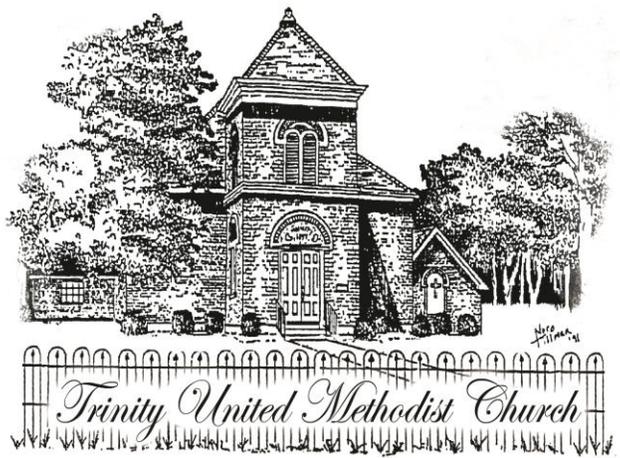




Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Understanding the New Testament The Book of Romans

An Introduction to the Paul's Epistles

Imagine yourself living in the first decades after the resurrection of Christ. You and your family have converted to Christianity and been baptized. But, what does it mean to be a Christian? Unlike you, the Christians of the first century did not have 2000 years of tradition to help them understand their faith. God had made them the Body of Christ, but what that meant for their lives was a mystery. How does one live, day to day, as a Christian? What impact should our faith have on our lives? How do Christian beliefs intersect with marriage, morality, business practices, government and family life? What should we do when faced with persecution by the government? All these questions and more are discussed in the epistles.

If you were a part of a Church started by Paul you would gather with the others in the church and worship in the ways Paul taught. You would study the lessons that Paul had taught and you would seek to understand God's claim on your life. You would also meet with other traveling evangelists like Apollos or Cephas. And, you would form opinions and beliefs. The problems would arise when your opinions and beliefs contradicted those of other Christians. That would lead to disagreements, fights and "side-taking" by other members of the Church.

Most of the Epistles address issues that have arisen in the Churches started by Paul. People are disagreeing with one another and seeking Paul's advice. In several of the Epistles Paul is addressing questions of practice and theology for the first time. Paul is a pastor seeking to lead his congregations. Sometimes, he is defending himself against accusations being made by others. And, in a real sense, he working through the answers to these questions for himself.

Paul's Letter to the Romans

The Letter to the Romans was written toward the end of Paul's ministry, probably around 58 CE. Unlike Paul's other letters, Paul is writing to a Church he did not establish and probably never visited. Based upon things stated in the letter he seems to be planning a trip to Jerusalem and then a trip through Rome on his way to Spain. It is likely that the up-coming trip to Jerusalem he describes is the one that ended with his imprisonment in Caesarea. He would indeed go to Rome, but as a prisoner. He is believed to have died in Rome, murdered by Nero.

Roman's position in the New Testament is based upon its length. It is the longest of Paul's Epistles which are ordered roughly according to length. Still, Romans is probably one of the most influential of Paul's letters in terms of the development of Christian theology. When Martin Luther was struggling with the problems he perceived in the Roman Catholic Church he turned first to Romans. The theme of Romans is the reality of salvation through faith in the sacrifice of Christ. That theme is stated early in the letter:

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith." Romans 1:16-17.

Simply stated, the gospel declares salvation for all who have faith, both Jew and Greek. We are saved through faith in God, not through our deeds. This insight freed Martin Luther from his frustration over seeking to live a sinless life. He knew that, no matter how hard he worked at it, he would continue to sin. If his salvation was left to his own good works, he was lost. As Paul notes in Romans, all have sinned. Romans 3:23. Moreover:

¹⁵ I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. Romans 7:15-20

I don't do what I should do and I do what I shouldn't do. We know the difference between right and wrong yet we still act wrongly. Paul is speaking of himself decades after his Damascus Road experience. Paul also makes it clear that the gospel did not replace the law and that the Christians did not replace the Jews. The Salvation offered by God is for the Jews and the Gentiles.

