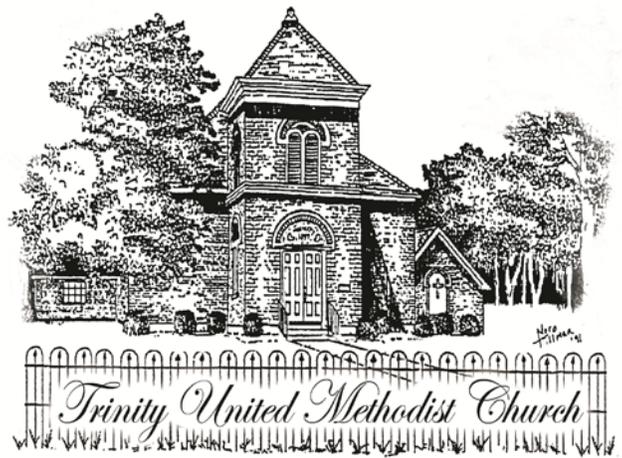




# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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**June 7, 2017**

## **Against Sin**

*For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;  
Romans 3:22b-23*

There is a story that, after one Sunday service, a reporter asked President Calvin Coolidge what the pastor had preached about that day. Coolidge, who was notoriously tight-lipped, said "Sin." Trying to coax a little more out of the president for the story, he asked the president, "Well, what did the pastor say about sin?" Coolidge replied, "He's against it."

What is Sin? Think about it. A criticism of our culture is that we no longer know what sin is. People say that we have developed into a culture that doesn't think anything is a sin. What is sin?

One approach to defining sin is to make lists of sins. Get them down on paper, like the laws passed by the legislature. Many people, inside and outside of the Church, think of sin in terms of a list of things that you shouldn't do. And, given some thought, most anyone can come up with a list of things that would probably qualify as sins. They may not be able to tell you why the items listed are sins, but they would feel confident that they are sins. As a famous jurist once said about pornography, "I might not be able to define it, but I know it when I see it."

The problem with such lists is that they tend to change with the culture. At one time a good Methodist would have listed dancing, card playing and drinking on a list of sins. Today, those things probably wouldn't be on most people's lists without substantial qualification. Someone might say erotic dancing is out, but ballroom dancing is harmless. Gambling for money with cards is out, but card playing itself is harmless. Drinking in moderation is not a problem, but drinking in ways that harm your body and those around you is a problem. These lists are as slippery as a politician's promises.

Another thing about the lists of sins is that they can give us a false sense of accomplishment. If there are 20 sins on your list, and you are confident that you aren't guilty at all on 10 of them, and only occasionally guilty of another five, then you can tell yourself that you are really doing quite well in the old sin department. Give yourself a pat on the back. Tell yourself that, most of the time, better than half at least, you are almost 75 % sin free. Like the old Ivory soap television commercial: 99 and 44 100 % pure.

Having those lists can also be a way of measuring yourself against others. List in hand you can size up your friends and neighbors. “Yep, Good as Sam here, here and here, better than Sam here, here and here. Sam really has problems with number 16.” These lists of sins can be a way of telling yourself that you are better than others. These lists can also be used like a rolled up newspaper to hit someone else in the face. “You sure messed that one up, you sinner!” Lists of sins are not the way to go.

Sin is best understood as those acts that separate us from God and one another; that divide us. The things we do that hurt ourselves and each other. The things we do to try to block God out of our lives.

Dorotheos was one of the “Desert Fathers,” a Christian monk living in a monastery in the Sinai around the year 700. Dorotheos talked about sin in a manner that came to be known as Dorotheos’ Compass. Dorotheos suggested that we think about creation as a huge circle with God at the center and spokes coming out from God representing the paths upon which we live our lives. As we move closer to God, he said, we move closer to one another’s lives. As we move away from God, we move further away from one another’s lives. The spokes become more separated the further they are from the center. The distance between us and God, and each of our lives from the lives of others, can be thought of as our sin. Sin is that which separates us from God and from each other.

So often we think of sin as some activity by a person, or government, or corporation. We talk about systemic sin. And such terms are useful. But think in your own life about the gaps between you and those around you. Don’t they often represent sin?

Racial bigotry is focused on creating and maintaining gaps between people of different races. Is not the measure of that gap the measure of our sin?

How about the economic gaps we all experience? We turn our faces away from the poor that flow around us in the cities, realizing that to get closer would mean having to address their poverty with our wealth. There is a proverb that says a rich man is like a walled city on a hill. *Proverbs 18:11*. Our wealth can cut us off from others. The economic gap between the rich and poor, locally and internationally, can be a measure of our sin as individuals and as a culture.

Or the Religious gap. Our willingness to turn away from people of other faith traditions because their understanding about God and salvation isn’t the same as ours. Yet, we need not adopt others faith to call them brothers and sisters, even if they don’t wish that relationship. Our sin is measured by our willingness to condemn, to judge, to separate ourselves from those who don’t believe as we do. Our isolation from people of other faiths is a measure of our sin, not of our devotion to God.

And, God help us, what of our willingness to rend the very body of Christ, the Church. In his movie *The Passion*, Mel Gibson gave us a graphic portrayal of how gruesome the crucifixion was. Yet, don’t we rend the body of Christ as we pull away from one another over our own differences in belief? When we seek to cut ourselves off from other Christians because of a judgment that another’s faith is not as pure as our own? Or that someone else’s faith is too dogmatic? Sin is alive and well in the body of Christ as we strike out at one another for being too liberal, too conservative, too progressive, too orthodox. As we turn our backs on one another, we turn our backs on God. As we move away from one another, we move away from God. The distance between us is a measure of our sin.

