

Sermon for Sunday 27 September 2020 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore, Md.

Scriptures: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21 :23-32

« *Closer* »

Last Sunday we held two consecutive committee meetings following the 10:30 service, and even at that, said the benediction in a little more than an hour! We are getting ready for our annual accounting with a passion. Laura Siegel faithfully led us through all the questions, and we had good conversation on each topic.

I was impressed. I sensed more vitality and variety of ideas this season, and there were some creative suggestions for new approaches, and some testimonials of thoughtful sharing between members on controversial topics.

I came away feeling we are drawing closer.

Take just one example: Deaf Ministry. This past Sunday, as I told you last Sunday, was Deaf Ministry Sunday. I spent this past week reading Bishop Peggy Johnson's book, "Make a Joyful Silence," and was deeply moved at her lifetime commitment to Deaf ministry, right here in Baltimore. I'll share the book ... in fact, I'm pressing you to read her candid account of this distinct community among us, and come up with something else we can do to support those who minister in it.

By now you know my viewpoint: The more variety of services we can get personally acquainted with, the more interesting our life together will be ... and if it's interesting, the longer we'll keep it going. Period. Laura Siegel can share the list of things we've done over the past year ... It's quite amazing. And when that shows up, not just on annual reports, but in business meetings that are short and sweet and to the point, we're getting closer.

In fact, I get the feeling that most of us are here because we do interesting things together. That doesn't mean we don't have ties that go 'way back. All that's true; but doing a wide variety of good, helpful things with folks that generally treat each other kindly is not a small blessing ... It's close to the real thing we keep learning about in scripture and song, and the prayers we pray and read together.

The challenge right now is that so much happens between Sundays these days that we ... at least I ... quickly forget how good it is to get closer to one another and to the scripture together. I don't think I'm exaggerating; do you? Between the news coming to us largely through agencies that make a profit from disturbing us ... the old saying, "If it bleeds, it leads;" and then the literal fact that big problems are all around us ... it's very hard to talk or think about much else. Am I right?

Exodus has the people of God complaining and getting rescued yet again ... It's not the failures, but the victories, that are our focus. And Matthew, after showing Jesus being criticized for

being helpful more than being politically correct, has him say, "For I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you."

Signs that we are getting closer to each other in our ordinary business meetings; that we're testing the waters of new outreach projects ... these are good news.

And again, "If there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy...be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord..."

These are good words. This is a good time.

Getting closer. Please God. Through Christ Jesus.

Amen.