Why is Paul writing to the church in Rome in such detail laying out his understanding of the gospel? We don't know but there is a basis in the letter for informed speculation. We know from his letter to the Galatians that there were elements in the Church, possibly from some Christians in Jerusalem, who were seeking to undermine his ministry. Paul may either know, or suspect, that these people have carried their accusations to the church at Rome. This letter seems to be a sort of introduction explaining to the church exactly what he has been preaching and why. Paul was probably counting on the support of the Church in Rome for his planned missionary journey to Spain. As we will see, much of what Paul tells the Romans about his understanding of the gospel was derived from his work with the churches he established.

Next Week: 1&2 Corinthians

Advent Is About God Reaching Into Our World

And the Word became flesh and lived among us...

John 1:14

It's Advent or, as many Christians in the rest of the world call it, 'the Christmas Season.' We will soon be hearing the debates about the "true" meaning of Christmas and whether the "true" meaning is lost in all the commercial activity. There will also be those bemoaning the use of 'Holiday Season' over Christmas Season. However, even if you listen closely, you probably won't hear a consistent message from Christians about the true meaning of the season.

For some Christians Advent is about "Peace on Earth," something the world did not experience in Jesus' lifetime or the two thousand years since. For many, it's a "Spirit of Good Will Toward All People," the

message exemplified in the classic *Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens. For still others, the primary focus is the Christ Child in the manger as the symbol of new life and hope. Yet, while all these aspects certainly have their place in the celebrations of the season, Advent is first and foremost about God reaching into our world.

The writer of John says it best in the verse quoted above. “The Word became flesh and walked among us.” The faith claim of Christianity is that God so wanted us to be reconciled to God, that God reached into our world and became a part of our reality. The incarnation, the birth of Christ, is the center of our theology. The atoning sacrifice was a reality once God became flesh. Flesh must, at some point, die. Christ’s death on the Cross would have no meaning if God had not been made flesh, nor would the resurrection. God took on human life and humanity killed that life. God responded with still more life. God’s love cannot be turned away, even when confronted with the worst humanity can do.

The word Advent literally means “coming.” God came into our reality. God sought us out where we live. In that act is the Gospel, the Good News. In that act is the hope of “Peace on Earth and Good Will to All People.”

Advent at Trinity UMC

Celebrating Communion during Advent

You have heard me say that Christians are a people of the cross and the table. The Table of the Lord is an especially powerful symbol for the church. Everyone gathers around that table bringing all of who they are, good and bad, to the table. Around the table we pray that God make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to the world. In other words, we pray that God empower us as the Body of Christ.

During the four Sundays of advent, on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day we will celebrate communion during each worship service. This is an opportunity for all of us to reflect on the meaning of the sacrament for our lives as disciples. It is also appropriate, as we prepare to celebrate the incarnation of God, that we remember each week the words of Christ as he prepared to die for us. “Do this in remembrance of me.”

The Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant and Chili Supper, December 11th

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.

Immediately following the Pageant, we will gather in the Fellowship Hall for a Chili Supper. Everyone who desires is invited to make a pot of their favorite Chili and share it with the congregation. If you plan on bringing Chili, please let Marty Bauguess know.

The **Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant and Chili Supper** will be held **Sunday, December 11th at 4:00 PM** at Trinity United Methodist Church. We will get into our costumes between 4 and 4:30 with the pageant starting at 4:30. Please come and be a part of this joyful event and bring a friend or two to join in the fun.

[We are still looking for a 'Holy Family' and a 'Baby Jesus.' We can make do with a baby doll but it's our preference, if at all possible, to have a baby and its parents as the Holy Family. If you know someone who has had a baby in the last year and who would be willing to participate, please contact Reverend Meaker. Remember, there are no lines to learn and we provide the costumes!]

Friday December 16th : Serving Lunch at the Last Minute Toy Store

On December 16th Trinity UMC will be serving lunch for the workers at the Last Minute Toy Store at 61st Ave. UMC. Lunch is served from 11:00 to around 4:00. If you are interested in volunteering please contact Charles Wilson.

