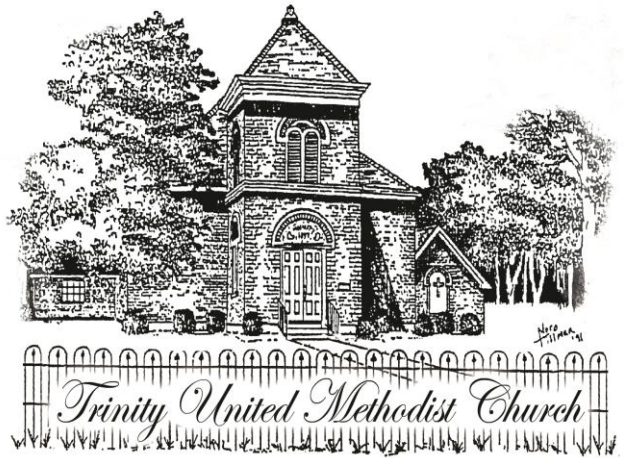




Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter

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Who Are You To Preach the Gospel?

¹¹ For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; ¹² for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Galatians 1:11-12 NRSV

In some traditions it is the practice to form so-called Pulpit Committees when a congregation decides it's time to look for a new pastor. I've never been a part of such a tradition so I don't know exactly how it's done. I assume some of the long serving members of the Church draw up what they think the selection criteria should be and then they go looking for someone who meets those criteria. I assume they look at resumes that outline education and churches served, look at sermon tapes and even discuss theology with the pastor to assure that his messages will be to their liking.

It's interesting to note, as indicated in the text from Galatians, that the idea of examining a pastor's credentials goes back to the very beginnings of the Church. But something I suspect isn't taken in account by pulpit committees is that sometimes the most unlikely persons will become among the most extraordinarily effective pastors. So it was with the Apostle Paul.

I.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians Paul is angry with the church. He's angry with the people of the church and with some evangelists, probably from Jerusalem. He believes that these evangelists are leading the church astray. These evangelists have come to the churches telling people that, if they are to receive salvation, they must convert to Judaism. This is contrary to the Gospel as taught and preached by Paul who proclaimed that the sacrifice of Christ alone was sufficient to provide salvation.

Not being satisfied with attacking his Gospel, these outside Evangelists have apparently been attacking Paul as well. They were essentially calling his background and credentials into question. Again, exactly what they are saying must be deduced by Paul's response. Possibly believing that Paul had failed to be truthful with the Church, the evangelists had told the Church that Paul was a persecutor of the Church and shouldn't be believed. Paul's statement is interesting in this regard. He states:

¹³ You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. Galatians 1:12-13 NRSV

It seems that, although Paul may not have lied about his past, he had not told the Church members about his history as a persecutor of the Church. He does not remind them of what he has told them about his past but rather refers to what the evangelists have probably said about him. It seems likely that Paul was very ashamed about what he had done when he was persecuting the Church. He was so ashamed that he tried to avoid talking about it. Now his reluctance to confess that sin has come back to cause him trouble.

The Evangelists are also apparently attacking Paul's credentials as a Jew. They are possibly suggesting that Paul does not preach adherence to the Law of Moses because he does not know the law. That he may have been born a Jew but was not raised and schooled in Judaism. Here Paul is on firmer ground. He proclaims that he was zealous for the law:

¹⁴ I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. Galatians 1:14 NRSV

'Traditions of his ancestors' is a way of describing the Law of Moses.

Paul did know the Law. In other writings he describes himself as having been raised from birth as a faithful Jew. Acts says he was schooled by one of the most famous Rabbi's in the history of Judaism. Elsewhere he also claims to have been a zealous Pharisee, one who believed in strict adherence to the law. Some Christians do not appreciate the role of the Law in Judaism. Jews then, and now, did not view the law as a burden. They believed, as scripture attests, that they are to be a people faithful to the law as an example to the world. Strict adherence to the law was a means of honoring god. Paul proclaims that he followed the law until God revealed the salvation offered to the world through the fulfillment of the Law; the sacrifice of Christ. That is now his Gospel. Christ, and him crucified.

As far as anyone could see, Paul had no extraordinary credentials to preach the gospel. He was a persecutor of Christians and a devout Jew. And yet few would question that he became the most influential evangelist in Christian history. His Gospel was simple. Preach Christ, and him crucified.

II.

John Newton was the son of a sea captain with no interest in religion. He was a onetime deserter from the British navy who was captured, flogged and demoted to the rank of common seaman. He was transferred, at his own request, to service in slave ships and eventually worked his way back up to the command of a slave ship. In later years he described his life as one devoted primarily to debauchery. He took advantage of all the distractions offered in the seaports of the Mediterranean, Africa and Europe.

One night, helpless at sea in a terrifying storm, he asked that God have mercy on him, his crew and his ship. After coming through the storm he did not, as did so many before him, turn his back again on God. He instead started the journey that would see him, at the end of his life, one of the most influential evangelists of his time. One of the many hymns he helped write was, of course, *Amazing Grace*. He was a military deserter, libertine, slaver. These were hardly the credentials one would look for in the Parish Pastor. Yet, he was a pastor whose ministry still touches our lives today. His Gospel was simple. Preach Christ, and him crucified.

III.

You see, it's never about the credentials of the pastor. It's always about God. In this regard we can take some guidance from the psalmist who wrote Psalm 146.

1 Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

*2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.*

*3 Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.*

*4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.*

...

The LORD sets the prisoners free;

8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

*The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.*

*9 The LORD watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

*10 The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the LORD!*

It's not about our credentials. It's always about the Lord. It's always about God.

IV.

