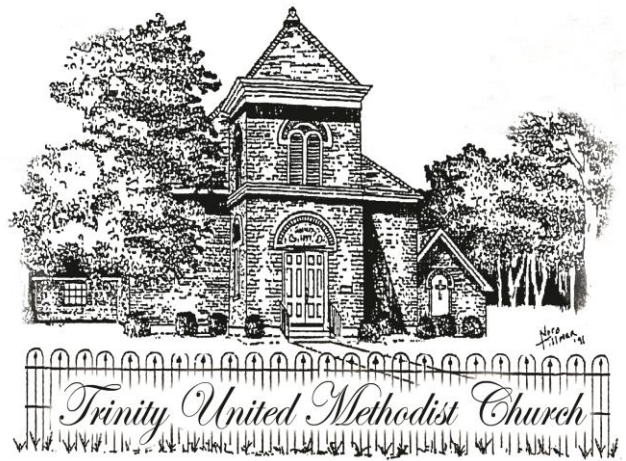




Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Hope Is A Way of Living

⁴⁰ Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left... Matthew 24:40 NRSV

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ³ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.' " Matt 3:1-3 NRSV

The smell of evergreen. Bright lights. Christmas carols. Isn't that what Advent is all about? Yet, here is Jesus talking about the end of the world. The end of the world. What if it happens before the 25th? Will Christmas even get here?

I.

This Saturday we will celebrate the "Hanging of the Greens." We will bring into the sanctuary symbols of the advent season, including some evergreen decorations. Perhaps some of you have already put up your Christmas trees. My youngest daughter, although now married and living in Chattanooga, insisted that we put ours up the weekend after Christmas.

Why evergreen? Several reasons really. One is that we await a coming King, and cedar was a wood that was used when building homes for Royalty. Read the Old Testament and you will find that the palaces for David and Solomon used huge amounts of Cedar.

A meaning more in line with the scripture today is that evergreens are a sign of hope. At a time when trees outside are bare, the smell of evergreens reminds us that Spring will come. In this time when the natural world is drawing in on itself, the evergreen reminds us that the world around us will blossom again.

Advent, in part, is about hope. A hope that the time described by Isaiah will come to the world. The weapons of the world will be turned into farming implements and we will no longer study the arts of war. *Isaiah 2:4*. God's time. Advent is a time of hope.

II.

What does it mean to hope for the coming of the Kingdom of God? How will we know when it is coming? Many centuries ago a wise man once asked his students how they could tell when the night was passed and the day was on its way back again. One suggested - "when you see an animal in the distance and you can tell if it is a sheep or a goat." Another said: "When you can see a tree in the distance and you can tell whether it is a fig tree or a peach tree."

But the wise man was not impressed with these answers. He finally told his students - it is when you can look at the face of any human being and see there the face of your brother or sister - because if you cannot do this, then no matter what time it is - for you it is still night."

The vision of God's time of salvation that we have is very important. How we envision the end of time influences how we see the present. Without an adequate vision of hope, we aren't ready to live this life as God wants us to live.

III.

The vision of salvation that Christ gives is, on the surface, not very hopeful. He speaks of the Coming of the Son of Man as so unexpected, such a surprise, that people aren't prepared. This vision is so disturbing that some Christians have latched onto it as promising a special salvation for just a very few people. Those who wrote the Left Behind books pervert the words and meaning of Christ to create a frightening image where families are split up by God, some taken, some left behind.

What Jesus is telling us is not to focus on the end of time. You won't know the time of Christ's Second Coming. You can't know the time. Focus instead on today. Live your life in constant anticipation that Christ might return tomorrow night; or tonight; or this afternoon; or right now. The way to make for a better future is to find Christ in the present.

There is an old story that some of you may have heard before. Read it anew with expectation in this Season of Advent. It's about a Monastery that once housed a great and thriving order of monks. The monastery was always filled with people singing, praying. The monks also moved out into the community, helping those in need; ministering to the sick.

But over time something happened. The monks were growing fewer and older, and there was little or no fervor in their spiritual lives. The abbot of the Monastery wondered what he could do. Deep in some nearby woods there lived a Rabbi, recognized by all as a wise man of God. One day the Abbot of the Order decided he would venture out of the walls of the monastery and visit the Rabbi to see if he, in his wisdom, could help the Abbot to restore the vigor in his Order.

