

Thoughts About the Current Crisis

Presented to Trinity Evangelical Free Church of Teaneck, NJ

On Sunday, June 6, 2020

Hi, this is Pastor Phil. Not everyone knows this, but I've been on vacation this week. I'm calling it a "marathon vacation". A marathon is a race that covers 26 miles. Twenty-six miles, 386 yards, to be exact. We can talk about why that's the case in a future discussion. For now, a marathon is a long race.

When runners participate in a marathon race, they often use the following approach: Then run for the first half. They then walk for a bit; up to a mile.

After that, they run again until they finish the race. Professional runners may jog that middle mile. At any rate, all runners slow down, but they don't stop.

So, I'm taking a "marathon vacation". I have slowed down, but I haven't completely stopped doing things for the church. One area where I've slowed down is the fact that I haven't written a new sermon for today. We're going to re-visit and "oldy but goody"; a sermon that I presented a while back, and which I'm told was very helpful to people. Before we do that though, I need to speak to some things.

I. The Current Crisis(s)

First, we've all been through a lot. We started with this crisis involving the Corona Virus. We've heard terrible stories about people suffering, the economy breaking down, empty shelves in supermarkets, and other really scary stuff. So, everyone is on edge about that.

Just as we thought we were climbing out and ready to begin fresh, we turned on our TVs and saw images of protests and riots in association with the tragic death of George Floyd. So, I want to take a moment to talk about this.

Before that though, I want to talk about reopening.

Reopening

We have been getting some hints from our governor that we may be able to reopen the church as soon as next Sunday, June 14. We will of course let you know. If we can reopen, we will do so in phases. In the first phase, we will ask people who are vulnerable to continue to stay at home. This group includes people over 60 and people with previously existing medical conditions. Note: We will ask this. No one will be prevented from coming if they want.

Please be reminded of the principles of grace. We don't get points for coming to church.

We are not punished if we don't. So, please pray about whether or not you feel God wants you to attend. Even if you aren't in this group, if you feel unsafe, you can remain home for now. We will respect your decision either way.

For those who choose to come: We will ask that you wear a mask. We will have hand sanitizer at the door. It wouldn't hurt if you bring your own, too. We will ask people to practice social distancing. This means, we will sit in every other pew.

If you are planning on coming, please send an email to me at Pastor@TrinityTeaneck.org to let me know.

Back to the crisis. We need to address what's going on in the world. You're turning on your TVs, and you're seeing images that are tragic. Protests, sometimes peaceful, but sometimes violent.

I've been your pastor now since September of last year. There are a lot of things that we need to speak about. I had hoped that we would have a lot of time to talk about the things that we will be facing as individuals and as a church. The current crisis means that we'll have to speed up the schedule.

Here are some of the topics that people in our world are very concerned about.

- The environment: Have humans dumped so much junk into our world that it's in danger of breaking?
 - What role should followers of Jesus play in addressing this?
- Social injustice – Humans have a bad habit of mistreating other human beings.
 - One form this takes is something called human trafficking. People in today's world are still being kidnapped and sold into lives of slavery. This is happening all around the world.
 - Another form is racism. That's at the base of all the protests we're seeing now.
 - What role should followers of Jesus play in addressing this?
- The sanctity of life – Since the Roe. V. Wade decision in 1973, 60 million abortions have taken place. Many people in the Christian community and others consider abortion to be the taking of a human life. This means there have been 60 million murders in the United States alone.
 - What role should followers of Jesus play in addressing this?

In this list, I have only begun to address the issues that face the human race, and which are of concern to Christians around the world. There are more. The complete answer to these issues will take a long time to discuss. I wish I could say that there was an easy answer. However, the Bible gives us a start.

Let's read a well-known passage.

22 One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. 23 As they sailed, he fell asleep. A

squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

24 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. 25 "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples.

In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him." (Luke 8:22-25)

Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters in Christ, the start to all the problems we face is Jesus Christ. He commanded the very elements of the earth when he walked with humans 2000 years ago. He still commands them today.

So, we will discuss these things together as a church, but we must always remember that our starting point is Jesus. Sometimes, we face things that scare us – things that anger us - Things that seem out of control. That's how the disciples felt when they were riding on a little boat in the middle of a terrible storm. They were sure they were going to drown.

I've mentioned more than once in the last few weeks that Jesus often has words of comfort for us. But sometimes, he has tough love. Jesus showed everyone in that boat that he was in control. After he showed this to his disciples, he didn't say, "Now, I can understand why you were all so afraid. Let's have a group hug and talk about our feelings." No. He asked his followers, "Where is your faith?"

Jesus is still in control today.

In all of this, I want to give a warning. Many in our congregation, and many of our friends, are watching a lot of TV. I understand – we're all locked in our homes. Imagine that there was a TV camera on the little boat with Jesus. Imagine that you're watching TV, and you see live images of lightning and waves washing over the little boat. You see faces of people who are afraid, and in some cases angry. **But, for some reason, you aren't shown Jesus.** For some reason, you don't see Jesus rebuke the storm. The camera was turned off before that happened.

How could that be? **That's because the guy holding the camera isn't a follower of Jesus.** Because he's not a believer, the people who watch the TV are only shown terrifying images, but no solution. Friends, that's how it is on our TV sets today. Please understand this: The people holding the cameras aren't believers. Most of the people you're watching on the Internet and listening to on the radio aren't believers. So, you're shown people who are angry and afraid. **But on TV, you're never told about the solution.**

In the coming weeks, we'll continue our study of Matthew. We'll see practical material. For example, Jesus said, "blessed are the peacemakers". What does it mean to be a peacemaker when you're surrounded by conflict? We'll find out.

Many years ago, a woman named Kathrina von Schlegel wrote a hymn entitled, "Be still my soul." Here are the words"

1 Be still, my soul: the Lord is on your side;
bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
leave to your God to order and provide;
in ev'ry change he faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: your best, your heav'nly Friend
through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

2 Be still, my soul: your God will undertake
to guide the future as he has the past.
Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake;
all now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know
his voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.

God is in control.

When we reopen, we will learn how to face the struggles of our world together. We will face them knowing that the solution to our struggles is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Until then keep believing, keep praying.

May the Lord richly bless you.

Pastor Phil