

“IT DOESN’T MATTER, IT’S ONLY CHURCH”

Romans 10: 8-13:

My wife, Linda and I, enjoy visiting other Presbyterian churches when we’re out of town on vacation. So, on a Saturday evening, last summer, while on a trip to Michigan, we were trying to decide where to go for Church the next morning. We wanted to visit of the smaller churches in the area, but due to the pandemic, most of these were still closed, so we settled on the large Presbyterian church which was open some 30 miles from our location. We arrived in plenty of time before the service began, so we had some coffee and met a few church members who had arrived early. We settled into our seats, and the scripture lesson was about a woman pouring the alabaster jar of perfume on Jesus’ feet. The preacher got up into the pulpit, and I got out my Bible to read along, and I also grabbed a pen and a piece of paper, in order to write down any notes or tidbits of spiritual insight this pastor had to offer. I was on the edge of my seat. I was hungry for some “Good News”, and the sermon started out good, with a brief summary of the scripture passage. And then, the preacher started talking about the new choir director the church had recently hired, who would be starting in August. And for the next 30 minutes or so, this preacher basically read the resume of their new hire. He talked about the person’s family, and experience – He repeated himself a number of times, and went on and on about their new choir director, who again, wasn’t even there. The reverend, had obviously, put no effort or time preparing this sermon what-so-ever – It was as if he didn’t care! Terribly disappointed, I put away my Bible and pen, and sat back in the pew, hoping and praying that he would get back to the scripture at hand, or at least talk about Jesus. I looked at Linda and she looked disinterested as well. All I could think about was, “Thank you Jesus that I hadn’t invited a non-Christian or unchurched person to come with us this morning, as they would have never wanted to come back to church again. When I told a colleague about our experience, he said, “What if someone had shown up that morning, as a last-ditch effort against committing suicide?” Well, they would have left this church and jumped off the nearest bridge. Linda and I left that morning, terribly disappointed and a bit miffed. We had sat through a worship service, which appeared to have been a complete waste of time. As we were discussing this fact in our car, I made the comment, “No wonder our churches are in decline, and no wonder people aren’t interested in coming to

church anymore. It's amazing anyone bothers as they all act as if it doesn't matter – It's as if they're saying, "Oh well, it doesn't matter, it's no big deal, it's only church anyway!" But you see, it isn't "Only church anyway" – It does matter! It matters a lot! I believe that being an active member of the church of Jesus Christ, is the most important thing we can do! It needs to be the center of our lives! It needs to be "Who" we are and "Who" we want to become! After all, it's the only hope for our world, a world lost in materialism, sin, meaninglessness, depression, war, addiction, hopelessness, and anger. But if our church acts as if "Oh well, it doesn't matter, it's only church" what kind of message are we sending to a lost and dying world? If we're content with being mediocre at best, what are we saying about our love for God and other human beings? Now, I'm not talking about being fanatical, as I'm speaking of commitments and priorities. I'm just talking about being the best ambassador for Christ that we can possibly be. And this means, doing the best we can with our worship services – our music – our mission – our Bible study – our neighborhood – and it takes the entire church – That is every one of us working together, in order to be the best representatives of Jesus Christ we can be. One person can't do it alone, as we all need one another. The world needs all of us, working together, as the hands and feet of Jesus Christ on this earth, in order to transform this world. Now, this isn't easy, and Jesus told us it wouldn't be easy. In our New Testament scripture this morning, Paul writes: "If you declare with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Trusting with our hearts leads to righteousness, and confessing with our mouths leads to salvation, and all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved! So, how can they call on someone they don't have faith in? Or, how can people have faith in someone they've never heard of? And, how can people hear about Jesus without someone preaching? And, how can we preach unless we are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the Good News." One night, I came into our family-room and asked Linda if I could turn on the evening news. "Oh Honey", she said, "the news is always so depressing!" And she was right – So, we decided, right then and there, to take a break from watching the news. That was 3 years ago, and you know, we haven't missed watching it yet. All in all, the news we get from the world is depressing, and it constantly bombards us on our phones! We can't escape it – We are told about war, terrorism, murder, rape, abductions, and stories of crime that are just