The Rabbi received the Abbot with open arms, but when he heard what the Abbot wanted the old Rabbi said, "I know how it is... it is the same in my town. The Spirit has gone out of the people. Almost no one comes to the Synagogue anymore." These two men of God sat and wept together. When it came time for the Abbot to leave, the Rabbi said "I'm sorry that I had no advice to give you, but I can tell you this: The Messiah is among you."

When the Abbot returned to the monastery, the other monks were eager to know what had transpired. The Abbot addressed them and said, "I'm afraid that the Rabbi had no advice to give us. We just wept together,

and then, as I was leaving, he said something very strange... he said that the Messiah was among us. I'm sorry, I don't know what it means."

In the weeks ahead, the old monks pondered the Rabbi's closing words. "The Messiah is among us?" they wondered. "Could it be one of our monks? If so, which one?" "He must have meant the Abbot.... yes, of course it is the Abbot for he is a godly man."

"On the other hand, he might have meant Brother Thomas. He too is a very holy man, and everyone knows it."

"Certainly he could not have meant Brother Elred! No, not Elred... he gets so crotchety at times. But then again, It could be Elred."

"But surely not Brother Phillip. He's so passive... so ordinary. Or is it Brother Phillip?"

As they contemplated in this manner, something changed in their lives. Every person they looked at, they realized, might be the Messiah. The old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one among them might actually be the Messiah.

Their worship changed as well. Knowing that the Messiah had come, that the Messiah was in the world, gave new life to their worship. People on the outside could hear the beautiful chants sung by the monks, and asked to be able to attend some of their services. After a while, something extraordinary happened to the Abbot. Young men, so moved by the lives and the devotion of the monks, asked to join the Abbot's Order. For the first time in years new faces appeared among the monks.

As time went on the Monastery was full of singing, and the devotions of the Brothers were enlivened and vigorous, and more young men were asking if they could join the Order, and the monastery had once again become a thriving Order and a vibrant center of spirituality for all the people in the surrounding community. They lived each day as if the Christ, the Messiah, lived among them.

It is Advent and we are reminded that Christ, the Messiah, lives among us. Each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we affirm that Christ lives among us in Spirit and that, one day, Christ will come again. As you go through the weeks ahead, watch the faces of those around you. Know that The Messiah, The Christ lives among us and live your life accordingly.

The Ferguson Decision and Our Jesus-Centered Response

By Rev. Richard Smith

Rev. Richard Smith, senior pastor of [Germantown United Methodist Church](#) in Germantown, Tenn., in the McKendree District of the Memphis Conference, offered some personal reflections last week (to staff and key leaders of his congregation) about the situation in Ferguson, Mo. Germantown is a city that borders Memphis, Tenn., on its east/southeast side. Richard's gave Bishop McAlilly permission to share this with the people of the Tennessee and Memphis Conferences.

There is no way for any one of us to know for sure whether Darren Wilson was guilty of a crime when he shot Michael Brown to death on Aug. 9. Whether justice was truly served is beyond our comprehension, I believe; certainly beyond mine.

Do I personally believe that Officer Darren Wilson bore some level of responsibility for the death of Brown? I do. It is hard, from the outside looking in, to see that the level of force he used was absolutely necessary. Would sitting in the conversations and the evidential reviews of the Grand Jury have led me – or you – to a different perspective? We'll never know.

Let me offer some personal reflections, which may or may not help in any way, but they are my heartfelt feelings about how we move forward from this tragedy and its aftermath – both in Ferguson, Mo., and in Memphis, Tenn.

- There is tragedy on several fronts here. The Brown family has lost their young son in a violent way and that pain will be real with them for months and years to come. Meanwhile, Darren Wilson will not be able to live a normal life for months and years to come; if ever.
- It is clear that the racial context in Ferguson – and here in Memphis – cannot be ignored. There were too many chilling accounts of police profiling and mistreating blacks in the Ferguson community for us to not pray for and encourage a change in that community. There are too many instances right here in Shelby County, Tenn., of African-Americans being mistreated for us not to pray for and actively seek greater justice, equality, and compassion as we live and work as brothers and sisters in our wider community.
- Our Church and the Church at large must be a venue for a Jesus-centered response. As I see it, a Jesus-centered response says *we must*:
 - Listen to those who might radically and passionately disagree with us on issues like this. No one has all the answers and when we care like Jesus, another person's opinion and experience matter to us.
 - Avoid demonizing either Officer Darren Wilson or Michael Brown. Only God knows fully what happened that night of Aug. 9 and why.
 - Passionately, fervently step up our efforts to make our communities more loving, equitable, affirming, racially- and culturally-inclusive places. We Jesus folks have a unique opportunity to show the world at large how we deal with heated, complex and controversial matters without any of us claiming absolute knowledge or wisdom. We can show the world what it means to treat each other with respect, consideration and Jesus-grounded love.
 - Spend fervent prayer time praying for the Browns, the Wilsons, the civil authorities involved, the religious community of Ferguson, ourselves, our community at large. This is a time when considerable prayer is needed by all people of faith.

