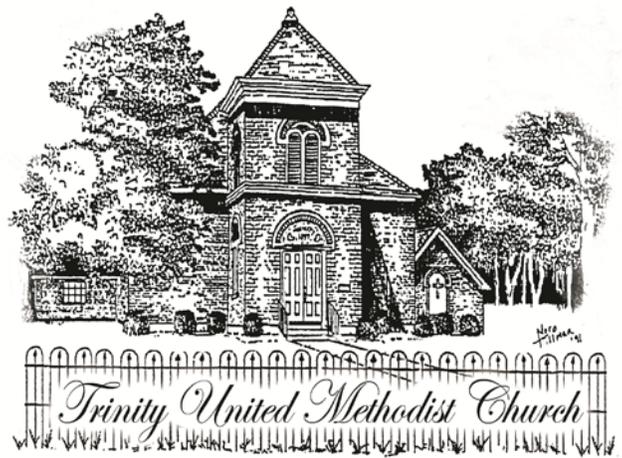




Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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

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One More Time about the Body of Christ

Seven years. Who'd have thought? That's around 350 Sunday mornings. Even allowing for vacations and other absences, and adding in occasional services, we have worshiped together close to 350 times. We've shared around 80 First Sunday meals. We have certainly mingled our lives together in the ministries of the church, but it has been more than that. We have raised our children and grandchildren together, cared for our parents together, laughed together many times, and we have cried and grieved together many times. We have cared for one another when we were ill or hurt. In many ways, we have seen the best and the worst that each of us have to offer.

You all also brought me healing that I didn't know I needed when I came here in 2010. After spending nine years in the inner city of Nashville, I was more tired than I realized. A ministry like West Nashville's can be very intense. You are constantly surrounded by the desperate need of others and there is often little you can do to alleviate that need. Constantly saying "no, I can't help" to people in desperate need takes a toll. I did that most every day for nine years. That was a part of daily ministry at West Nashville. That experience left me hurting. The love and concern that surrounded me when I came to you started the healing process.

This Sunday I will preach on Christian love. But, after all this time together, is anyone really surprised that I also want to speak of the Body of Christ one more time?

I.

Paul coined the expression "The Body of Christ" in 1 Corinthians. This was also one of the earliest of Paul's letters. And, over my time with you, I have come to realize that my favorite book of the bible is 1 Corinthians. Oh, by the time I got here I preached that we must live as the Body of Christ, but I had not really come to appreciate the Book of 1 Corinthians.

Think for a bit what it must have been like for those first Christians in Corinth. In the first place, to even come together as a church they had to ignore social, language and cultural barriers that defined first century Roman culture. Corinth was a sea coast city and was made up of people from different countries within the Roman Empire who also spoke different languages. Roman aristocrats and government officials spoke Latin, Greek was the language of trade and commerce, probably the dominate language of the region, and native languages and dialects would be spoken in the home and within ethnic communities. Undoubtedly, there would be some in the Church at Corinth who did not speak another's language. It's likely that some people provided

translation services for the Church when they came together. This early church was divided by language and culture.

The Church at Corinth was also divided by social status and wealth. We know from the letter that some of the members were wealthy and had a great deal of control over their own work hours. Others were trades people or merchants, probably some were sailors or dock workers and common laborers. And some were slaves. Paul had come to these people who would never have been together in this way in everyday First Century culture and told them that they were brothers and sisters in Christ. That one person was not better than another person. Everywhere else in Roman Culture you fit into a social hierarchy. It was not supposed to be that way in the Church.

But, as you read the first letter to the Corinthians, you come to realize that what really divided this community was a total lack of understanding about what it meant to be Christian. And that is understandable. This was a new faith tradition. Oh, it had roots in Judaism, but no one had a clear idea of how they should live as Christians; of what it meant to be baptized. They had experienced the presence of the spirit, but they were still processing how that experience changed their lives.

Lacking guidance, they fell back on the Roman Culture. Some treated Christianity like one of the many mystery religions of the time. In addition to worship of the Roman gods like Mars or Jupiter, mystery religions were a type of secret society. They claimed to have secret knowledge about how the world worked that could only be disclosed to a limited few. A number of Paul's letters speak out against those who claim to have secret knowledge about Christ or Christianity. Paul rejected the claim that secret knowledge was involved. "I preach Christ and Him crucified," Paul says. Nothing secret about it.

Others sought out Charismatic leaders. A human being who they believed was specially empowered by God and who could, in turn, give them some sort of divine blessing or advantage. That's what Paul is talking about when he complains about people bragging that they were baptized by Paul or Apollos or Cephas. Some even claimed that they were blessed by Christ but that others weren't. 1 Corinthians 1:10-17.