horrendous! Things that make our human-life seem cheap, but also very evil! Putin and Russia invade the Ukraine and the atrocities start multiplying. This recent invasion of the Ukraine may cause us to fear and leave us with less hope than we had before it happened. And certainly, this news brought on a certain amount of worry for a lot of us. As the old saying goes in the news business, "If it bleeds, it leads!" Which is another way of saying, the more awful and shocking the story, the more air-time it gets on T.V. And then we sensationalize it – we all milk it for all it's worth. And we get a lot of bad news, and worse, we come to expect it. I love the rock band, "The Eagles", and one of their prominent members is Don Henley, who wrote a song which came out several years ago which explains the evening news like this: "I make a living of the evening news, just give me something, something I can use, people love it when you lose, they love dirty laundry. We've got a bubble-headed-Beach-blonde who comes on at 5, she can tell you about the plane crash with a gleam in her eye, see it's interesting when people die, give us dirty laundry. Can we film that operation? Is the head dead yet? You know, the boys in the newsroom got a running bet, get the window on the set, we need dirty laundry. You don't really need to find out what's going on, you don't really need to know just how far it's gone. We can do the "innuendo", we can dance and sing, when it's said and done, we haven't told you a thing, give us dirty laundry!" The feet, which get a sort of glee out of bringing us down – gossiping, verbally raping us, if you will – are not beautiful feet at all. The only beautiful feet are those which bring us a completely different kind of news! Paul tells us in our scripture lesson, "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart", that is, the message concerning faith we proclaim: "If you declare with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Now, that's a completely different kind of news, it's the "Good News!" And this good news comes from the mouths and lives of those who have been transformed by it! Many of us Christians, emphasize the importance of believing in our hearts about the Lordship of our risen Christ, without stressing the necessity of confessing Christ with our lips and our lives! Encasing Christ in the private domain, makes Jesus available 24/7, without the discomfort of having our faith challenged in the public arena, or putting much effort into it. According to the Bible, real faith or authentic faith always becomes a matter of public record, you see, believing in our heart always should lead to a profession of our faith with our lips and our lives. Christian-faith

is never a private matter! It's the good news, meant to be shared by all.....to all. So, does the church matter? Do we need the church? Do people need Hoge Memorial Presbyterian Church? Jesus founded the church – he organized his followers, and sent his Holy Spirit to empower us. In the New Testament, the church is even called, “The bride of Christ.” The church is an absolutely essential part of God’s plan for the world, and each individual believer. Paul writes that the church is “The body of Christ.” This means that we are called to be “Jesus, living in the world today.” We are charged with the task of doing what Jesus did, and speaking on Jesus’ behalf. Be his hands, his feet, his voice. We are the means by which God has chosen to save and transform the world. The Bible also tells us that each and every member of the church is given certain gifts by the Holy Spirit. So, we all have an extremely important part to play in order for the church to be the best it can be. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to see that people in our community need Hoge Memorial Presbyterian Church. Jesus exclaimed that we are the “Salt of the earth”, and the “light of the World”. We are to be the positive “Spin Doctors” in our church community. We are to bring hope and new life into the lives of those who are without it. And, you know what? Our church doesn’t really belong to a denomination, the Presbytery, or anyone else – Our church belongs to Jesus Christ! For one thing, this church is not the building – It is you! It is me! And Jesus died on the cross, to shed his blood in order to purchase us for himself. Our church belongs to our Lord, Jesus Christ! Jesus is our Lord and God! And because Jesus is Lord, the driving mission of this church should be the things Jesus wants us to do.....nothing more.....nothing less. But, how do we know what Jesus wants us to do with his church? We can figure this out by looking at what Jesus did when he walked on this earth. We must do everything with integrity, and not just go through the motions. Or just get by, Jesus went all the way to the cross! And to follow Jesus, we must take up the cross as well. The question is: “Are we doing this?” Each of us as individuals and together as the church of Jesus Christ, are called to proclaim Jesus! And we see it every day – some people would rather play golf on Sunday mornings rather than coming to church to worship God. Some go fishing – Others take kids to soccer practice. Many more, have tried church, and found it listless, dull, boring, and the message? What is the message? So, they lay in bed, or take the dog for a walk, and we are accountable for this behavior? How can they call on Jesus, when they don’t have faith in him? How can they have faith in someone they’ve never heard of? “How beautiful are

the feet of those who announce the “Good News.” How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the good news! And, at the end of your day, take a look at your feet – Have you done your duty as a member as a member of the church of Jesus Christ? Have you shared the “Good News” today? Do you have beautiful feet, to walk the walk, and talk the talk? Our mission for our church is waiting for us! Every day, time to get moving, cause time’s a wasting! It’s our church and it does matter.....very much! In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.... Amen!