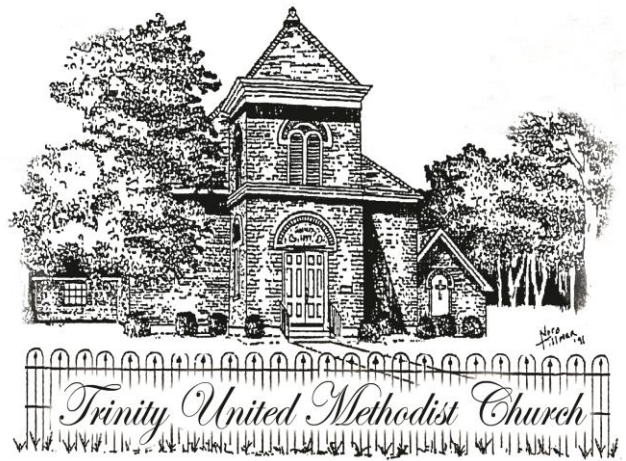




Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Working The Garden

⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 1 Corinthians 3:5-6 NRSV

One of the strangest Christian heresies of the 20th century is the idea of personal religion. This idea is that your faith beliefs are simply a matter between you and God. A personal religion as that term is usually used, is one that is only practiced in private or with a few close friends. It is not a faith tradition that affects our public life or that is supposed to affect how we live in the world. I call this a heresy because a heresy is a belief that contradicts the principal teachings of a faith tradition. A Christian Heresy leads us away from the Gospel. There may be religious traditions that separate our personal lives from our public lives, but Christianity isn't one of them. To be Christian is always to be in relationship to God and God's world; to be in relationship to God and God's children.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Paul is fighting an attempt by the Church at Corinth to make Christianity about them and their beliefs; to make Christianity a personal experience. The Church at Corinth has lost its way. Its members have begun to think that their religious beliefs are personal; that Christianity is a personal religion. Paul spends most of this letter telling them that Christianity is, first and foremost, about Christ. Second, Christianity is about our relationship with Christ. And last, Christianity is about our work in the Garden.

I.

Paul begins his letter by making it clear that our lives begin and end in Christ. In the first ten verses of 1 Corinthians, Paul uses the name of Christ ten times. It is like a hammer pounding a nail; repetition to drive the name of Christ through their thick heads:

*Paul, called to be an apostle of **Christ Jesus***

*² To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in **Christ Jesus***

*³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the **Lord Jesus Christ**.*

*⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in **Christ Jesus***

*⁶ just as the testimony of **Christ** has been strengthened among you*

*⁷ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our **Lord Jesus Christ***

⁸ *He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our **Lord Jesus Christ**.*

⁹ *God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, **Jesus Christ our Lord**.*

¹⁰ *Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our **Lord Jesus Christ...***

Paul is driving the nail into their thick heads: "I was called by Christ; you've been called by Christ; we've all been sanctified by Jesus Christ; in the name of Jesus Christ get your act together." Paul wants them to understand that their faith is first and foremost to be about Christ.

II.

Second, Paul wants them to understand that their faith is about their relationship with Jesus Christ and not about them. The first thing Paul addresses in this letter is the divisions among the people. People in the Church were fighting with one another. Can you just imagine? Among other reasons for division, members of the Church are trying to boast to one another they are better because of who has baptized them. Some brag that it was Paul who baptized them. Others that the Apostle Peter baptized them and still others that it was the evangelist Apollos.

Paul's response is to again bring the focus back to Christ:

¹¹ *For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. ¹² What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³ **Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?** 1 Corinthians 1:11-13 NRSV*

Paul tells the people that it's their relationship with Christ that matters, not their relationship with other Church leaders and certainly not their egos! This is the worst aspect of treating your religion as personal. Your faith becomes all about you; what makes you feel good; what makes you feel special. Paul insists that our faith must be about our relationship with Christ and not ourselves.

III.

Finally, Paul reminds the people that they are called to be servants of Christ. He uses the image of the world as a garden. One plants, another waters and attends the plants, but it is God who gives the growth. Our faith is to be about God and Christ but we are called to be servants working the garden:

5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. 9 For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 NRSV

Our faith is not something personal to us. If we accept the claim of Christ on our lives we are to live as servants of God.

Does this mean we are in the business of saving souls? No. Salvation is the work of God, the work of Christ. We do not save souls. We're field workers, says Paul, hired hands. We plant, we water, we tend

the garden, but it is God who does the big things. Our faith is not personal. It is about Christ, our relationship with Christ and our work in the name of Christ.

IV.

Which brings it all back to us, Christians at Trinity UMC early in the 21st Century. We aren't the Corinthians. What does this scripture have to say to us? Exactly what it said to the Corinthians. We are called to plant. We are called to tend the garden. We are field hands working in the garden.

