



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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August 20, 2014

The God Vote III: Hot Button Issues, Fear and Faith

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, beloved whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:4-9 NRSV

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷ A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" Mark 4:35-41 NRSV

We've been talking about how our faith affects our vote. In an election year there is always a lot of talk about how Christians vote so it seemed to make sense to look at how our faith affects our politics. A little review:

1. Separation of Church and State does not prohibit us from bringing our faith to the political process. We've established that we should bring our faith to the political process. We live in the world, but are not of the world. We bring our Christian perspective to the political process and that is a good thing.
2. Christians are not frightened by diversity. In this nation that is increasingly polarized, we recognize that diversity is part of God's plan for creation. We need diversity to discern a balanced view of the world around us. Diversity makes us stronger.

3. We bring our anger to the political process. Christians are not all sweetness and light. If you are paying attention there are good reasons to be angry. But we seek to use that anger to motivate change, not to strike out at one another. Scripture commands us to be angry, but not to sin.
4. Christians bring prayer to the political process. Prayer is a means of discerning those things that God would have us consider as we make political decisions. We don't treat prayer as a cosmic vending machine, 'pray and it shall be yours.' Prayer is a means of discerning God's will for our lives.

I.

The last topic I want to touch on are the hot button issues. Those issues that, more than others, tend to polarize us; to separate us from one another.

Do something for me. I'm going to list seven of what I believe are so-called hot button issues, some of a greater or lesser degree, supported or opposed by Christians. There are probably a few more, but these are the ones I see being used by politicians the most often. As you look at them, strive to be conscious of your reaction to each issue; whether just the mention of it can bring up powerful feelings:

Abortion
Separation of Church and State
Gay/Lesbian Marriage
Gun Controls
War on Terror
The Meaning of Patriotism
Immigration

As you read this list did you have an emotional response about any one of them? A flash of anger, of despair, of frustration? Large segments of the population have an almost visceral response, a gut response, to at least some of these issues. These issues, more than others, seem to touch a chord in us that swings us strongly to one side of the issue or the other.

And the media and political professionals know that. The people who make a living in the world of politics, the people who seek to guide and use public opinion to advance their own agendas whether it's being elected, passing legislation or selling toothpaste, know that there are issues out there that push our buttons. They count on us having a strong emotional response to these issues that will divide us into two or more camps.

Hot button issues are sometimes called wedge issues because they drive a wedge between people. Used properly, the hot button issues can divide us into opposing camps: US and THEM. The irony being, of course, that who is US and who is THEM varies issue by issue and is entirely a matter of perspective. Whatever side you are on is US. The other side is THEM.

Hot button issues depend on one more thing. Fear. Hot button issues are used to drive a wedge between people and polarize them by making them afraid. If we are afraid, we are prepared to justify the most radical solutions to problems to avoid the consequences that we fear. Take homosexual marriage for instance. I've lost track of the number of automated calls I've received over the years proposing a constitutional Amendment prohibiting Gay Marriage. These calls base this proposal on the argument that allowing Gay Marriage will threaten traditional heterosexual marriage. Folks, the divorce rate in this country was running close to 50% a

long time before there was any proposal on the table for Gay Marriage. The institution of marriage may be ill and suffering, but it's not a virus picked up from the homosexual community.

Gun control is another issue often spoken about in terms of fear. You have one side saying that, if we don't get gun control soon, people will be walking down the streets with automatic weapons and bazookas. The other side saying, if we let them control our automatic weapons and bazookas, pretty soon they'll want our hunting rifles. Them and us. And dividing all, fear.

II.

How should we, as Christians, respond to the Hot Button Issues? How can we avoid being controlled by our fear; led around by our fear? The Christian answer is that we can protect ourselves from fear through faith. Look at the passage from Mark. It's a very familiar passage to most children of Sunday School age. Jesus and the Disciples have spent a busy day preaching to the crowds and it is time to move on. The Disciples load Jesus into a boat on the Sea of Galilee and they shove off. Unfortunately, they haven't left the crowds behind. Other boats load up and shove off too.

Now, the Sea of Galilee is not really a sea. It is a large fresh water lake, located in a bowl of sorts. It's surrounded by small mountains and hills on all sides. When the wind blows across that bowl, it can churn up the lake, creating waves 8 to ten feet high. Pretty big waves if you are stuck in a small fishing boat that itself is probably only 10 to twelve feet long. And, it is common for these winds to come up suddenly, trapping the fishing fleet on the lake.

Jesus disciples, many of whom are fisherman, know how dangerous this situation is. They might be able to ride out the winds, they might not. But then they look over at Jesus and discover that he is asleep! ...³⁸ *But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"*

Jesus is not a fisherman. He is a carpenter. A city boy. And, his Disciples apparently think that he is either too sound a sleeper for his own good or dumb as a brick. How can someone sleep through such a horrible storm? And so they wake him up. To ask him for help? No. To yell at him for sleeping! "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Misery loves company and Jesus wasn't sharing in the misery of wondering if the storm was going to swamp the boat! It is only then that Jesus speaks to the Storm. "Peace" he says, and the storm quiets down. It is clear that the Disciples did not wake Jesus to get him to quiet the storm because they are over awed by what he has done. They are startled that he does it. "*Who is this that quiets the storm?*" No, they wanted Jesus to experience the misery with them. To feel the fear with them. And it is at this point that Jesus chides them for having so little faith.

