



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Who Forgives?

¹⁸ *Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Matthew 18:18*

²³ *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” John 20:23*

“*Christ died for us while we were still sinners. That proves God’s love for us. In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven.*” You will recognize that statement as a part of the liturgy associated with our prayer of confession.

Only God can forgive sin because sin represents a break in our relationship with God. In a number of places in scripture, Jesus forgives sin. Theologically this is no problem for us because we see Jesus as part of the Holy Trinity that is God. But there are the two passages above that have led the Church, and some Christians, from time to time to assume the role of forgiving sins or granting absolution from sin. In some times and places the Church and individual Christians have even purported to withhold God’s forgiveness. In form the statement from our liturgy seems to imply that I, as an agent of the Church, am granting absolution from sin. Acknowledging that this area can become a quagmire I want to attempt to clarify the United Methodist view of sin and the power of forgiveness.

First, with regard to the liturgy we use every week, I am not purporting to grant forgiveness of your sins and you are not granting forgiveness of my sins. Forgiveness of sin is an act of God accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The statement, “*In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven,*” should be heard as an announcement; a proclamation of the Gospel, the Good News. We are affirming a core belief of Christianity. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven.

What then do we do with these two statements from Matthew and John? Is the Church supposed to have the right to withhold the forgiveness of sins? The short answer, based on scripture, is no. First we start with the proposition that sin is an act against God. It is an act that may affect people and communities but its nature is an act that causes separation between the sinner and God. Looking first at the text from Matthew we find that the statement quoted above comes as part of Jesus’ description of a process for resolving disputes between members of the Church. That process calls for one on one discussion of the act that has harmed another church member, then a discussion between the sinner and the wronged person with the help of one or two members of

the Church, and finally an attempt to resolve the dispute within the Church as a whole. Matthew 18:15-17. If the sinner still has not repented then he is to be treated like a “tax collector or gentile.” We already know that, in Jesus eyes, “tax collectors” and other sinners are supposed to be treated as someone who is sick and in need of help. Matthew 9:10-13. Jesus suggests that separation from the Church is appropriate but not separation from God’s Grace and not abandonment. The Church is still seeking to bring the Gospel to the sinner and gentile. Moreover, immediately following the Matthew 18:18 text is Peter’s question about forgiveness. Matthew 18:21-22. “*How many times should I forgive the member who sins against me? Is seven times enough?*” “*Seventy-seven times,*” says Jesus. In other words, so many times that you would lose track. Forgiveness is not something that should be withheld by the Church or its members because it is not something withheld by God. Finally, there is the Great Commission:

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19 NRSV.

Christ commissioned the Church to spread the Gospel to the world, not to be custodians of God’s grace.

John 20:23 can be understood in a similar manner. In the Gospel of John sin is a failure to recognize Jesus Christ. It is described as walking in darkness. This is established early in the Gospel:

¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.” John 3:19-21 NRSV.

(See also John 1.1 et. seq. where Christ is described as the light that comes into the darkness.) The mission of the Church is to share the Gospel so that people will come to know and believe in Christ; that they will literally walk out of the darkness. If people come into the light, if they accept Jesus Christ, then their sins are forgiven. If they reject the Gospel then their sins are “retained”; they cannot be forgiven not because of the act of the Church but because of the rejection of the Gospel.

Finally, a discussion of the forgiveness of sin would not be complete without a reference to the “unforgivable sin.”

³¹ Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. Matthew 12:31-32 NRSV

Note first of all that every sin will be forgiven except the sin of “blasphemy against the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit represents the power of God to forgive sins. The Holy Spirit is the means God uses to work in the world. If one refuses the help of the Spirit they are denying the power that can forgive their sins. Under those circumstances, their sins cannot be forgiven.

The Gospel is that only God can forgive sin and God has forgiven our sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. However, that forgiveness is a gift that must be accepted. When we close our liturgy of Confession and Pardon we are proclaiming the Gospel: *In the name of Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven.*

One Hundred and Fifty Years Living As The Body of Christ

As many of you already know, we will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the founding of Trinity UMC on June 13th and 14th. People are already beginning to work on the celebration but we need your help. Please talk to Cheryl Wilson, Nancy Conway or Jeanne Rybolt about ways that you would like to help and to see if they have tasks that you hadn't considered. *In particular, we need someone who would be willing to help produce and edit a media presentation of peoples' recollections and experiences at Trinity in recent years and in years past.* If you would like to be a part of that effort, please contact Rev. Meaker.

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.

⁶I listen carefully, but none of you admit that you've done wrong. Without a second thought, you run down the wrong road like cavalry troops charging into battle. Jeremiah 8:6 CEV

The label "flip-flopper" became popular in politics some time ago to describe a politician who changed his or her position on a subject. To be fair there is some basis for being critical for what some see as political hypocrisy, making statements that the current audience wants to hear while changing those statements for the next audience. Yet, if we are a thinking people, we should expect that people's opinions will change over time. Who among us has never changed their mind about an important subject? Jeremiah is speaking here for God. God is telling the people that they refuse to change their ways that reject God's laws. Instead, they continue blindly going forward defending a lifestyle that rejects God. Perhaps it's time to rethink some of our sacred beliefs about 'right living' and evaluate them in light of how God, through scripture, tells us to live.

²⁰ When you meet together, you don't really celebrate the Lord's Supper. ²¹ You even start eating before everyone gets to the meeting, and some of you go hungry, while others get drunk. ²² Don't you have homes where you can eat and drink? Do you hate God's church? Do you want to embarrass people who don't have anything? What can I say to you? I certainly cannot praise you. 1 Corinthians 11:20-22 CEV

Paul is addressing the same mindset as the people of Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day. The rich don't see that they have any obligation to the poorer members of the Church. They are ready to eat and they can't envision adjusting their lifestyle to think about the well-being of others. They simply "charge forward" without regard to the needs of their absent brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul reminds them, and us, that we are all part of the Body of Christ and must care about what happens to one another.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons are 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

May 17th: Sermon: To be Christian, You Must Believe in Christ. Seems straight-forward. My texts are Matthew 16:13-19 and John 1:1-5.

May 24th: Sermon: To Be Christian You Must Believe in the Church, the Body of Christ. Christians often speak in terms of having a "personal relationship with Christ." Paul reminds the Church in Corinth that the personal relationship with Christ includes a personal relationship with all other Christians. My texts are Acts 2:1-21 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

Worship Leader's Schedule

May 17

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

May 24

Elaine Rohrig, **Liturgist**

Pat Moran & Linda Robinson, **Greeters**

Rodger & Cherry Klein, **Ushers**

Announcements

The “Fish Fry” committee will meet tomorrow, Thursday, May 14 at 6:30 PM in Fellowship Hall. All members of this committee are encouraged to attend.

“**Companions in Christ**” Sunday school class has begun a new study. Adam Hamilton is a pastor and Christian author who has written a number of books, some of which we have studied previously. Our current study is an effort to make sense of God’s will. Some of the questions we are discussing are, “Why do the innocent suffer,” “Why do my prayers go unanswered,” “Why can’t I see God’s will for my life?” and “Why God’s love prevails.”

We meet at 9:45 AM in the adult Sunday school room. Everyone is welcome to join us as we enjoy fellowship and study together.

Please sign up to be host/hostess for the first Sunday meal. The sign-up list is on the bulletin board. It would be very helpful if each month could be filled in.

Our church will be serving and providing food at **61st Avenue United Methodist Church Saturday, May 23**. If you are able to volunteer, please see Charles Wilson.

May Birthdays

Tommy Cotton, Sam Richardson, Jim Winton

Happy Birthday to each of you!