



# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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## When God Tore Open The Heavens

*"O that you would tear open the heavens and come down..."* Isaiah 64:1 NRSV

We're moving into advent. Advent begins the first Sunday after Thanksgiving. During Advent we contemplate the miracle of the incarnation: God became flesh and lived among us. John 1:14. Advent is followed by the season of Christmas, celebrating the birth of Christ. The two seasons are usually conflated in our minds as we consider the period from Thanksgiving to Christmas the "Christmas Season." It is also, in recent years, a time for Christian whining. I wish I could be more charitable about it but whining is exactly what it seems to me to be. The typical complaints go something like this:

*"Christmas has become too commercialized!" "Christmas is under attack!" "Christmas is too stressful to be a time of joy!" "Christmas has lost its meaning!"*

Statements like these characterize the Season of Advent and Christmas. As we prepare ourselves for this part of the Christian year it might be beneficial to deal with some of these comments and the attitudes they reflect.

*"Christmas has become too commercialized!"* Let's acknowledge something that we all realize but don't often reflect upon. The word 'Christmas' has two meanings. One is the distinctively Christian celebration of the coming, the advent, of Christ. *".. [T]he Word became flesh and lived among us."* John 1:14 NRSV. The other meaning of Christmas is secular. It is a year-end celebration very much in the tradition of many societies that celebrated the Winter Solstice. Although there is a dispute among scholars on this point, some contend that the early Church chose December 25<sup>th</sup> as the 'birthday' of Christ in order to supplant the Roman Winter Solstice celebration. In any event the secular Christmas is celebrated by many non-Christians and marked by the sharing of gifts. Its importance to the retail commercial sector can be marked by the continuous monitoring of retail sales beginning the day after Thanksgiving. The secular holiday is undeniably commercialized and will remain commercialized. The Christian celebration need not be commercialized, although some elements in the Church undoubtedly fall into that trap.

*"Christmas is under attack!"* This is one of the more curious complaints about the Christmas season arising from the Church in recent years. Some Christians have become incensed that retail establishments, sensitive to the need to maximize sales during the Christmas season, have begun using the term 'Happy Holidays' to close a transaction instead of 'Merry Christmas.' In a world wracked by war,

economic upheaval, racism, injustice and poverty it is astonishing that Christians are spending so much energy on this issue. Of course retail establishments, desiring to maximize sales and profits, are going to act in ways that are designed to appeal to as broad a constituency as possible. Remember that the secular Christmas is merely one of several year-end celebrations. Don't sweat the small stuff.

*"Christmas is too stressful to be a time of joy!"* Probably true for many people inside and outside the Church. But this is largely a self-inflicted injury.

*"Christmas has lost its meaning!"* Utter nonsense. God placed the meaning in Christmas and nothing humans can do will remove that meaning. It may, however, be necessary for Christians to rediscover the meaning of Christmas and help share it with others.

As part of our advent observance this year I have prepared a Lectionary based study of the scriptures for Advent. The study draws its name from the Isaiah text quoted above which is one of the texts for the First Sunday in Advent. I've titled the study, *When God Tore Open the Heavens*. Both adult Sunday School classes will be using this study. However if you do not wish to study the texts with others, but would still like to participate in the study, the study guide will be available on the web site in PDF format. If you have any trouble getting a copy please let me know and I will see that you receive one.

## 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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](http://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](http://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](http://www.Justicebible.org).

*<sup>26</sup>Jerusalem, I will choose  
judges and advisors  
like those you had before.  
Your new name will be  
“Justice and Faithfulness.” Isaiah 1:26*

Would you wish to live in a town named ‘Bigotry and Prejudice?’ How about one named ‘Rape and Pillage?’ or ‘Good for the Rich, Bad for the Poor?’ Jeanne and I just returned from Hawaii. Amidst the beauty of the Islands is a distressed economy. As we walked the beach in the mornings we saw a number of people sleeping on the beach in sleeping bags, their possessions piled close by. Honolulu is one of those cities that is offering to move its homeless elsewhere with one way transportation tickets. In the States its one way bus tickets. In Honolulu its one way plane tickets. Isaiah foresees a time when Jerusalem will be called ‘Justice and Faithfulness.’ Justness and faithfulness in the biblical tradition includes care for those who are in need. Do we hope for a time when our cities could be named ‘Justice and Faithfulness?’

*<sup>51</sup>The Lord has used his powerful arm to scatter those who are proud. <sup>52</sup> God drags strong rulers from their thrones and puts humble people in places of power. <sup>53</sup> God gives the hungry good things to eat, and sends the rich away with nothing. Luke 1:51-53*

*<sup>11</sup> This very day in King David’s hometown a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay.” <sup>13</sup> Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said:*

*<sup>14</sup> “Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God.” Luke 2:13-14*

It has become popular among some Christians today to assert that scripture does not speak of the divisive nature of wealth. However, the way we are divided by wealth is one of the principle themes of scripture and one that

God commands us to address. In the *Magnificat*, Mary speaks of the age God is bringing forth in Christ; an age that will see relief for those who are suffering. In the passage from the second chapter of Luke, the angels speak of “pleasing” God. As in the Isaiah text, pleasing God involves living a faithful life which also includes concern for the welfare of others.

## **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 23<sup>rd</sup>: 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.

**November 30<sup>th</sup>: Sermon: “When God Tore Open the Heavens: Our Desperate Need.”** We know we need God in our lives but we still struggle to live the lives we know God wants. The Good News is that we have been given all we really need for our lives as Disciples. My texts are Isaiah 64:1-9 and 1 Corinthians 1:3-9.

## Worship Leaders Schedule

### November 23

Mike Fetting, **Liturgist**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Greeters**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

### November 30

Linda Robinson, **Liturgist**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Greeters**

Mike & Renee Fetting, **Ushers**

## Announcements

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!**