

Prayer: Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus. As Jesus sends his disciples out into the world, he tells them, "Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me." This means that when we welcome the people Jesus sends to us, we are welcoming Jesus himself. As we welcome them, we experience Jesus, present with us, and we come to know Jesus more fully. We are rewarded, we are blessed, as we welcome. Amen!

"THE CHURCH HAS LEFT THE BUILDING."

When I ask you what is a Church, you may answer in one or two ways: A church is a building where Christians go to worship. Or a group of committed believers of Christ, figuring out how best to live out their faith. When people come to church, they come with preconceived ideas of what a church should be and with high expectations of what a church should do for them individually, or for their family. When those expectations are not met people become disgruntled and eventually leave to shop for another church.

Unfortunately, we have many church shoppers and hoppers these days, who do not have full understanding of what church really is or perhaps they are looking for a perfect Church. Let me assure you, there are no perfect churches, because there are no perfect people.

Let me read a poem, I found it interesting by an unknown author concerning "What Makes A Good Church?"

If all the lazy folks get up
If all the sleepy folks wake up
If all the discouraged folks cheer up
If all the gossiping folks shut up
If all the untruthful folks fess up
If all the divided folk's makeup
If all the depressed folks look up
If all the offended folks sweeten up
If all the lukewarm folks fire up
If all the Sanctified folks show up
If all the leading folks live up
If all the pledging folks pay up
And if all the complaining folks pray up."

Many of the churches, and by churches, I mean Christians, have forgotten the church is meant to thrive outside the walls of the church building by serving others and by being a means of God's Grace. It is time for the Church to leave the building.

The origin of the phrase "'the church has left the building'" lies with Elvis Aaron Presley; known globally as Elvis. Dubbed the "King of Rock and Roll", he is regarded as one of the most significant cultural icons of the 20th century. His energized interpretations of songs and sexually provocative performance style, combined with a singularly potent mix of influences across color lines during a transformative era in race relations, led him to great success.

In order to clear halls of his unruly fans after concerts, it was announced that "'Elvis has left the building." 44 years after his death, we still use the phrase which in essence means today – "The Show Is Over" "It's Time to Leave."

I have a simple message for us this morning – "The Show Is Over" "It's Time to Leave" -- "THE CHURCH HAS LEFT THE BUILDING." Many of the churches -- and by churches, I mean Christians -- have forgotten the church is meant to thrive outside the walls of the church building by serving others and by being a means of God's Grace. It is time for the Church to leave the building.

Here, the expression highlights intense change within the church. Not only does the church change for its own existence, it also does so for the life of the world. The church cannot avoid the many past and future changes of our constantly transforming society, demographic changes long in process.

Laity as well as clergy have distinctive experiences of the church in our time, all of us have something to say about the many changes in our society and how these are affecting our faith, the church, and pastoral work.

When we read about the life of Jesus in the Bible, we see an extraordinary thing. everywhere Jesus went lives were changed:

- Peter, Andrew, James, Phillip, and John were ordinary fishermen
- Matthew was a tax collector
- Paul was a Jesus hater
- John the Baptist was a nomad
- One man was a leper
- A little girl was demon possessed
- Another was lame
- Yet another man was blind
- Thomas was a doubter

After their encounter with Jesus, they were transformed:

- Paul went from a Jesus hater - to a Jesus lover
- John went from being a nomad - to being on a mission
- Peter went from hothead fisherman - to passionate disciple
- The Lame walked
- The Blind saw
- The unclean Leper was healed and cleaned
- Thomas believed

None of these encounters with Christ happened in a church building. As these people's lives were transformed, they became witnesses to Christ.

After Christ left, He left them His Spirit; when His Spirit dwelled in them, they became the Body of Christ; as the Body of Christ, together, they formed the Church.

Sometimes we in the church have been guilty of assuming we are a holy landmark for sightseers. People:

- Come to see our worship
- Come to see our Savior
- Come to see all God's chosen people
- Come to see the sights and sounds of our church

Someone once said, "We are all called to be fishers of people, not keepers of the aquarium"

The reality is most people are not transformed as followers of Christ in the church and the majority of prayers of salvation are said in a home, a car or a park rather than in a church building

The Church needs to leave the building for the un-churched, de-churched, those hurt by the church because they consider church irrelevant. Leaving shares the joy of worshipping God and being a part of a beloved Christian community that praise God the Word of God is practical truth and together is so VERY RELEVANT!

Also, these persons mistakenly think church is "ONLY FOR INSIDERS!" Instead of being critical of our friends and family that don't worship God, do we realize why the Church isn't very contagious sometimes? Sometimes we keep the good news to ourselves. We may not realize we're doing it and we certainly don't want people to stay on the outside

without finding a way in. But we haven't done what the Bible tells us to do to. It's really simplistic. It's really not difficult at all. "GO"

Yes, the church is going to have to leave the building in order to be contagious! If those on the outside are going to know that church is relevant, and that there are no outsiders, then the church must leave the building! This principle is really rather ironic in the first place because the Bible never employs the word "church" to describe a building.

The word "Church" in the Bible never refers to bricks and mortar - wood - nails - lighting - decorations. In Scripture, "Church" refers to - The community of believers; It refers to the people, not the place The first church buildings weren't even constructed until the Church had been in existence for 300 to 400 years! When the New Testament of the Bible was being written, there were no church buildings!