My last 3 years serving at West Nashville I had an associate pastor. Her name was Sherry Cothran Woolsey. Sherry had been the lead singer in an up and coming rock band. They had two moderately successful albums, had been the opening act for several headliners and were about to begin a three month tour of England and Europe. It was at that point that Sherry left the band, returned to the US and began to pursue a call to ministry that she had felt for some time. Sherry brings who she is to the Church. She loves Christ and preaches the Gospel; Christ crucified.

When I think of the ministry students I knew at Vanderbilt Divinity School, we seem an unlikely group to have become pastors. One woman I went to school with was a registered nurse with three children. Before attending Vanderbilt, she had had very little formal religious education. She has served churches now for over ten years in the Nashville area. She preaches the Gospel, Christ crucified.

Another was a wealthy and successful real estate developer. If asked what his major had been in college he would have said beer, women and football. He confesses he graduated UT by the skin of his teeth. His

manner of preaching might be described as “down home,” but he loves Christ and preaches the Gospel: Christ crucified.

Still another was a woman who had never worked outside the home and was raised to believe that women had no place in the leadership of the Church. Her husband almost left her over her decision to pursue ministry and many in her family stopped speaking to her. Yet, she preaches the Gospel, Christ crucified.

Two others many of you know. One was a tenured professor at Vanderbilt and the other a former Army officer. I think you can attest that Paula Hoos and Don Sensing love Christ and preach Christ crucified.

I am a licensed attorney. I practiced law in Nashville and Middle Tennessee for almost twenty years. I also spent over 15 years of my adult life firmly resolved to have nothing to do with God. In that time I only darkened the door of a church about five times and then only on the insistence of other members of my family. When I perceived a call to ministry I ran from it for almost four more years. I’ve now served as a pastor for over 16 years. I love Christ, and try, each and every week, to preach the Gospel: Christ crucified.

There is no need that you become a pastor to proclaim the gospel. You are all ministers of the Gospel. You all have the credentials necessary to preach the gospel. Every last one of you. The only credential required is the love of Christ. Share your faith with those who need to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

When God Tore Open The Heavens

You are invited to participate in a special study this Advent season. I have prepared a study guide to accompany the Lectionary readings for Advent through the First Sunday after Christmas. Both adult Sunday School classes will be using the study. Books are available at the Church and a PDF file containing the book will also be available on the Web site.

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.

²¹*Jerusalem, you are like
an unfaithful wife.
Once your judges were honest
and your people lived right;
now you are a city
full of murderers.*
²²*Your silver is fake,
and your wine
is watered down.*

*²³Your leaders have rejected me
to become friends of crooks;
your rulers are looking
for gifts and bribes.
Widows and orphans
never get a fair trial. Isaiah 1:21-23*

Isaiah has harsh words for the people. Society has become focused on deceit and falsehood. Nothing in the market-place can be trusted and justice is for sale. Politicians are for sale as well. Isaiah here is speaking for God.

*²⁷ You Pharisees and teachers are in for trouble! You're nothing but show-offs. You're like tombs that have been whitewashed. On the outside they are beautiful, but inside they are full of bones and filth. ²⁸ That's what you are like. Outside you look good, but inside you are evil and only pretend to be good.
Matthew 23:27-28*

Jesus makes a similar claim about his own society. Those who appear righteous have actually abandoned the Law and the practice of righteousness. Jesus challenges us to look at our own society, and our own lives, and determine if we too are hiding our hurtful actions behind a veneer of righteousness.

Disciple Bible Study Opportunity

Thursday Evenings 7:00- 9:00

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 begun our study and currently have seven people in the class . If you have been postponing a serious study of scripture now is a great opportunity to jump in. We can accept new students for the next couple of weeks.

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

November 16th : Sermon: "Hands For Troubled Souls": Rev. Roland Scruggs, retired UM Elder will lead worship this day. His texts are 2 Corinthians 8:7-15 and Mark 5:21-43.

November 23rd: Sermon: "Eternal Life". What in the world do we mean? This is part of our All Saints celebration. Be thinking of those people who have shaped your faith. My texts are: 1 John 3:1-3 and Matthew 5:1-12.

Worship Leaders Schedule

November 16
 Renita Hartsock, **Liturgist**
 Pat Moran & Rachel Newman, **Greeters**
 Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Ushers**

November 23
 Mike Fetting, **Liturgist**
 Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Greeters**
 Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

Announcements

Saturday, November 22 - 4:00 PM

Brooks Crowell will be performing a tenor solo concert on November 22 in the Bryant Chapel at Lebanon First United Methodist Church, 415 W. Main Street, Lebanon, TN. Brooks is looking forward to returning to his home church to perform his favorite music.

His selections for voice and piano will include solo arrangements of classical sacred music of the Masters including Handel, Schubert, and Gounod. Brooks will also perform "And I Heard a Great Voice", written by Don Dicie, and first performed at the 9/11 Prayer Service on Sept.12, 2001 at Trinity.

Brooks will be accompanied by Colette Keyser.

That's My Pan:

It's not too late to order gifts for yourself or others and at the same time, participate in our fund raiser.

You can order online if you want at <http://www.thatsmypan.biz/frtn10177>. Once you click on Begin Shopping, you are taken to a page that shows all that is in the catalog PLUS more. They have lots of new products that aren't in the catalog.

If you need to send it, click on the link at the top of the page that says "not local" - this will enable you to ship the products to an address that's not going to church.

You can click on pay by check (give money to Dana) or you can pay by Credit Card.

So, enjoy your shopping, and know that all proceeds will go to the missions of the Trinity Women's Group.

November Birthdays

Cheryl Wilson, Ensley Mason, Betty Haynes, Brooks Crowell, Ross Crutcher

Happy Birthday to each of you!