So, what do we do about sin? For Christians, there is only one answer. Christians do not have some sort of moral high ground. As a group, I’m willing to bet that Christians are no more moral, no less susceptible, to

the power of sin than any non-Christian. What makes the Christian unique is this. We acknowledge that sin is too big for us to deal with on our own. We need God. If you are going to take your faith as a Christian seriously, that is the starting point. You come before God and say, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." You acknowledge that it is only with the help of God that we can resist those powers that pull us apart; those powers that separate us from God. We can't reason our way out of the problem of sin. We can't work our way out. The Christian spends each and every day acknowledging that it is only with God's help that we can be released from the power of sin.

One of the most powerful symbols of the power of God to bring us together, to overcome the separation caused by the sin in our lives, is the Great Thanksgiving. As we gather around the table, we ask for the spirit of God to make us one with Christ, one with each other and one in ministry to the world. We ask God to draw us close; to remove the space that separates us one from another and from God.

Reflect on those things in your life that are pulling you away from God. Those things you do that hurt those around you, that hurt yourself. When you next come to the table, lift those things up to God. Ask God's help to deal with the sin in your life. And, I commend to you the words of Psalm 51. "Have mercy upon me O God, according to your steadfast love. Have mercy upon me, a sinner."

## **The Problem of Grammar**

When I returned to my office last Sunday I found a bulletin on my desk that highlighted what someone (I don't know who) apparently considered a grammatical error. Now, grammatical errors occur from time to time in the bulletin despite our combined efforts to avoid them. As noted above, all have sinned. This particular error, however, involved the prayer of preparation that appears in the bulletin every week. Added to the phrase "but more important" was an "ly" to make it "more importantly."

We have used this prayer for the last seven years. For almost four years we used "importantly" and the last three or so "important." I can understand how some things get under our skin. When we changed from "importantly" to "important" someone confessed to me that the use of "importantly" drove them crazy and they were glad to see the change. Apparently, there is someone else who feels the same way about "important." It's likely that this prayer will change under Rev. Wells as he will do things differently in worship just as I changed worship from the format utilized by Rev. Hoos. But, I thought it might be helpful to consider this discussion from an "English Usage" web site that I found on the internet relating to the usage of "important" and "importantly."

*While I agree with previous answers that the distinction in the sentences in the question has to do with adjective vs. adverb usage, I also think it's useful to note a related issue concerning the adverbial usage of the specific word importantly, especially in the phrases more importantly and most importantly. For some reason, importantly was (probably unjustly) targeted by style guides and usage experts in the mid-20th century. After having encountered a couple overzealous older editors who insisted on rephrasing almost any use of the word importantly, I'm somewhat heartened to read answers and comments here by people who seem not to even realize this was once a significant editorial issue. There's a bit of the history of the controversy [here](#):*

*In 1968, "Winners and Sinners," a periodic bulletin published by the New York Times, noted that, at the head of a sentence, "the adverbial phrase 'more importantly' modifies nothing in the sentence. What is wanted in constructions of this kind is 'more important,' an ellipsis of the phrase 'what is more important.'"*

*Other authorities felt the same way, including Strunk and White's "The Elements of Style," which categorized the sentence-modifying "more importantly" as a misuse and told writers to avoid it by replacing it with "more important" or some other term.*

*Strangely, this flurry of opposition to "more importantly" was concentrated mainly in the 1960s and '70s as people got to thinking about the term and decided that it didn't make sense.*

*Usage guides in the past couple of decades generally tend to downplay this issue or state that it was always an imaginary problem. Bryan Garner in his Modern American Usage notes that this logic simply can't apply to many other sentence adverbs, like notably or interestingly (e.g., one generally wouldn't begin a sentence, "Most notable,..." but rather "Most notably,..."). He goes on to say: The criticism of more importantly and most importantly has always been rather muted and obscure, and today it has dwindled to something less than muted and obscure. So writers needn't fear any criticism for using the -ly forms; if they encounter any, it's easily dismissed as picayunish pedantry.*

*Despite Garner's judgment, I have still in recent years encountered people who appear to adhere to Strunk & White's unjustified statement that the word importantly should always be rephrased. (Actually, in this case, this arbitrary pronouncement seems to originate with White; the rule did not appear in the original Strunk.)*

*Thus, while there is a distinction to be made between the adjective most important and the adverb most importantly, writers should be aware that there are still those out there who think that even adverbial uses of most importantly are incorrect and should be changed to most important. (By the way, this modification is generally explained in older usage guides by some logic like: at the beginning of a sentence, what you should be saying is "What is most important..." and most important is an abbreviated version of that. Why the word important(ly) among sentence modifiers is singled out for this treatment is never explained.)*

As is true of many things in the Church, there is something to be said for both sides. "Importantly" dominated the first four years of my ministry. I'll let "important" have the last two Sundays.

## **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

- 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".

## 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 1 Samuel. The last bible study before the Summer Break will be June 15<sup>th</sup>.

## 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 11, 2017: Sermon: Whose Gospel?** We are charged to share God's Gospel, the Good News. But too many Christians seem intent on re-writing the Gospel to suit themselves. The Gospel belongs to God. My texts are 2 Corinthians 13:11–13 and Matthew 28:16–20.

**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 11

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**  
Joyce and Maurice Edwards, **Greeters**  
Gina and Brandon Stewart, **Ushers**

### June 18

Gina Stewart, **Liturgist**  
Marty and Dana Bauguess, **Greeters**  
Hal and Rachel Newman, **Ushers**

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

We will be serving food to the congregants at **61<sup>st</sup> UMC**. The remaining date for providing and serving food is **Saturday, June 17**. Sixty-First Ave. UMC 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 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 June

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

**Happy Birthday to each of you!**