Folks, we are in the boat with the disciples, and we are being tossed about on a sea of controversy. And too often we are letting our fear run amok and pull us around. Like the disciples waking Jesus to share in the misery, we band together on one side of these issues or the other for company. We seek out others who are afraid of these issues in the way we are afraid and huddle together. We've overlooked the fact that this is God's world. No matter what happens we are never outside the presence of God. We do not ignore the problems of the world, but we also do not seek to cut ourselves off from all those affected by the problems. Rather than taking sides we should seek solutions to these issues, guided by the tenets of our faith.

Let me suggest that the Christian perspective on the hot button issues is best represented in this way. We are all in this together, and there are problems in our midst. We need one another, and God, to address those problems. Everything we do is done in the certainty that God is always with us.

Doesn't make sense to you? You don't understand how you could approach these problems without feeling fear? Consider the passage from Philippians:

*⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

That is the balance we are to seek. We do not seek a peace that is ignorant of the storm, we do not seek a peace that ignores the impact of each of these issues. We seek the peace that comes from the knowledge that God, that Christ, is always with us even in the storm. We seek that peace that surpasses understanding.

When we find **that** peace we can no longer be led around by our fears. A politician who brings up one of those issues to those who have found the Peace of Christ which surpasses understanding should be cautious. He or she needs to come prepared with more than sound bites intended to stoke fear. They need to come prepared to speak in depth about the problem, its complexities, and its potential solutions. None of these issues is simple and we are being foolish if we buy into the idea that they can be solved without give and take, without compromises. And, if that politician is speaking to a group of Christians, that politician should be prepared to hear what the Gospel has to say about the issue. Christians let the Gospel speak, not their fears.

Conclusion

We've been considering **The God Vote**. Your faith matters in this up-coming election. Use the gift of that faith to help you find your way through the rhetoric, through the manipulation, through the mean spiritedness of the political process. Bring your values as a Christian, your faith as a Christian, your prayers as a Christian to this election. Don't allow the media, or the candidates, or anyone else trivialize your contribution as a Christian.

Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

Jeanne and I would like you to join us this February on a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We will leave on February 16 for nine days of Biblical discovery, returning on February 25th. We will be part of a larger group of primarily United Methodists from all over Middle and West Tennessee. This is a special tour organized by Bishop William McAlilly, the Bishop for the Tennessee and Memphis Conferences.

I first visited the Holy Land in 2000. Jeanne and I went back in 2005 and again in 2012. Before I went the first time I was somewhat cynical about the upcoming experience. I didn't think that it would have much of an effect on me. But, when you stand on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, or travel to the Synagogue at Capernaum, you suddenly realize that you are likely walking ground that Christ walked. When you pray among the Olive trees in Gethsemane, stand in the prison cell contained in the House of Caiaphas, or see the name of

Pilate inscribed on a monument in Caesarea, the events surrounding the imprisonment, trial and passion of Christ take on new meaning; a new reality.

Brochures for the trip, including exact costs and travel itineraries, are available in my office. I'll also schedule a time this summer to share photographs taken on my previous trips to Israel and answer questions about the trip. I hope you will prayerfully consider participating in this faith building experience.

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.

*¹¹ The wealth of the rich is their strong city;
in their imagination it is like a high wall. Proverbs 18:11 NRSV*

I've always been fascinated by this proverb. The Hebrew word translated as 'strong' is a word that refers to military strength; a city able to defend itself from outside threats. However, it is an imaginary city with imaginary walls and an imaginary army. Our wealth can isolate us if we allow it, but its protection is largely illusory. From a biblical perspective we are called to see ourselves as part of a larger community that offers mutual support and is centered upon a right relationship with God (righteousness.).

¹⁸ A certain ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹ Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother.' " ²¹ He replied, "I have kept all these since my youth." ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." ²³ But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. Luke 18:18-23 NRSV

Jesus is focusing attention on the same problem dealt with in the proverb. There is nothing inherently evil about wealth, but it can cause us to make our wealth the focus of our lives instead of God.

Disciple Bible Study Opportunity

Thursday Evenings 7:00- 9:00 Beginning September 18th

Disciple Bible Study is a 32 week study of the bible from Genesis to Revelation. It has guided many people to a deeper understanding of scripture and their faith over the years. Many in the Church have completed this study.

We have enough people to begin a Disciple Bible Study. We will begin on September 18th. There is room for additional people. If you have considered undertaking a study of the bible before, this is a wonderful

opportunity. If you have taken the study before but would like to repeat it you are also welcome. If you are interested in being a part of this group, please contact Rev. Meaker.

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

August 24th: Who Do You Say Jesus Is? Jesus asked that question of his Disciples. It may be one of the most important questions for us to answer for our own lives. My texts are Romans 12:1–8 and Matthew 16:13–20.

August 31st: What Are Your Credentials? What right does God have to make claims on our lives? And who determines if we are qualified for those tasks? My texts are Matthew 16:21–28 and Exodus 3:1–15.

Worship Leaders Schedule

August 24

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**

Sam & Judy Richardson, **Greeters**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

August 31

Nancy Conway, **Liturgist**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Greeters**

Richard & Dawn Stevens, **Ushers**

Announcements

The “Companions in Christ” Sunday school class has begun a new study. The study is, “**Dare to Dream**” which will help us discern God's dream for us and how we live it out prayerfully and spiritually. We will be creating a “God-Sized” mission for ourselves. Please join us. You will be enriched spiritually and you will enjoy the fellowship and commitment of others.

Everyone is doing a great job in signing up to assist with Sunday School, hosting first Sunday meal and preparing communion. Keep up the great work!

August Birthdays

Mike Rohrig, Sara Jordan, Charles Wilson, Dana Bauguess

Happy Birthday to each of you!