



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



2084 Wilson Pike · Franklin, TN 37067 · 615.794.2665
Pastor Dennis Meaker: 615.794.2665 · djmeaker@gmail.com

December 16, 2015

An Apology

During last Sunday's sermon I did something I rarely do. I was openly critical of a specific politician. Donald Trump. If I had it to do over again I would not have singled Mr. Trump out for special criticism. While it is appropriate, even important, for a pastor to speak about current events and controversies, individual political or public figures should not normally be singled out. If I offended anyone, please accept my apology.

Separating religion and politics is not something that can be done nor, in my opinion, should a pastor try. Politics addresses our collective activity to govern our lives together. The Gospel addresses our collective activity to govern our lives together. It is inevitable that, from time to time, they should come into conflict.

Something that I said when I began my ministry at Trinity almost six years ago, that I have reiterated from time to time, and affirm again here is that my sermons reflect my own struggle with the Gospel. That is the nature of preaching. In contemplating how the Gospel affects our lives I must address how I should be living my life. I am sometimes quite uncomfortable with the Gospel that I preach because it calls me to places that I am not sure I wish to go. Also, as we discuss when we begin Disciple Bible study, it is inevitable that we will come to differing conclusions about the gospel as we read the Bible. As shown in the letters of Paul, Christians have been disagreeing with the interpretation of scripture from the beginning and in that we share in a heritage developed over 4 millennia by the People of Israel. Moreover, the give and take among Christians as we struggle with scripture is one way by which we discern God's Word for our lives.

I generally preach from a manuscript and not notes. There are several reasons for this. First it allows me to honor our time in worship. The sermon is not the center piece of worship but is one part. I know by the length of the manuscript how long the sermon will last. In my experience, sermons that last more than 15 minutes are often not heard. As a trial attorney I learned that it is a cardinal sin to bore the judge or jury.

I also use a manuscript because I believe that it matters how something is said and I wish to be as precise as possible when I make a statement from the pulpit. While any sermon will vary a little from the manuscript, the manuscript keeps me 'on task.'

Finally, using a manuscript is an aid in addressing concerns of the congregation with something that I preach. I will provide a copy of my sermon manuscript to anyone who asks. In that way you know exactly

what was said. If you disagree with something that I've said you can review the sermon at your leisure and then discuss it with me. While we may not ultimately come to an agreement concerning an issue, we will be discussing the Gospel which is never a bad thing.

Finally, I think by now most of you know me well enough to know that I do not consider myself to have 'all the answers.' As Paul told the Romans, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That is certainly true of me. From time to time I will make mistakes, as I did last Sunday. The only thing I can do is offer an apology and ask for your forgiveness. Peace.

The Advent Wreath

² For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. ³ Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Isaiah 60:2-3 NRSV

Who is Christ to you? Why is Christ important to you and to the world? The liturgical meanings behind the Advent Wreath seek to provide answers to those questions.

Many Christians want to separate their "religious life" and their "secular life." We have often been raised to think of our faith as something personal and something that can be separated from our day to day activities. Yet the Old Testament Prophets, Jesus, the Apostles and other writers of the New Testament rejected the idea that we can separate our religious lives from our secular lives. They taught that there is only life and the choice to live that life in relation to God or something else. The Advent Wreath is a liturgical symbol of Christ as the center of our existence.

Christ our Hope: The first week of Advent we acknowledge that Christ is our hope for salvation of the world. The lectionary readings focus on those passages of scripture that speak of God ending time. One of the most powerful images comes from Isaiah 25:

*⁶ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.
⁷ And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
⁸ he will swallow up death forever.
Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.
⁹ It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. Isaiah 25:6-9 NRSV.*

Isaiah envisions a great feast where God is not only the host but a loving parent. God will remove the "shroud" from the world; the constant fear of sin and death that clouds our existence. God will wipe away all

tears and bring salvation. Christ as hope for the world reminds us that regardless of what happens, this is God's world and that ultimately God will bring salvation to the world.

Christ the Way: The emphasis of the Second Sunday in Advent is Christ as the way we are to live our lives. Typical of the lectionary readings for this day is Romans 15:4-6:

⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. NRSV

When we are baptized or confirmed, we are not pledging our allegiance to God and Christ. We instead profess to adopt a new way of living in the world that is focused on God and patterned on the life and teachings of Christ. We cannot separate this religious commitment from our daily lives because we acknowledge that the lives we live will reflect our faith and beliefs.

Christ our Joy: The color purple is most often associated with penitence. Three candles of the Advent Wreath are traditionally purple recognizing that we have turned our lives away from God and are in need of repentance; that is turning back to God. Traditionally, the third Sunday in Advent the candle is pink which is a color associated with Joy. We celebrate that Joy is another name for Christ. We believe that our Joy is founded on God's act in Jesus Christ. My favorite advent reading for the Third Sunday in Advent is from Philipians:

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. Phillipians 4:4-7 NRSV

For many it is hard to fathom how we can "rejoice" in the face of the evil in the world. It might help put this verse in context to know that, when Paul wrote it, he was in prison facing possible execution by the Romans. Paul could rejoice because, come what may, salvation was assured through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Christ the Prince of Peace: On the fourth Sunday in Advent we celebrate Christ as a living presence in this world. We celebrate Christ as the one always with us and who constantly calls us to peace. One of the advent readings commonly used on the fourth Sunday in Advent is from Matthew:

*"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."
²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:
²³ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"
which means, "God is with us." Matthew 1:20-23 NRSV.*

The promise of Emmanuel is God with us. Ours is a living faith, and we acknowledge that there is not a moment of the day that Christ is not with us. As Jesus stated in Matthew 28:20, "I am with you always, to the end of the Age."

