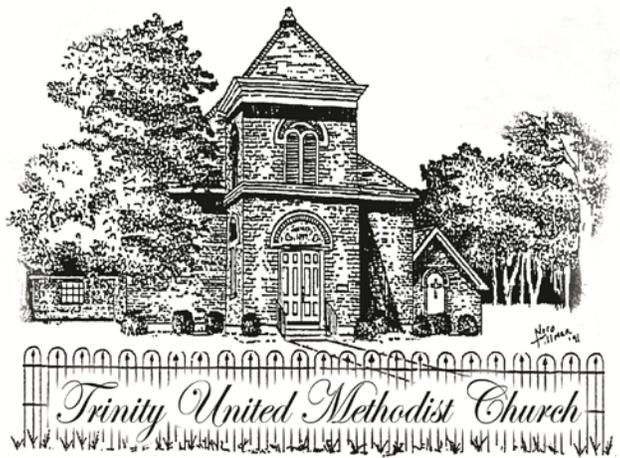




Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Understanding the New Testament 1 and 2 Thessalonians

¹⁵ For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thess 4:15-17 NRSV

⁶ Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. ⁹ This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. 2 Thess 3:6-10 NRSV

Like 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians are, in form, two letters of Paul written to the same community. However, unlike the Corinthian letters, most scholars agree that both were not written by Paul. The consensus is that 1 Thessalonians is an authentic Pauline letter from the middle First Century and that 2 Thessalonians is a pseudo-Pauline letter probably written toward the end of the First Century. Second Thessalonians may have been written to the Church in Thessalonica but could have been written to another community.

First Thessalonians is believed to be the earliest of Paul's known letters and indeed the earliest of all known Christian writings. It is usually dated around 49 C.E. approximately 20 or 30 years after the crucifixion of Christ. First Thessalonians provides insight into Paul's method of operation that differs from that described in Acts. Acts describes Paul as beginning his evangelistic efforts in the synagogue when he arrives in a new community. Although Paul very likely associated with the synagogue because of his strong Jewish roots, he apparently did much of his proselytizing through some sort of leather shop run by Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. This conclusion is based upon his defense of their ministry among the Thessalonians beginning in 1 Thessalonians 2.

⁹ You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. ¹¹ As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, ¹² urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2:9-12. NRSV

Paul and his friends “worked night and day” to support themselves while spreading the Gospel. Acts 18.3 alludes to Paul being a “tentmaker” although the term translated “tentmaker” could also refer to other occupations associated with leather. These scholars speculate that Paul and his companions established a leather shop in the market district, using it as an opportunity to meet people and spread the Gospel. The fact that Paul refers to the members of the church as converted pagans and not as Jews or persons associated with the synagogue also brings into question the efficacy of Paul’s efforts to proselytize his fellow Jews. 1 Thess 1:9.

Paul’s Gospel was apocalyptic in nature. By that I mean that Paul believed and preached that the end of time is coming soon when the Son of God who died for our sins will return. But, no one knows the actual date of Christ’s return:

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ When they say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! 1 Thess 5:1-3. NRSV

However, enough time has passed since the establishment of the Church at Thessalonica that converts are beginning to die and that has created a crisis of faith. Members of the church want to know what will happen to the dead upon Christ’s return. Paul’s message is that the dead will be called first by Christ:

¹⁵ For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thess 4:15-17 NRSV

Note that Paul’s words encompass all those who are left. There are none “left behind.” In Paul’s theology there are the righteous dead and the righteous living who are called to Christ. Since he is describing the end of history, those who are not called to eternal life are gone forever.

Second Thessalonians is believed to be a pseudo-Pauline letter, in part because of the theology of the apocalypse it expresses. In First Thessalonians, Paul says that the end of time will come like a thief in the night and no one knows when that time will come. There is no mention in First Thessalonians, nor any other of the Pauline letters considered authentic, of a “lawless one” who will come into the world first; i.e. an “anti-Christ” figure. Yet the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians focuses upon this person as a “sign” of the end in contradiction to 1 Thessalonians. The intended recipients of this letter had apparently begun to worry that the end of time had already arrived and they had somehow missed it.

As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. ³ Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not

come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. 2 Thess 2:1-3 NRSV

Church members may have felt that the end of time had come because the community was experiencing persecution and suffering. 2 Thess 1:3-12.

Another aspect of this belief that the end of time was either imminent or already arrived is that some members of the community had stopped working and had decided to wait out the last few days. We have seen this phenomenon in recent years when people, believing the end of time was imminent, quit their jobs and sold all their possessions to await the end. In Thessalonica these people were placing a burden on the rest of the community. It is in this context that the writer of the letter admonishes the people:

¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. 2 Thess 3:10. NRSV

You might recognize that verse because it has become a favorite “proof text” for some politicians justifying cutting off any assistance for the poor. Yet this text in no way addresses those people who are old, sick or disabled (including many disabled veterans) who cannot work or the many people unemployed simply because there is no work. Poverty is a real and a complex issue in this nation and has been throughout all recorded history. It is not disposed of in this text from 2 Thessalonians that deals with specific members of a religious community who had made the decision not to work. (And, for the record, most people receiving assistance in this country are working but are unable to earn enough to live.) The Gospel calls us to reach out and assist those in need, not humiliate them or abandon them.