Sunday December 18th: Lessons and Carols and Blue Christmas

During Worship on December 18th we will celebrate with a traditional service of Lessons and Carols. This service reminds us, through scripture and song, of the promised coming of Christ and God's Love for the World.

It is also our tradition to include a **Blue Christmas** Observance on the Fourth Sunday in Advent. 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.

Sunday December 18th at 3:00 PM: Christmas Concert and Carol Sing Led by the Nashville Singers.

The Nashville Singers will be with us once again on December 18th to offer a concert of Seasonal Music and lead us in singing traditional Christmas Carols. A reception with light Refreshments will follow.

Saturday December 24th at 4:30 PM: Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion Service

It's Christmas Eve. Let's face it. If it's not done by now it probably won't get done. It's time to stop and remember why this day is celebrated by billions the world over. Gather with us for a traditional Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion service.

Sunday December 25th: Christmas Day Worship and Fellowship: 10:00 to Noon.

Every five or six years, Christmas Day falls on a Sunday. We will not hold Sunday School but we will gather between 10:00 and 11:00 to share in fellowship and a light breakfast. At 11:00 we will gather for worship. Children (of all ages) are invited to come in their pajamas. We will worship with scripture and song and celebrate the Birth of Christ.

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. Each week we light a different candle on the Advent Wreath.

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: This is the theme for the Third Sunday in Advent. 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 need to repent; that is turn 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 Philippians:

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.

Preacher, What Does the Bible Say about ...?

From the time I came to Trinity I have stated on numerous occasions that I am willing to consider a sermon, or sermon series, on any subject that is of concern. If there is a subject upon which you would like me to preach I will consider it. If I do not think it appropriate for a sermon I will explain why. It might also be appropriate to address some issues as part of a Newsletter article or series or as part of the Sunday School curriculum. But, if at all possible, I will seek to speak to these issues that are of interest on Sunday morning. One purpose of worship is to contemplate our relationship with God and if something is bothering you it is likely bothering others as well.

Thursday Morning Bible Study

The Thursday Morning Bible Study Group meets weekly on Thursdays from 10:00 to 11:30 AM. The group has decided that it will not meet until after the first of the year. We will meet again on January 12th and continue our study of Genesis.

Prayer Ministry

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

Elva Beard	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Leslie Eastwood	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson

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 11th: Experiences of the Heart. “Are you the one?” asks John the Baptist from prison. “Are you the one who is to come or should we wait for another?” This is one of the stranger questions in the Gospel since it comes from someone who was among the first to identify Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus’ answer is enigmatic but seems to say, “What does your heart tell you?” My texts are James 5:7–10 and Matthew 11:2–11.

December 18th: Lessons and Carols. Blue Christmas. (See above)

Worship Leaders

December 11

Linda Robinson, Liturgist

Mike and Elaine Rohrig, Greeters

Jan and Stacy Bell, Ushers

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GraceWorks has a shortage on many items in our food pantry, and we need your help restocking it! Here is a list of some very critical items needed in our food pantry: **Critical Needs:** Canned green vegetables (not green beans), Canned beans, Canned meat (not tuna), Cereal, Hamburger Helper type boxed meals, Soup. Please support this important ministry with your regular donations. The box is located beside the side door.

Hosts and Hostesses for First Sunday Lunch: Please see the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board. Please add your name to host this occasion for the coming months.

The Nanette Crowell Companions in Christ Sunday School Class is both learning and enjoying a series of videos, narrated by Ray Vanderlann. The videos as well as the narration take place in ancient lands described in the Old Testament. We enjoy discussion about what we are learning and the application of the lessons to our lives. We enjoy fellowship beginning at 9:45 with our study beginning at 10:00. All are welcome to join us as we pursue Biblical truths and the application for our lives.

Birthdays in November

Cheryl Wilson, Greg Locke, Betty Haynes, Ken Strait, Brooks Crowell, Ross Crutcher

Happy Birthday to each of you!