The Christ Candle: Finally there is the Christ Candle, the large white candle in the center of the Wreath that is lit on Christmas Eve. White is the color of new life and, in our tradition, it is also the color of death and resurrection. The white candle in the Advent Wreath symbolizes all three of those ideas. We remember the night of the incarnation, the night Christ was born. We acknowledge that, with his birth as a human child, God accepted the inevitability of a human death, the atoning sacrifice. And we are reminded of Easter Sunday and the defeat of sin and death through the resurrection of Christ. Lighting of the Christ Candle also symbolizes God's promise to bring light into the world:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:1

The next time you look at the Advent Wreath, take a moment to reflect on who Christ is and God's act of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Blue Christmas

This Sunday, the Fourth Sunday in Advent, we will celebrate with a Service of Lessons and Carols. Through music and the scriptures we will recall God's act of salvation through bringing Jesus Christ into the world. But we will also recognize what some characterize as a Blue Christmas observance.

The Christmas Season is not a time of joy for all people, especially those who have lost a loved one. For many such people the coming of the holidays only emphasizes the loss in their lives and the grief that they feel. Also, for the many people dealing with sickness and chronic disease and for those suffering depression, the coming of the holidays and the unfulfilled desire to feel Joy can be quite painful. Along with communion on the fourth Sunday in Advent we will also offer an anointing for healing. The anointing is merely making the sign of the cross on your forehead with olive oil, coupled with a prayer for healing in body and spirit. Anointing is one of the oldest liturgies in the Church and one recommended by scripture. James 5:13-15. Consider making this simple act of devotion a part of your observance of Advent.

Thanks

The unrehearsed Christmas pageant was a huge success, even if it was unrehearsed. Thanks to everyone who participated. Make plans to be at Church next Sunday afternoon at 3:00 for the Choir Christmas Concert. Bring a friend or friends. There will be a reception following in Fellowship hall.

Thursday Morning Bible Study

Our Thursday morning Bible Study meets on Thursday mornings between 10:00 and 11:30. Everyone is welcome to attend. It has been my practice to allow the group to decide what parts of the bible they wish to study. We have concluded our study of Mark and Matthew. Last Thursday we started a study of Luke.

The Poverty and Justice Bible

⁸⁻⁹ So once again, I, the LORD All-Powerful, tell you, "See that justice is done and be kind and merciful to one another!" ¹⁰ Don't mistreat widows or orphans or foreigners or anyone who is poor, and stop making plans to hurt each other." Zechariah 7:8-10 CEV

The last several Sundays in Advent I've been preaching on the concept of righteousness. Righteousness, right relationship with God, demands the right relationship between people as well. Zechariah stands in the line with the many prophets before him who proclaimed this simple truth to the people. As the text says, even God acknowledges that this is a message that has been repeated again and again.

⁷ Crowds of people came out to be baptized, but John said to them, "You bunch of snakes! Who warned you to run from the coming judgment?" ⁸ Do something to show that you really have given up your sins. Don't start saying that you belong to Abraham's family. God can turn these stones into children for Abraham. ⁹ An ax is ready to cut the trees down at their roots. Any tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into a fire."

¹⁰ The crowds asked John, "What should we do?"

¹¹ John told them, "If you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn't have any. If you have food, share it with someone else."

¹² When tax collectors came to be baptized, they asked John, "Teacher, what should we do?"

¹³ John told them, "Don't make people pay more than they owe."

¹⁴ Some soldiers asked him, "And what about us? What do we have to do?"

John told them, "Don't force people to pay money to make you leave them alone. Be satisfied with your pay." Luke 3:7-14 CEV

Centuries after Zechariah, John the Baptist repeats the teaching as well. Righteousness, right relationship with God, demands right relationship with one another.

=====

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.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons are part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Mac McAfee	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood		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 20th: Lessons and Carols In scripture and song we celebrate the Christmas story. We also acknowledge that Christmas can be a time of pain for many people and offer anointing for healing.

December 27th: Sermon: Putting On Our Church Clothes. Years ago a couple of books, one for men and one for women, emphasized the importance of how we dress. They were titled "Dress for Success." Paul suggests that we Dress to be successful Christians. My texts are Luke 2:41–52 and Colossians 3:12–17.

Worship Leader's Schedule

December 20
Stacy Bell, Liturgist
Tommy & Jo Cotton, Greeters
Larry Eastwood & Marty Bauguess, Ushers

December 27

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**

Betty & Herb Haynes, **Greeters**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

Announcements

Give the gift of music and give to Trinity! Mystisa Records has just announced the re-release of two of Brooks Crowell's previous albums, "**Christmas at Burke Hollow**" originally released in 2009 and "**Love Ye The Lord**" released in 2011. Digitally re-mastered to enhance the quality of the recordings, these CD's make a great inspirational gift. The CD's are available in Fellowship Hall for \$12 each and the proceeds for this re-release go to Trinity UMC general fund.

The following is a listing of up-coming events:

Advent Sunday School Study: The Nanette Crowell Sunday School class has begun a study written by our Pastor, Dennis Meaker. The Study is, "**The Days are Surely Coming.**" All are welcome at 9:45 in the Sunday School room.

Sunday, December 20, Choir Concert 3:00 PM.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion Service 4:30 PM.

Birthdays in December

Cheryl Wilson, Ensley Mason, Betty Haynes, Ken Strait, Brooks Crowell, Ross Crutcher.

Happy Birthday to each of you!