Finally, they fall back on the cultural norms of social status or office. Some were Roman citizens, and believed themselves better than the noncitizens. Others were rich and lorded that over those who were poor or even slaves.

I suspect that these problems arose in no small part because Paul was pretty hazy on what it meant to be a Christian. When he planted the church at Corinth, Paul was a fairly new Christian. Everyone was a new Christian. For the last two thousand years, we have discussed and argued over what it means to be a Christian. We have the benefit of all that discussion and tradition. Paul, and the Corinthians, didn't have anything.

What does it mean to be Christian? How is Paul to answer the question for the Corinthians? Paul comes up with a fourfold response: Christianity is about relying upon Christ, sharing in the grace of the Lord's table, understanding that we are the body of Christ and living together with one another and the world around us.

II.

Christianity is never about one person; never about any person. Christianity is about Christ. In the first nine verses of 1 Corinthians Paul invokes the name of Christ nine times. People in the church at Corinth are claiming superiority over one another based upon who led them to Christ. Some claim that they are special disciples of Paul, or Apollos or Cephas, the Disciple we know as Peter. Paul rejects these claims out of hand. He essentially says, Christianity is never about the pastor, no matter how much the pastor might want it.

Christianity is about Christ; God made flesh. God who became flesh to grow closer to humanity and who died on a cross for the salvation of the world. One pastor or church member plants; one pastor or church member waters and tends the plants; but it is God who gives the growth. 1 Corinthians 3:5-9.

As you look down through history, the truly great leaders of the church have always been those who constantly pointed to God; who pointed to Christ. Time and again, people who put their faith in pastors or other individuals have always been disappointed or even horribly misled. Paul insists that the people at Corinth focus their faith on Christ and not on Paul or anyone else.

III.

Christianity is about sharing in the grace of the Lord's Table. Paul proclaims to the Church at Corinth, and to us, that it is the table that brings us together.

1 Cor 10:16-17: ¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

That language should sound familiar. It is part of our communion liturgy. Paul is very upset with the people at Corinth because they are not treating the meal they share as the Lord's Supper. They are treating it like it was any other meal. The rich are arriving early and eat all the food before the working people and the poor can arrive.

1 Cor 11:20-22: ²⁰ When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. ²¹ For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. ²² What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

Paul goes on to talk about sharing in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. What he is criticizing is the people's failure to treat the sacrament as the Lord's Supper. For Paul, sharing of this meal is what brings us together and makes us one in Christ and one with each other. If we do not perceive Christ's presence, and share in the meal with the desire to be made one in Christ, we are sharing unworthily.

Many people have construed Paul's statement about not taking unworthily as an admonition not to come to the table unless you are as close to perfect peace in heart and mind as possible. Instead Paul would tell us that, when our spirits are deeply troubled, we are in even greater need of the sacrament.

IV.

Which brings us to the words that I think I treasure above any words other than "He is Risen." Verse 12:27:

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

When you read these words, it's important to remember who Paul is talking to. The Church at Corinth does not have its act together! They are whining about a million trivial things, fighting with one another, trying to control one another, and one class of individuals is acting in a way meant to humiliate everyone else. This is

about as dysfunctional a Church as you can find anywhere. And it is these people to whom Paul says: “You are the body of Christ!” Present tense. He doesn’t say “You should clean up your act so you can become the Body of Christ.” As I often say in nearly every benediction, we are made the Body of Christ through the Power of God’s spirit, not by virtue of anything we have done.

We bring to Christ all of who we are. Paul says we are all given different gifts, and that is true enough. But let’s be honest with one another. Along with our gifts, we bring all of the bad parts too. We come to the table of Christ with all of who we are, and God makes us the Body of Christ despite who we are.

V.

Lastly, Paul tells us how to live and minister together with one another and in the world. I’ll speak more about this on Sunday. The greatest gift we have, he says, is love. Love not in the sense of feeling affectionate toward one another, although that can be a part of it. But Love in the sense that your sense of wellbeing and contentment is premised upon the wellbeing of those around you. You can hate someone deep in your heart, and still show that person Christian Love. Your hate is a problem for you and everyone around you. It will destroy your happiness and probably shorten your life. But it need not prevent you from demonstrating Christian love.

