



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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

November 30, 2016

Understanding the New Testament The Book of Acts part 2: The Ministry of Paul

³ Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." Acts 9:3-6

¹⁵ The voice said to [Peter] again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." Acts 10:15

The majority of the remainder of the Book of Acts beginning in chapter 9 focuses on the conversion and ministry of the Apostle Paul. The Apostles had met in Jerusalem shortly after the crucifixion and selected a Disciple named Matthias to replace Judas. Matthias is never mentioned in scripture again. As so often happens in scripture, God had a very unlikely candidate in mind to replace Judas: Saul of Tarsus, the fledging Church's greatest persecutor. While others had already begun preaching the Gospel to the gentiles, it is Saul, later named Paul, who becomes the evangelist to the Gentiles. Paul's first mission was with Barnabas to the new Church at Antioch. Acts 11:19-26. There, the Holy Spirit commissioned Paul and Barnabas to preach the Gospel.

One of the principal issues facing the early church was the question of conversion to Judaism. Jesus was, after all, Jewish. His twelve Disciples and most of his followers were also Jewish. It seemed perfectly reasonable to believe that, if one was to be a follower of Jesus, one must first become a Jew. Acts touches on this subject in several ways. As noted, it describes the first efforts to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. It also describes a vision received by Peter revealing to him that the Jewish laws that restricted the eating of certain foods need not be strictly followed. This was important because the food laws limited social intercourse between Gentiles and Jews. Finally, Paul and the leaders in Jerusalem reached an agreement:

¹⁹ Therefore I [James] have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰ but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. Acts 15:19-20

Compare Gal 2:1-14. Judaism always welcomed gentiles to worship in the synagogue, even those who did not convert. Many of these persons were probably drawn to Judaism because of the Jewish laws and traditions that encouraged the creation of a supportive community where people helped one another. There were few gentile

conversions, however, possibly because of the requirement of circumcision. In Hellenistic society circumcision was considered mutilation of the body. The decision not to require conversion to Judaism before becoming a Christian allowed Christianity to develop independently of Judaism and probably prevented it from becoming an obscure Jewish sect. Loss of the connection with Judaism also resulted in more persecution for Christians. Judaism was a respected ancient religion within the Roman Empire. Once divorced from Judaism, Christianity was one more upstart mystery religion that engaged in questionable practices (eating human “flesh” and drinking human “blood” for instance.)

Acts goes on to describe the mission and ministry of Paul in a number of different cities around the Mediterranean. It also describes his own experiences of persecution and imprisonment. Acts additionally refers to some figures who are mentioned in the letters of Paul, including Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila. Acts 18:24-28.

According to Acts, near the end of his ministry Paul was drawn into conflict with some of the Jews in Jerusalem who objected to his preaching to the Gentiles. When it appeared to him that he might be summarily tried he proclaimed his Roman citizenship which prohibited such summary treatment. He was then transferred to Caesarea and the palace of the Roman governor Felix. According to the text, Paul was held in prison for two years apparently because Felix was hoping that Paul would be able to bribe his way out of custody with the help of his followers. Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus and, after a brief hearing in which Paul again exercised his right as a citizen to appeal directly to the Emperor, Paul was dispatched on a ship to Rome. Following a very eventful trip to Rome which included, among other things, a shipwreck, Paul was imprisoned in Rome for two years. What eventually happened to Paul is not known, although most scholars believe that he was probably executed in Rome.

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 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 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. We will start a study of the Book of Genesis on December 1, 2016.

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 4th: God's Limits. God can do anything. Or are there limits? My texts are Isaiah 11:1–10 and Matthew 3:1–12.

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.

Worship Leaders

December 4

Houston Hartsock, Liturgist

Tommy and Jo Cotton, Greeters

Sam and Judy Richardson, Ushers

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!