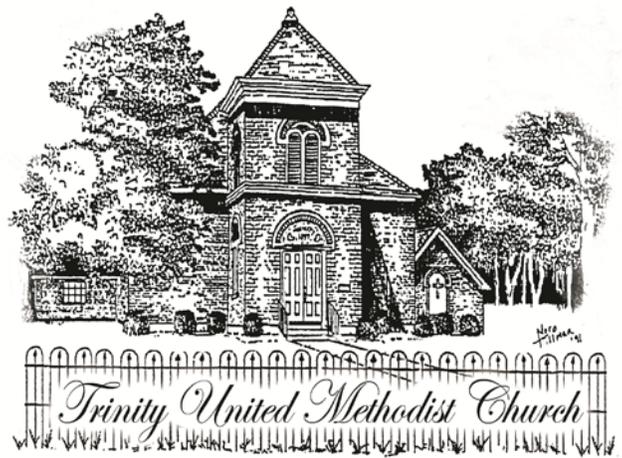




# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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## Understanding the New Testament *The Revelation to John or the Book of Revelation*

*“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,<sup>2</sup> who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.” Rev. 1:1 NRSV*

*“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.  
Rev. 1:8 NRSV*

**The first thing to note is that the title of the book is Revelation, not Revelations.** I make that point because it is routine to hear or read references to the “Book of Revelations.” It’s surprising that so few writers of fiction, movies and television write the title correctly. Revelation is a translation of a Greek word, *apokalypsis*, or in English, apocalypse. Apocalypse means “to reveal.” Revelation is an example of a form of literature known as Apocalyptic. Apocalyptic literature was written by both Jews and Christians. As we saw in our study of the Old Testament, one of the oldest examples of apocalyptic literature is found in Chapters 7-12 of the Book of Daniel.

Apocalyptic literature was written to encourage people to be faithful to God during times of great persecution. It has several common traits. Apocalyptic literature divides history into two eras: the evil present and the coming reign of God. It emphasizes the conflict between Good and Evil and usually indicates that, for the present time, evil will seem to be prevailing. However, victory is ultimately to be God’s, followed by the end of history and a Judgment where the faithful are rewarded and those who have fought the Good are punished. Apocalyptic also makes use of symbolic images such as beasts, dragons, horns, seas of fire and more. Some scholars believe that the use of symbolism was to hide the message of the book from everyone but the faithful but most scholars believe that the use of symbolism was intended to impart a sense of mystery to the writings.

Revelation was probably written during the closing years of the first century during the reign of the Emperor Domitian (81-96 C.E.) although references in parts of it seem to refer to persecution during the time of Nero (54-68 C.E.). Both Domitian and Nero engaged in active persecution of Christians. Of particular interest in this regard is the reference to the number 666 or 616 (Rev. 13:18). The letters of the Hebrew language were, at one time, given numerical values. In Hebrew, there were two ways to write the name Nero. In one way the name would equal the value 666. In the other way the name would equal the value 616. Both figures appear in manuscripts of the Book of Revelation. However, modern interpreters seeking to argue that the Book of

Revelation is foretelling modern history have claimed, at different times, that the “beast” referred to is Adolph Hitler, Mussolini, Henry Kissinger, Barrack Obama and even Pope Paul the VI. Other nominations though the centuries have included the Papacy in general, Muhammad, Labor Unions, European Banking Cartels and a supercomputer located in Brussels. The symbolism in revelation is open enough that many individuals and organizations can be shoehorned into the image.

The writer of the Book of Revelation claims to be a man named John in exile on the island of Patmos, apparently for preaching the Gospel. (See Rev. 1:9). This is unlikely to be the Apostle John both because of the age of the writing and the fact that the writer refers to the Apostles but makes no claim to be one of the Apostles. It is also unlikely to be the same John who is connected with the Gospel of John or its Epistles since those documents do not have any elements of apocalypticism.

Chapters two and three outline the messages that Jesus wishes conveyed to seven churches in Asia Minor, roughly modern day Turkey. These churches are admonished to remain faithful to the Gospel and not grow weary or afraid of preaching the Gospel. They are to be wary of false teachings and false prophets and apostles. The text then turns to the vision of the future that has been revealed to John.

From this point on in the text, the imagery is very difficult to interpret and it cannot be put into any sort of recognizable chronology. For instance, in chapter six, after the breaking of the “sixth seal” of a scroll handed from the “the one on the throne” (God) to the “one like a slaughtered lamb” (Jesus) the earth and the Universe apparently comes to an end.

*<sup>2</sup> When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood,<sup>13</sup> and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. <sup>14</sup> The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.*

The sky has been ‘rolled up’ and the mountains and islands have been removed. However, according to the text, the Kings of earth, and apparently all its people are still present and are in for further cataclysms in at least ten of the coming chapters.

