



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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

December 2, 2015

Jesus' Big Sister

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us...
John 1:14*

I once saw Jesus' big sister. As many of you know, Jeanne and I brought the Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant here from West Nashville UMC. During one year at West Nashville I met Jesus' Big Sister.

We were gathered for the Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant. Our baby Jesus was 7 week old Stephen Singleton. His 4 year old sister Rachel played one of the sheep. One of those moments that you couldn't plan in advance came when the Shepherds and their sheep approached the Manger. Baby Stephen was making a wonderful baby Jesus, lying in the manger crib, flanked by his parents. Rachel, dressed in her sheep costume ran around the altar rail, well in advance of any shepherd, and raced to stand before the manger. Grabbing its sides, she peered over the top to see what the manger held.

This Christmas I invite you to reclaim the wonder of a four year old. Grab the sides of the manger and look in with me. Look at the baby who is God.

I.

What is the meaning of Christmas? A time of Joy? Yes. A time when we think about Peace for the world? Yes. A time of gifts? Yes. For many people, Christmas is a time for being together. Families gather together. Church communities gather together. Parties abound. For many people Christmas is a time of togetherness. All this togetherness, though, masks the reality that we live largely isolated lives. To understand the meaning of Christmas you must first come to grips with our isolation from one another.

We live lives isolated from one another. For instance, think about the time you spend each day by yourself. Many of us spend at least an hour or two each day isolated in our cars. We travel down crowded highways in our automobiles, shut away from one another. During rush hour, there might be 50 or 100 people within 50 yards of one another at any given time, sometimes more when the traffic is really backed up. Yet, we are all shut away in our cars, listening to the radio, talking on the phone, listening to music or something else. Our best friend or worst enemy could be in front of us, beside us, or behind us and we wouldn't know it.

In large part we live isolated lives in our homes and neighborhoods as well. We live isolated from our neighbors. We see our families, and some friends who come by, but for the most part we are isolated in our homes. My family has lived in the same house for 27 years now, but almost all the houses around us have changed hands 2, 3, 4 times, some more than that. I couldn't start to tell you the names of my neighbors. I leave my house in my car in the morning and return to it at night. Even when my wife and I walk around the neighborhood, most people do not expect, or seem to want, any more conversation than a simple hello; how's the weather suit you. Inconsequential small talk.

We can even find ourselves alone in the Church. A pastor friend of mine tells of a Christmas Eve before he entered the ministry. He was divorced and his Mother was out of the city on Christmas Eve. Not wanting to be alone on Christmas Eve, he went to a large, United Methodist Church. He arrived a little late and was told that the overflow crowd for the service was in the gym, where close circuit television could provide the images of what was happening. He went where he was directed, only to find himself almost alone in the gym. Just a very few other people. Attending one of the largest United Methodist Churches in Middle Tennessee, my friend still spent Christmas Eve alone, watching the service on television, surrounded mostly by empty chairs.

We live lives isolated from one another.

II.

Let's be honest with ourselves about our isolation. We like it that way. We don't want to be involved with the lives of other people. What is the saying? "I don't want to get involved." We might say that to other people, as an explanation of why we aren't doing more, or we might offer it to others as sound advice. "Don't get involved." "No good deed goes unpunished." "You'll be sorry of you get involved with someone else's problems."

And, the fact of the matter, is that there is some truth in that philosophy. We all have problems of our own. Most of us feel like we just don't have the energy to be involved with someone else's problems. We don't have the means to look after ourselves AND someone else. Being involved with other people can be ... messy, inconvenient, troubling. So, often, we turn away from involving ourselves in the lives of others.

And, just to be clear, I don't think that attitude is something new. It is not some creation of the late 20th century or early 21st century. The bible makes it clear that people have always shied away from helping one another, shied away from getting involved. Think of the parable of the Good Samaritan, where two people left the man bleeding and dying on the roadside rather than help him. Recall the story of the Rich man and Lazarus from the Gospel of Luke. The rich man passes by Lazarus every day as he enters and leaves his home, never even offering him scraps of food from his table. The prophets proclaimed that many people were ignoring the needs of their neighbors; only looking after themselves. Human nature has not changed much in the last 2 to 4 thousand years. We don't want to get involved. We don't want to be involved in the needs of others.