Evangelism is sharing the good news about Jesus. We can evangelize inside the church building but in the NT of the Bible, no one ever came to Christ inside a church building? No one was evangelized inside a church building! They didn't have them! People made faith commitments to Christ in Jails - in their Homes - Out in the Fields - On the Road.

All along God meant for the church to leave the building! The church has been sent by Jesus to "GO" to the unchurched and tell them the Good News! The Church has been directed by the Lord Jesus to leave the building! That's a simple instruction given by Jesus over and over again in the New Testament.

For this to happen and be effective – THE CHURCH HAS LEFT THE BUILDING!

Hebrews 10:24-25 – "Discover creative ways to encourage others and to motivate them toward acts of compassion, doing beautiful works as expressions of love. This is not the time to pull away and neglect meeting together, as some have formed the habit of doing. In fact, we should come together even more frequently, eager to encourage and urge each other onward as we anticipate that day dawning."

The passage deals with the powerful role Christian community and fellowship play in encouraging Christians to grow and persevere in their faith. God has designed us to need one another. Often, we are unaware of how great that need is until we actually experience true Christian community; community that propels us forward in our holiness, ministries and walks with Christ. As a plant grows strong and healthy in good soil, God has designed us, too, in such a way, that we will only grow spiritually strong and healthy within the soil of a close-knit group of Christians.

The way in which "meeting together" as Christians causes spiritual vitality is manifold: there is encouragement in hearing of others' struggles and victories in their walks of faith; there is motivation that comes from hearing the Word of God and learning insights others have into the Scriptures; and, in a less tangible way, there is the experience of the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in and through the lives of others, which fans-to-flame the Spirit of God in our own lives.

This scripture calls us to see a particular aspect of Christian community that is often overlooked, the visible manifestation of God's grace. Although God knows our deepest sin, He chooses to love us in and through Jesus Christ. Being known in all of our weakness, insecurity and hidden sin, and yet being loved and accepted is critical to our lives being transformed by grace. Because we cannot visibly see God, He has designed Christian community to manifest this grace so we can truly experience it. To enjoy this transforming grace, we must have a few close Christian friends with whom we can be extremely honest and vulnerable.

While there are many ways that our faith and heart are reflexively strengthened through Christian fellowship and relationships, the word "consider" in Hebrews 10:24 ("let us consider how we may spur one another on") points to the need for intentionality. Fellowship can be reduced simply to a social time, if we are not intentionally considering how, in the context of meeting together, we might encourage particular individuals to press on in their walks with the Lord.

God has designed us to need community. Community allows us to experience life transforming grace, protects us from the hardening and deceitfulness of sin and spurs us on toward love and good deeds. We continually move toward isolation and independence even though God created us to live in community. Let us not give up meeting together.

Hebrews 10:25 exhorts believers to “not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing” because we are all in the habit of doing it. As these life-giving relationships are only found in community, Satan tries to “deceive” us into thinking we don’t need to get together. He often uses our fears, insecurities and the distractions of our busy lives to lure us into living independently. Yet, a Christian life lived in isolation will always lack the spiritual health and vitality of a life lived in community.

Go! For THE CHURCH HAS LEFT THE BUILDING.”

GO! Jesus spoke these words about welcome to his first disciples and to each of us this very day as he sends us into the world. We have been given instructions— instructions about how as Jesus disciples we are to take part in his transforming work of disrupting and healing the world. Jesus ends these instructions saying whoever welcomes you, welcomes me. Which means, Jesus isn’t just calling us to welcome those he sends to us. He is also sending us out to others to be the face of Christ for them. We are to help others out in the world to experience the love of Jesus.

The mission of the church of Jesus Christ isn’t to get people into buildings. The mission is to share the good news that the crucified and risen Jesus is present and at work in the world. The mission of the church is to be the hands and feet and face of Jesus in the world. We are to feed and serve and love others out in the world. We are to make space for others in the world in our daily lives. We are to help people know that there is a place for them in the very heart of God. Gathering in the church building, at the altar, equips us for this critical mission, but it can never take the place of that mission.

THE CHURCH HAS LEFT THE BUILDING.” The Gospel reading today is a stern loving reminder and command that we aren’t called to get people into the pews. We are called to be the church at work in the world. We are called to welcome those Jesus sends into our lives. We are called to be the face of Jesus in the world by how we live and speak and serve others, even in these strange times, especially in these strange times. We are called to make holy welcoming space for others.

This is a daunting task, yet we are not alone. Jesus sent the first disciples out in pairs but now he sends us out to share his love as a congregation, the body of Christ.

Go and preach the good news; not “sit around and wait for people to come” - but get up and go! We have forgotten the going part. One thing that I have learned is that Christianity is, first and foremost, about relationships. Once again, if we are going to do what Jesus says, if we are going to “GO” - then we have to be intentional about making relationships with other people!

People of God, together, we do Jesus’ work in the world in all the places Jesus sends us. Together, we are given the power of the Holy Spirit to carry out Jesus’ mission.

Beloved of God, Jesus makes it clear that there is a place for you, and all people, in the very heart of God.

You are sent to share that good news in the world. THE CHURCH HAS LEFT THE BUILDING - Thanks be to God!