How do we do that? We share our faith with the people around us. We share the Gospel with the people of this community. We share the Gospel with our friends and neighbors. The problem is, I think, that idea makes us uncomfortable.

There's a cartoon I came across recently. It shows a woman standing in her living room and answering the door. Two men there ask her if she knows Jesus Christ. And, standing in her living room, hiding from these men behind a curtain is a man in sandals; apparently Jesus hiding from the visitors at the door. The woman knows Jesus but, apparently, Jesus doesn't wish to know these men. We don't want to be like those two men. We don't want people hiding from us when they see us coming, afraid that we will share our faith with them in an offensive way.

Yet, sharing our faith can be done without chasing people away. Remember, your goal is not to save souls. You can't save souls. That is God's work. Your goal is to not warn someone that they will go to hell. Again, that is not something you know. God judges, not us.

Your goal is to plant the idea of Christ in the mind of another. How do you do that? The easiest way is to talk about your faith life. Have you had a good experience with Church? Share that if the opportunity arises. Has God ever touched your life? Share that. Has God been a source of strength in a time of trouble? Share that. Did you engage in a mission project that was particularly meaningful? Talk about it and why you were a part of it. Not to brag, but to share the experience.

If the opportunity presents itself, ask someone if they attend Church. And, if they don't, invite them to come with you one Sunday. Studies have shown that most new Christians come to Church the first time because someone they know invites them. If that person proceeds to vent about unpleasant experiences they have had in Church, listen. Folks have had bad experiences in Church, sometimes horrific experiences. Somewhere in there you might have a chance to share that things like that don't happen at your Church. Plant the name of Christ, the idea of Christ.

Sometimes you are called to water the garden, to tend the garden. Someone asks you a question or shares an experience. Someone else has planted the idea of Christ in their minds and they ask you what you think, what your experience is. Be willing to be a servant of Christ and share what you have experienced. You don't need to pretend to be someone who has all the answers. Simply someone who is walking the same road, seeking the same answers. Leave the growth to God. We are just the workers. First and foremost, as Christians, we are servants of God.

Take down your bible sometime this week and read through the first ten verses of 1 Corinthians. Listen as Paul insists that, first and foremost, our faith is about Christ. Remind yourself that your faith is not something personal between you and God. It's about your relationship with God, with Christ and

with all those around you. And remind yourself that, in the final analysis, you are called to be a worker in God's garden.

Holy Week Services

This Sunday begins the last week in the season of Lent. The last week of Lent is called Holy Week. It begins as we commemorate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem when the crowds greeted Jesus by laying palm branches in his path. Our **Palm Sunday** service will be a service of lessons and hymns. We will recall not only the entry into Jerusalem but also the Last Supper, the agony in the Garden, the arrest and trial of Jesus, his crucifixion and his burial. We do this because cannot fully appreciate Easter Sunday unless we also recall the Passion of Christ.

On Thursday we will have a combined **Maundy Thursday and Tenebrae service**. Maundy Thursday gets its name from the Latin phrase *mandatum novum* meaning New Commandment. Jesus gave his Disciples a new commandment on that night as recorded in John 13:34-35:

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Maundy Thursday also marks the institution of the Lord's Supper.

The Tenebrae Service is sometimes called a Service of Shadows. It is a meditation on the passion of Christ. Just before the service begins the church will be "stripped." The symbols of the faith will be removed (the Cross on the altar, the altar cloth, etc). The sanctuary will be lit by candles and the passion story will then be read as the candles are extinguished.

On **Good Friday** at noon we will hold a short service recalling the crucifixion. Scripture tells us that the crucifixion took place between noon and 3 o'clock. The Scripture will be read from the lectern instead of the pulpit. The pulpit represents the proclaimed Word of God and Good Friday is the day that we sought to remove the Word of God from the world. The church will remain open until 3:00 PM for those who wish to stop, meditate and pray.

Easter Season Sermon Series

What's the Least I Can Believe and Still be Christian?

Several years ago Dr. Martin Thielen, a United Methodist Pastor here in the Tennessee Conference, wrote a book titled, "What is the Least I Can Believe and Still be a Christian?" The title is not really descriptive of the thrust of the book but comes from a question Dr. Thielen was asked by a parishioner contemplating a profession of faith. Dr. Thielen uses the question as a jumping off point to discuss things that are not central to Christian belief and things that he believes are central to Christian belief.