III.

Which brings us back to the manger and what it holds. When we grab the sides of the manger, and look in, we find that God lives by a different philosophy. God gets involved. God chose to enter this world. God chose to become a part of God's creation. That is the miracle of Christmas. That is the meaning of Christmas. The word made flesh. God became involved.

God became human. God became flesh. Think for a moment what that means. The faith claim of Christianity is that God chose to walk among us as a human being. That God became fully human, was born of

woman, lived among us as a man, taught us as his children, and willingly died a tragic, painful, bitter death on a cross for us. God walked among us. He ate with us, spoke to us, held us in his arms, drew air into lungs and cried human tears. God so loved the world, that God became a part of the world.

The belief that God became flesh is at the heart of what we affirm as Christians. What's that old saying? If you would know someone, walk a mile in their shoes. Well, God walked a lifetime in humanity's shoes. God put those shoes on and tramped the earth. Experiencing what we experience. Feeling what we feel. Have you ever felt despair so deep that you didn't believe you could go on living? So has God. Have you ever experienced a moment of joy that lit your world like a floodlight? So has God. Have you ever experienced paralyzing fear? Fear that froze you in your tracks? So has God. Every emotion that you have ever experienced, has been experienced by God, as a human experiences it. That is the claim of Christianity. We don't worship a God who doesn't understand human struggles. Who doesn't understand human weakness. Who doesn't understand human fear. Because of what God did in Jesus Christ, God understands what it is to be human. God became human and walked among us.

God GOT involved. There was no reason, rationally, for getting involved. The world Jesus was born into was racked by war, by poverty, by disease, just as is the world today. God acted out of love. A love that sought to be involved in the life of every human being who ever lived. When you look over the edge of that manger, you are looking at the manifestation of God's love. You are looking at God. A God who loves the world, loves you enough to live and die as a human being. A God who told us, by word and deed, that the only true way to live in this world, is to be involved with its people, to be involved with one another.

As you prepare to celebrate Christmas, carry with you the image of young Rachel looking over the edge of the manger crib, looking at the wonder of the God who chose to be involved. Who chose to live in the world and among all of its people. And make a new or renewed commitment to live your own life involved with the world, and all of its people. That is the path to peace. That is the way of the kingdom of God. That is the meaning of Christmas.

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 13th at 4:00 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. Our Holy Family this year will be Lindsey and Jason Aldred with Ava Cole Aldred in the lead role of the Christ Child. A Chili Supper will follow 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 have begun a study of Matthew.

The Poverty and Justice Bible

*⁹You're doomed!
You made your family rich
at the expense of others.
You even said to yourself,
"I'm above the law."
¹⁰But you will bring shame
on your family
and ruin to yourself
for what you did to others.
¹¹The very stones and wood
in your home
will testify against you.
Habakkuk 2:9-11*

The bible does not condemn wealth. But it does condemn wealth accumulated through harming others. It also condemns the wealthy who see themselves as above the law. God's law demands that the rights of everyone need to be considered, and proclaims that it matters how we treat 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 13th: Sermon: What Then Should We Do? Paul admonishes us to rejoice always. It is often difficult to see how we can. Then John answers a more direct question. My texts are Zephaniah 3:14-20, Philippians 4:4-7 and Luke 3:7-18.

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.

Worship Leader's Schedule

December 13

Elaine Rohrig, **Liturgist**

Donnie & Renita Hartsock, **Greeters**

Hal & Rachel Newman, **Ushers**

December 20

Stacy Bell, **Liturgist**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**

Larry Eastwood & Sam Richardson, **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 13, the Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant and Chili Supper sponsored by the men's group. 4:00 PM.

Sunday, Decembet 20, we will be serving food to the workers at the 61st United Methodist Church. Volunteers need to be at 61st Street UMC by 11:30 AM.

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

Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion Service 4:30 PM.

Birthdays in December

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

Happy Birthday to each of you!