Finally, be clear that while protests are a natural and sometimes needed response to extreme civil disappointment, violence and hateful disruption are not acceptable. We need to work toward reconciliation which then leads to disciplined conversations about what needs to change for things to be different for those who are racially and economically mistreated in our society. Racism is alive and well in America and we cannot ignore that.

The Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant

Every Church Christmas pageant shares these characteristics: there is a rush of preparation over three to four weeks, high levels of anxiety to get the performance organized, the effort to get young children to learn a few lines of dialogue and deliver them on cue and the effort to put the performance on with a minimum of mistakes. There is one more characteristic of Church Christmas Pageants. Despite the best efforts of the organizers the result is a somewhat chaotic presentation of the Christmas Story. However, no one really minds that because their children are part of that chaotic presentation.

The Unrehearsed Christmas pageant also produces a somewhat chaotic presentation of the Christmas story but it substitutes a lot of fun for the anxiety and stress usually accompanying a pageant. Instead of weeks of preparation, everyone arrives the night of the performance. They select a costume as a shepherd or sheep, a star or an angel, a wise person, a cow, a donkey, or an innkeeper and spouse. A narrator reads the Christmas story while the costumed participants act out this old and wonderful story. Christmas songs are sung and the story is retold to a new generation. 'Kids' of all ages are invited to get dressed and participate. Refreshments are then shared in the fellowship hall.

The **Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant** will be held **Sunday, December 14th at 4:30 PM** at Trinity United Methodist Church. Please come and be a part of this joyful event and bring a friend or two to join in the fun.

!!!! Ideally we should have a 'Holy Family' (Mary and Joseph) and 'Baby Jesus.' This is a couple with a baby no more than one year old. The Holy Family has no lines and need not bring costumes. We provide those. They need only arrive at the manger and watch the rest of the show. 'Baby Jesus' can be a boy or a girl. The swaddling cloth is white, not pink or blue. If you know a couple with a baby who might be interested in coming to participate as the Holy Family, please let us know. We can go forward with a doll, but a live baby is best. !!!!

Request for Volunteers from Sixty First Ave UMC Last Minute Toy Store December 18-21

(Received from 61st Avenue UMC)

Could you give a few hours of your time to make this Christmas a more joyful one for Davidson County children from low-income families? Sixty-First Avenue UMC in West Nashville is in need of help with its annual "Last Minute" Christmas Toy Store.

Volunteers are needed for a variety of tasks Thursday the 18th through Saturday the 20th from 11:30 – 5:30 and Sunday the 21st from 12:30 to 6:30. We are urging people to arrange their schedules so they can stay for a complete shift if possible. We have a special need for bi-lingual (English-Spanish) volunteers.

Also, we have a special need for gifts or gift cards for teenagers since most of our donations are for younger children. Last year 4,973 children from close to 1600 families received toys, books, candy canes and oranges through this program.

If you can help out with this ministry, please contact Sixty-First Avenue UMC at 292-7184 or e-mail 61avenueumc@bellsouth.net. Information is also available at www.lastminutetoystore.com.

[Trinity UMC will provide lunch for volunteers at the Toy Store on December 19th. If you would like to help with that please contact Charles Wilson or Rev. Meaker.]

Commitment of Service

We had a great response to our Commitment Campaign. If you have not yet returned your commitment cards there is still time. You can drop them into the collection plate on Sunday morning or simply turn them in to the church office.

The nominations committee is reviewing the commitment to service pledges from everyone who returned a card and you should hear from a nominations committee member soon giving you information about the areas in which you are interested. If you do not hear from someone by December 14th please speak to a member of the nominating committee. They are: Rev. Dennis Meaker, Nancy Conway, Cheryl Wilson, Jo Cotton, G.L. Jones, Houston Hartsock, Bill LeCates, Rachel Newman, Nanette Crowell and Wanda Folds.