Next week: The Pastoral Letters, 1&2 Timothy and Titus

For Everything There is a Time

So it says in Ecclesiastes. For reasons that I will try and explain in more detail below, I have decided to retire at the end of this Conference year. A new pastor will be appointed to begin leading Trinity UMC on July 1.

I first perceived a call to ministry in 1991. I was a partner at Waller, Lansden, Dortch and Davis, one of the top law firms in Nashville. I had three children, none of whom had graduated high school, as well as a mortgage and all the other obligations that go along with marriage and family. Becoming a United Methodist Pastor made no economic sense. Accordingly, I took two aspirin and got a good night’s sleep. Six years, and many bottles of aspirin later, I entered Vanderbilt Divinity School. I entered full time ministry in 1998 while still in school. My income dropped by 80% but we somehow managed. I closed my last case in December of 1999 and subsequently put my Law License on inactive status. It’s been twenty years since I entered Vanderbilt and all our kids are out of college and on their own. I’ve never regretted my decision. Although I missed the practice of law I never questioned that I was doing what I should be doing.

I’ve been very blessed in my appointments, both by the people in my churches and in the longevity of my appointments. My first appointment was to a four-point charge in Maury County, the Santa Fe (“FEE”) circuit. There is a painting of one of those churches on my office wall. I served the Santa Fe Circuit three

years. I had asked to stay at Santa Fe the third year because the people had been so supportive of the juggling that was required for me to both serve the Churches and go to school. I was appointed to West Nashville UMC in 2001. I served West Nashville until 2010. I was appointed to Trinity in June of 2010. Some of the people I entered ministry with have had six or more appointments in the same period of time. Some have also run afoul of some very dysfunctional congregations. People like you have made my years in the ministry a true blessing.

As many of you know, in 2005 I was diagnosed with Congestive Heart Failure, caused by a virus that attacked my heart. The virus seriously weakened my heart and that condition has limited the extent of my physical activity ever since. Because of the available medications and treatments, by 2006 I was able to continue working fulltime although in 2012 I had to have a pacemaker/defibrillator implanted. The last eighteen months, however, it has become harder for me to give my ministry here at Trinity the time it needs. I am often very tired. In fairness to the Church, after much prayer and reflection, I decided that I would retire at the end of this Conference year.

I have notified Stacy Bell, the Chairperson of the Staff Parish Committee of my plans, as well as Allen Black our District Superintendent. It is still early in the appointment process for the Conference so they will have adequate time to consider who will be appointed. As United Methodists, we understand that the Bishop and the Cabinet make appointments but they will take into account the needs of the Church in making that appointment. Allen Black will also consult with the Staff Parish Committee regarding the appointment of the next pastor and communicate any desires and concerns to the Bishop and Cabinet.

In the meantime, there is still a lot happening in the coming months. We are about to start Lent, there is the Easter Egg Hunt to plan as well as Holy week and Easter services. With the coming of Spring we will look again to running our Parents' Night Out Program, incorporating the lessons learned last Fall. I have asked Donnie to schedule an Administrative Board/Program Council meeting for later this month.

Every day is a Day of New Beginnings as one our hymns says. This is one of those. Should any of you have any questions about this process I'll be glad to discuss it with you.

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 received two new members of the Group when we started up again after the Christmas holidays but there is room for more. We are currently studying 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

February 19th. Sermon: You Shall Be Holy. I can't speak for you, but I've never felt 'Holy,' let alone 'perfect.' Yet the passages this week call us to be Holy and Perfect. Should we give up right now? My texts are Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18 and Matthew 5:38-48.

February 26th. Sermon: Start At The Foot of the Cross. The story of the Transfiguration is about the Glory of Christ. But it also contains a message for us. It reminds us that, to see Christ in Glory, we must start at the foot of the cross. To see Christ in Glory, we must first see Christ's suffering. My texts are Exodus 24:12-18 and Matthew 17:1-9.

Worship Leaders Schedule

February 19

Elaine Rohrig, **Liturgist**

Julia Moore and Maurice Edwards, **Greeters**

Ken and Jan Strait, **Ushers**

February 26th

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**

Renita Hartsock and JoAnn Harper, **Greeters**

Greg and Sherry Locke, **Ushers**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Brittany Collom and Houston Hartsock will marry March 11 at 2:00 PM here at Trinity. All are invited to attend this wedding. The RSVP email address is hartssockwedding@gmail.com or tell Brittany or Houston of your plan to attend.

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. There are a number of openings for volunteers.

The Nanette Crowell Companions in Christ Sunday School Class is both learning and enjoying a new discussion-based study. We are reading a book, "Ask." This book explores "faith questions in a skeptical age." We enjoy discussion about what we are reading 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 February

Donnie Hartsock, Joyce Edwards, Bert Winton, Maurice Edwards, Jeanne Rybolt, Patricia Stevens, Eric Crowell.

Happy Birthday to each of you!