The Beast imagery referenced above begins in chapter 13. Some people refer to the Beast as the Antichrist although, as discussed last week, that term only appears in the letters of 1&2 John and refers to **persons** who have left the Johannine community. Reading the Book of Revelation as Apocalyptic literature written during a time of Roman persecution, the Beast can be interpreted to be the Roman Empire, supported by the power of Satan, dominating the world. The beast makes war on the Saints and its mouth is filled with the blood of the martyrs. Likewise, the “Whore of Babylon,” seated on seven mountains (Rev. 17:9) would seem to be the City of Rome perched upon its seven hills. After descriptions of the many battles between Good and Evil, Satan is defeated, the world is judged, and the world is reborn as a “new heaven and a new earth.”

When you attempt to read through the Book of Revelation I encourage you to utilize a scholarly commentary that is not trying to make the case that Revelation is a prediction of what is in store for the present-day world. As noted above, reading Revelation as a prediction of what will happen tomorrow or within a short time from the present is an activity that has been undertaken for centuries and the symbolism of Revelation is pliable enough to allow it to be applied to most any time and place. However, read as a call to be faithful to the Gospel even in times of great persecution, such as the Christians of the Sudan are experiencing today, it can be a source of comfort and encouragement.

**Concluding thoughts:** This series on understanding the Old and New Testaments has been written as a guide to reading and understanding the bible. As United Methodists we believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. This does not mean that we profess the inerrancy of scripture as do some other traditions. It means that we always read the words of scripture to hear the Gospel, the living Word of God. We do not worship the printed word on the page; we worship God as revealed in Jesus Christ within the pages of the bible. The bible can help us understand God's love for us and God's hopes for creation.

## **Life Begins On Opening Day**

*He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.  
Matt 28:6 NRSV*

In my last appointment, I pastored a woman who had ALS. Kathy had lived with ALS for 15 years which, for those of you who aren't familiar with the disease, is quite extraordinary. For the seven years I knew her, she was unable to move anything except to blink her eyes and move the fingers on one hand. Thanks to a computer interface, however, that was sufficient because she was able to use a version of Morse Code to operate a computer. She would compose long e-mails and articles, one laborious letter at a time. Kathy's son was three when she was diagnosed and she was determined to see him graduate high school. She missed that by around three months, but she lived long enough to die knowing that he would graduate and was about to set off to college as a young adult. Complications from ALS ended her life, but it would be wrong to say that she lost her battle. ALS never defeated her.

Kathy was an ardent baseball and Chicago Cubs fan and never failed to remind us, in the dead of winter, of the number of days until the beginning of the baseball season. She once sent me an e-mail with that information, noting that "Everyone knows life begins on Opening Day." Life begins on Opening day. That sentiment stood out for me. In fact, it seemed to me to summarize the core of Christian belief. Life begins on Opening Day.

The Gospel accounts are all clear on one fact. The tomb was empty. But each account is subtly different on how the followers came to learn of the empty tomb. While all agree that Mary Magdalene was there and a principle witness, none of the other accounts creates a scene to rival Matthew's. If the resurrection was planned in Hollywood this is how it would be staged. Lights, sound, drama.

There is an angel from God who pushes the rock sealing the tomb aside with such force that the ground shakes. It seemed like an earthquake. This angel is a stunning figure, immediately recognized as an angel. "His appearance was like lightening." I take that to mean that looking at the angel was like looking at continuous flashes of lightening. His clothing was as white as snow.

The ground is shaking, the lights are flashing, the angel is speaking. Lights, sound, drama. Matthew wants you to know that it's Opening Day, and the world will never be the same again.

In the drama of this moment, it's easy to overlook some of the other witnesses to the event. Guards had been posted to prevent anyone from stealing the body. These may have been temple guards or Roman soldiers. The text is unclear. Most likely they were temple guards. Their job was to keep Jesus' body in the tomb. They blew it. Matthew tells us that these guards became like dead men at the sight of the angel, falling

to the ground. I can believe that, can't you? If I had been there I might have played like I was dead too. This is a pretty scary event.

See those guards in your mind's eye. Imagine what they felt, there on the ground, on Opening Day. You see, in a lot of ways, we have much in common with these guards. At times, it seems we try to keep Jesus locked away in our churches just as the soldiers were supposed to keep Jesus locked away in his tomb.

Let's be honest. Most of us are not in a hurry to see the world that Jesus Christ sees. We do not want to live in a world where the 'last' are first; in a world where we are expected to shoulder the problems of other people whom we will never see or know; in a world where we are called to love those who hate us. We are not in a hurry to live in the Kingdom that Christ proclaimed. Jesus Christ would turn OUR world upside down. Because we fear the world that Jesus would create, we act like those guards at the tomb. We want to keep Jesus securely locked away in our Church buildings. It's safe to come to Church and talk about Jesus, to read the stories, to sing the songs. No one in Church will question what we do and Jesus can't do much to change our lives if we keep him securely locked up in Church.