Many of you expressed a desire to commit to the daily reading of scripture. You may already have a book for devotional reading but I wanted to make sure that you were aware of some other resources. One of the best resources for daily devotional reading is the *Upper Room* devotional guide published by the Upper Room and available directly from the church. These come in regular and large print editions. The Upper room also provides its devotional online at www.upperroom.org.

The Upper Room also publishes *The Upper Room Disciplines*. This is a lectionary based guide that provides daily readings based upon that week's lectionary readings. My preaching often follows the lectionary so this particular guide would provide a basis for contemplating that week's scripture readings before coming to worship. The *Upper Room Disciplines for 2015* is available through www.Cokesbury.com and through Amazon.

Another approach to daily scripture reading is *lectio divina* (literally, divine reading). In this practice you read a section of scripture in a prayerful attitude until a particular passage catches your attention. You then spend a period of time contemplating and praying about that passage and what the Spirit may be saying to you through that passage. If there is interest, I would be glad to lead a short course on the practice of *lectio divina*.

Some people wish to use their devotional time to read through the bible in a year. There are a number of guides to help with such a plan. Several can be found at <http://www.ewordtoday.com/year/>. I will also provide a reading plan for those who wish to begin on January 1, 2015. It will be available at the Church and on the website.

One of the most important practices for a Christian is the prayerful daily reading of scripture. I am pleased that so many of you expressed a desire to follow that discipline.

The Poverty and Justice Bible

The Poverty & Justice Bible is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think

that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to www.Justicebible.org.

⁷I am the LORD All-Powerful! Israel is the vineyard, and Judah is the garden I tended with care. I had hoped for honesty and for justice, but dishonesty and cries for mercy were all I found. Isaiah 5:7CEV

I started including references from the Poverty and Justice Bible in the newsletter on June 5th of last year. Eighteen months later we are just getting to the Book of Isaiah with much left to go in the Old Testament. Here again is a reference that should be very familiar by now. God is a God of Justice who demands honest, truthful dealings among God's people. Isaiah says here that God is disgusted that, instead of honest and just conduct all God receives are pleas for mercy for being dishonest and denying justice.

*⁸ You used to be like people living in the dark, but now you are people of the light because you belong to the Lord. So act like people of the light ⁹ and make your light shine. Be good and honest and truthful, ¹⁰ as you try to please the Lord. ¹¹ Don't take part in doing those worthless things that are done in the dark. Instead, show how wrong they are. ¹² It is disgusting even to talk about what is done in the dark. ¹³ But the light will show what these things are really like. ¹⁴ Light shows up everything, just as the Scriptures say,
"Wake up from your sleep
and rise from death.
Then Christ will shine on you." Ephesians 5:8-14*

Paul admonishes the people who have come to Christ to live honest lives and to be truthful. Paul was teaching from both his Jewish and Christian heritage. Living such a life is living in the light that is Christ.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Sarah Jordan	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Mac McAfee	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;

- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

December 7th: Sermon: “When God Tore Open the Heavens: God’s Patient Salvation.” “Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again.” So we proclaim when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. But when will it happen and why the delay? The writer of 2 Peter has an intriguing answer. My texts are Mark 1:1-8 and 2 Peter 3:8-14a.

December 14th: Sermon: “When God Tore Open the Heavens: Who Are We?” Our faith is often viewed from a personal perspective; i.e. what it means to us. But Paul points out that the significance of the Church is who we are in the eyes of the World. My texts are John 1:6–8, 19–28 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24.

Worship Leaders Schedule

December 7

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**
Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**
Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Ushers**

December 14

Julia Moore, **Liturgist**
Betty & Herb Haynes, **Greeters**
Jason & Lindsey Aldred, **Ushers**

Announcements

Holiday Deadline for these great gift ideas of pans/cutting boards/mugs is fast approaching ...

For orders to be delivered to church, please have your order in by December 5th.

The Deadline for orders going directly to a recipient placed online Midnight, December 10, 2014**

These orders submitted directly by the above date are guaranteed to arrive by December 24.

Our website is ...

www.thatsmypan.biz/frtn10177 - Orders placed here will be delivered to the church.

If u are wanting them shipped elsewhere please go to the button on the website that says NOT LOCAL? OR http://www.thatsmypan.biz/frtn10177/page.php?main_page=dropship.

December Birthdays

Jake Fetting, Pam Jones, Dorise LeCates, Hal Newman, Lindsey Aldred, Rachel Newman

Happy Birthday to each of you!