Look at the practical application of these words in 1 Corinthians 13:

- **Love is patient:** Don’t jump to conclusions and don’t be quick to make judgments. Go slowly and seek understanding.
- **Love is Kind:** There are ways to say things that must be said that do not harm, or that least minimize harm. Love does not seek to hurt others.
- **Love is not arrogant, or boastful or rude:** We all have our opinions. John Wesley once said that no one holds or espouses an opinion that he believes is wrong. But nevertheless, our opinions may be wrong. Don’t arrogantly assume that you are right and someone else is wrong. You both may be right. You both may be wrong. See above. Love is patient. Explore your differences.
- **Loves does not insist on its own way...:** Fairly self-explanatory. Anyone ever insist on their own way? I still don’t have that one down, although I’m a lot better about it than I used to be.
- **Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things:** I’m not there yet. But that is the standard.

This passage is often read at weddings. I think that would drive Paul crazy. Paul is not talking to newlyweds. He is trying to tell the church how to live together as the Body of Christ and how to live and minister in the world as the presence of Christ.

VI.

Bring it all together now: When I say we are the body of Christ, I am saying:

1. We are a people focused on God as revealed in Jesus Christ. We do not build our faith on our leaders.
2. We are made one with Christ and each other through the gift of God's grace, most powerfully symbolized through the sharing of the Lord's Table.
3. God has made us into the body of Christ despite all our failures and short comings. And,
4. As the body of Christ, and with the help of God, we are to live lives of Christian love.

Being a Christian doesn't have much of anything to do with what happens after we die, except for the promise in scripture that, come what may, we are never outside of the presence of God. Our eternal life begins in the here and now. We are supposed to live in God's Kingdom in the here and now.

Being Christian doesn't have anything to do with what happens at the end of time. Christ said that he didn't know when the end would come, so I'm willing to bet that all those who claim to know that the end times are near don't have a clue either.

Christianity has everything to do with how we live in the here and now; everything to do with the world around us. We are the Body of Christ. With God's help, people can experience the presence of Christ through how we live in this world.

Conclusion

A final thought. I am no longer your pastor after this Sunday, but we remain one in Christ Jesus. Whenever you share together at the Lord's Table, you also share together with me. Whenever I share together at the Lord's Table with other Christians, I also share together with you. You are an extraordinary congregation. I love this Church and I love you. I will miss you. You will always have a special place in my heart.

Thank-You

Jeanne and I were over-whelmed by the out-pouring of love at the reception for us this last Saturday evening. The things that were said, the crystal bowl and engraved pedestal and the other very generous gifts were very humbling. You and this Church will always hold a special place in our hearts.

Old and New Pastors

Over my years in the ministry I've seen some pastors who seem unable to move on from their previous ministries. Although they are in new appointments, or retirement, they are constantly returning to Churches they have served in the past to perform weddings, funerals and baptisms. While I can understand peoples' desire to have someone they know well at such times, coming back to churches a pastor has served undermines the ministry of the new pastor. A new pastor can only become your pastor if you allow him and that is hard to accomplish when the old pastor maintains a presence. For that reason, the United Methodist Church insists that, once I leave an appointment, I do not return to that appointment except at the request of the new pastor and, even then, that I should seek to avoid returning specifically for weddings, funerals and baptisms. As the apostle

Paul would say, it's never about the pastor. It's about Christ. Although you were never aware of it, I'm afraid I hurt the feelings of several people at West Nashville when I declined to return there to officiate at funerals. The same is true of my time at West Nashville when I was contacted by former parishioners on the Santa Fe Circuit.

It is my hope that Jeanne and I can attend some weddings and baptisms as they come up. We will be saddened to come to funerals but know that we will be among those who surround your loved ones with love when the need arises. But I do ask that you do not ask me to come back as a pastor to officiate at these events. I will always feel especially close to the people of Trinity but my time as your pastor is coming to a close.

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 10th 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 20th and Rev. Well's first Sunday will be July 2nd.

Volunteer Opportunities

- 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".

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

June 18, 2017: Sermon: The Greatest of These is Love. My final sermon at Trinity and as a full-time United Methodist pastor. My texts are 1 John 16b-21 and 1 Corinthians 13.

Worship Leaders Schedule

June 18

Gina Stewart, **Liturgist**

Marty and Dana Bauguess, **Greeters**

Hal and Rachel Newman, **Ushers**

June 25

Linda McGill, **Liturgist**

Mike and Elaine Rohrig, **Greeters**

Greg and Sherry Locke, **Ushers**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We will be serving food to the congregants at **61st UMC**. The remaining date for providing and serving food is this **Saturday, June 17**. Sixty-First Ave. UMC will be closing this month. 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 enjoy fellowship beginning at 9:45 with our study beginning at 10:00. Our current study is, "Five Marks of a Methodist." All are welcome to join us as we pursue Biblical truths and the application for our lives.

Birthdays in June

Lynn McGill, Jo Cotton, Richard Stevens, Nancy Conway, Kenneth Stevens, Larry Eastwood

Happy Birthday to each of you!