But, as Matthew would tell us, it's Opening Day. In fact, it's been Opening Day every day since that first Easter morning, 2000 years ago. Just when we think we have Jesus all locked up, he bursts forth. As we celebrate Easter this week, think about it as Opening Day, the start of something extraordinary. Christ is Risen. Christ is Risen Indeed.

## Holy Week Services

The last week of Lent is called Holy Week. It began on Palm Sunday as we commemorated Jesus' entry into Jerusalem when the crowds greeted Jesus by laying palm branches in his path.

On Thursday we will have a combined **Maundy Thursday and Tenebrae Service** at 7:00 PM. 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:

<sup>34</sup> *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.* <sup>35</sup> *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.

## **Rev. Will Wells Is the Newly Appointed Pastor for Trinity UMC**

Stacy Bell, the Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee, announced on Sunday April 10<sup>th</sup> that Rev. Will Wells has been appointed as the next pastor of Trinity UMC. Rev. Wells is currently serving Fayetteville First United Methodist. His wife, Pamela, is also a United Methodist pastor and will take over as pastor to College Grove UMC in June. They will live in the parsonage at College Grove. Moving day for Tennessee Conference pastors is June 20<sup>th</sup> and Rev. Well's first Sunday will be July 2<sup>nd</sup>.

### **Volunteer Opportunities**

- Host for the Easter Egg Hunt. The hunt has been held the Saturday before Easter for the last couple of years. "Training" and some supplies are available for this event.....
- VBS director. It's not too soon to start planning. The director will get to choose the VBS theme and date.
- Nursery level (pre-K) lesson plans coordinator. We have approximately 100 lessons and related crafts ready to use currently. Coordinator will need to refresh these periodically and be able to show others the set up.
- Wardrobe supervisor for the Christmas pageant. We have 70-80 costumes currently and have fabrics, patterns, etc. for several more. This role is about getting the costumes ready for the pageant as well as helping participants get "suited up".

### **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 have room for you! We are currently studying Judges.

### **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**

**April 16, 2017: Sermon: Essentials of Christianity: Belief in the Resurrection.** On Easter Sunday I will begin a series of sermons on the essentials of Christianity. The first sermon will, appropriately, deal with belief in the resurrection of Christ. My texts are 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 and Luke 24:13-35.

**April 23, 2017: Sermon: Essentials of Christianity: Doubt Is Good.** Some Christians seem to think that having doubt about matters of faith is wrong, even sinful. However, it is doubt that keeps us searching for God. My texts are John 20:19-29 and Mark 9:14-24.

## **Worship Leaders Schedule**

### **April 16**

Ken Strait, **Liturgist**

Sam Richardson and Joann Harper, **Greeters**

Mike and Elaine Rohrig, **Ushers**

### **April 23**

Renita Hartsock, **Liturgist**

Marty and Dana Bauguess, **Greeters**

Julia Moore and Linda Robinson, **Ushers**

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Easter Lilies:** If you want to order a lily in honor of or in memory of loved ones, please let Brooks Crowell know. Cost of each lily is \$8.00

## **Easter Egg Hunt**

This year's event will take place Saturday, April 15 at 10:00 AM. We'll have a few activities indoors as the children are gathering prior to releasing them to the hunt.

### **Want to help?**

1. Come on Easter Egg Hunt day at 8:30 AM to do a little decorating and a little egg hiding.
2. Invite your friends, neighbors, relatives to join us for this great day.
3. Bring grandchildren, nieces, nephews and neighborhood children to the Hunt.

Families are encouraged to **bring diapers** of various sizes as we collect them as part of the "No child wet behind." A collection box will be in Fellowship Hall for your donations.

**An Administrative Council meeting is scheduled for Saturday, April 29.** All members are part of the Administrative Council. All members are encouraged to attend this meeting at 9:00 A.M.

**A meeting of the church trustees is planned for Sunday, April 30 immediately after church.** We will be discussing church maintenance issues. All trustees are encouraged to attend this meeting.

We will be serving food to the congregants at **61<sup>st</sup> UMC**. Additional dates for providing and serving food are: **May 20 and June 17**. The serving date of **April 15** has been cancelled. This church will be closing in late June. This is a wonderful opportunity for serving others. Please make **Charles Wilson** aware if you are able to serve.

**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.

**The Nanette Crowell Companions in Christ Sunday School Class:** We are currently enjoying our lenten study, "The Journey to Easter." We enjoy discussion about what we are reading and the questions at the end of each chapter generate interesting discussion as well as thoughtfulness. 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.

**No Newsletter the week of Aril 16<sup>th</sup>.** Rev. Meaker will be on vacation.

### **Birthdays in April**

**Betty Whitefield, Mary Coleman, Jo Oliphant, Jason Aldred, Houston Hartsock, Erin McKibben**

**Happy Birthday to each of you!**