Beginning on April 12, the Sunday after Easter, I will begin a ten part sermon series loosely based on Dr. Thielen's book. The first five sermons will focus on propositions that you do not have to believe to be a Christian. The second five will focus on propositions that I believe are central to Christian Faith. The titles for these sermons are listed below:

- *You do not have to Believe that God Brings Catastrophes into Our Lives.*
- *You do not have to Believe that Women Cannot be Preachers or Leaders of the Church.*
- *You do not have to Believe that Christians Never Doubt.*
- *You do not have to Believe that “Bad” People Will be ‘Left Behind’ by God.*
- *You do not have to Believe that Everything in the Bible Should be Taken Literally.*

- *To be Christian, You Must Believe in Christ.*
- *To be Christian, You Must Believe in the Church, the Body of Christ.*
- *To Be Christian, You Must Believe in the Holy Spirit.*
- *To be Christian, You Must Believe in God’s Love for the World.*
- *To be Christian, You Must Believe in the Resurrection.*

One reason I offer sermon series is to provide an opportunity for you to be able to invite people to our Church. It is sometimes easier to invite people to come and visit the Church when you can tell them what the sermon will be about. A sermon series offers people an opportunity to get to know us over a series of weeks and experience what it is like to participate in our ministries. I encourage you to take this opportunity to invite others to “Come and See” what Trinity United Methodist Church is like.

72+U The Mission and Ministry of the Tennessee Conference and Trinity UMC

After this the Lord appointed [seventy-two] others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ² He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Luke 10:1-2

The mission of the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences of the United Methodist Church is to Discover, Equip, Connect and Send lay and clergy leaders who shape congregations that offer Jesus Christ to a hurting world, one neighborhood at a time. The values underlying this mission are:

Unrelenting love for all people
 Integrity
 Excellence
 Faithfulness and Fruitfulness
 Innovation

Luke 10:1-2 describes the beginning of the first missionary effort of the Disciples of Jesus Christ. Some translations state that Jesus sent forth 70 disciples, others say that he sent forth 72. The Tennessee and Memphis Conferences, under the leadership of Bishop William McAlilly have adopted that scripture as a map for our own mission in our communities. The Bishop has invited us to view our communities as our mission fields, seeking to bring the Gospel to everyone in our communities.

In the coming months I will bring you more information about this mission initiative and how we might be a part of it.

Easter Egg Hunt

Last year's Easter Egg Hunt was a huge success. We would like to make this year's even better. The Easter Egg Hunt will be held on the day before Easter, Saturday, April 4th, at 10:00 AM. If you are able, please come by and help with the preparations and with the activities themselves. Also, be sure to invite your neighbors, grandchildren, nieces and nephews to be a part of the fun. If you would like to help, please contact Julia Moore or Jeanne Rybolt.

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.

*Don't mistreat others
or falsely accuse them
or say something cruel.
¹⁰Give your food to the hungry
and care for the homeless.
Then your light will shine
in the dark;
your darkest hour will be
like the noonday sun.
Isaiah 58:9b-10 CEV*

The bible is full of many obscure instructions and propositions that are hard to understand. Isaiah 58:9-10 doesn't fall into that category. It seems to me that mistreating the poor and saying cruel things about the poor has become common place. I sometimes wonder if people do that because they so fear becoming poor themselves. Isaiah describes acts of simple kindness as bringing light into a very dark world.

¹⁴ You are like light for the whole world. A city built on top of a hill cannot be hidden, ¹⁵ and no one would light a lamp and put it under a clay pot. A lamp is placed on a lampstand, where it can give light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ Make your light shine, so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-15 CEV

Like the prophets, Jesus equated living a life of love and kindness with bringing light into the world. Indeed, according to the Old Testament, the faithful people of God were to be a light in the world. Sometimes I fear that we are not only hiding our light under a bushel, but extinguishing it.

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

March 29th: **Palm Sunday.** Palm Sunday will be a service of Lessons and Hymns. We will reflect upon Christ's entry into Jerusalem, the initiation of the Lord's Supper, and the Passion and the Crucifixion. Communion will also be celebrated.

April 5th: **Easter Sunday. Sermon: They Were Afraid.** Of all the resurrection texts, Mark 16:1-8 is the most curious. My texts are 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 and Mark 16:1-8.

Worship Leader's Schedule

March 29

Rodger Klein, **Liturgist**

Linda Robinson & Pat Moran, **Greeters**

Marty Bauguess & Tommy Cotton, **Ushers**

April 5

Dana Bauguess, **Liturgist**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Ushers**

Announcements

In a few days, we will be celebrating Easter. If you would like to honor a friend, family member or honor a loved one in memoriam, please use the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board. **The order for lilies must be placed by March 29.**

The **Maundy Thursday/Tenebrae service** will take place **Thursday, April 2 at 7:00 PM.**

The **Good Friday service** will take place at noon **Friday, April 3.**

Our **Easter Egg Hunt** will take place **Saturday, April 4 from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM.** We are collecting individually wrapped candy and will soon need volunteers to serve before, during and after this wonderful occasion. Please invite your neighbors and friends to come and experience the fun to be had that day!

Easter Sunday is a first Sunday. However, we will not celebrate a First Sunday meal on Easter Sunday so that people can share the day with their families.

March Birthdays

Pat Moran, Marty Bauguess, Tom Moore, Jeff McKernan, Herb Haynes, Ava Fetting

Happy Birthday to each of you!