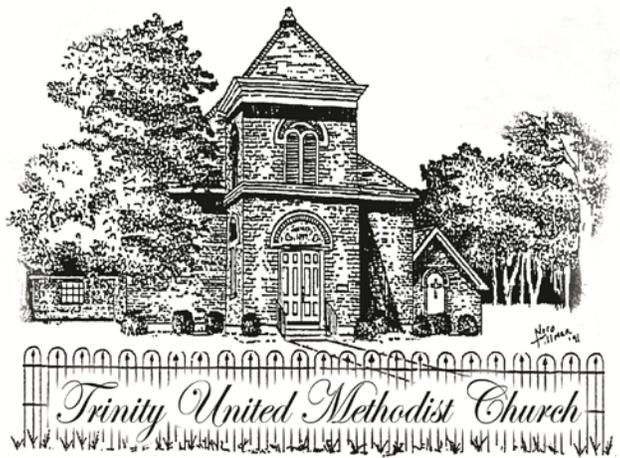




Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Understanding the New Testament The letter of James

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷ So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. James 2:14-17 NRSV

James is a curious letter. When Martin Luther was contemplating what should be included in the biblical canon for Protestants, he considered excluding the letter of James. He referred to it as “an Epistle of Straw” because of it contains only two references to Christ and because of its teachings on faith. Yet, James is a very important letter for all Christians to read and ponder as they consider what it means to be a Christian and how we are to live as the Body of Christ.

In Romans Paul wrote:

²⁸ For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.
Romans 3:28 NRSV

By the time of Martin Luther, the Catholic Church had taught for centuries that good works were necessary and efficacious for insuring salvation. Yet the priest Martin Luther still felt the weight of his sin despite trying to live a good life. He didn’t believe that he could be “good enough” for God; he didn’t believe that he could offer works that counterbalanced his sins. Luther had also come to despise the Catholic practice of giving money to the church as a “work” that could bring salvation. Ultimately Luther, and many of his contemporaries, broke with the Catholic Church in part because of its emphasis on works. The letter of James makes it clear that Luther was not the first person to struggle with the question of the relationship between works and faith.

Among the many false teachings that sprang up in the first centuries of the Church was one labeled *antinomianism* (literally ‘opposed to the law.’) The antinomians contended that, since Christians receive salvation through faith alone, it really didn’t matter what you did so long as you had faith. The most extreme members of this group even advocated living lives of extreme sin because the more sin abounds the more grace they will receive to remove the sin. This is the thinking that Paul addresses in this passage from Romans:

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Romans 6:1-2 NRSV

So, bad works were still understood to be a barrier to salvation. But what of good works? Do they still have a role to play? The Catholic Church insisted that they did but its excesses in that area and others led to the Reformation. Some early Protestants objected to performing works of justice or charity on the basis that such works evidenced a lack of faith in Christ alone for salvation. Where is the middle ground?

James insists that our faith must affect how we live our lives. As shown in the passage that heads up this article, Christianity is not an intellectual exercise but a way of living in this world. I think Paul would agree since it was Paul who first described the Church as the Body of Christ. The General Rules of Methodism reflect this understanding:

*Do No harm
To the extent it is within your power, do good.
Stay in Love with God.*

John Wesley formulated these rules to provide practical guidance to people on how they should live as Christians. When early Methodists asked, “How goes it with your soul?” they were looking for a discussion of how you had incorporated these rules into your daily life.

The letter of James contains several passages that are among my favorites. In addition to the one that heads this article, consider these:

²⁰ for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness. 1:20

Too often, people acting out of anger insist that they are acting out of devotion to God.

²² But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. 1:22

It is easy to agree intellectually with many biblical teachings. Too often we say to ourselves, “yes, that is the way the world should work.” But, despite having heard the Word of God we hold back from acting on that Word. It doesn’t seem to be a realistic way to approach the world.

² For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, ³ and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here, please,” while to the one who is poor you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet,” ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 2:2-4

We are too often a society that gauges worth by appearance. James suggests that this is not a new problem.

⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. 3:5-6

What we say can have a profound effect on the world around us. That effect can be good or evil and the outcome is often ours to control based upon what we say. There are more gems in the Letter of James. I invite you to sit and contemplate this practical advice for living as the Body of Christ.

Next week: 1&2 Peter

Scholarship Opportunity

One of our members, Jean Robinson, is a member of Alpha Delta Kappa, an organization for Women Educators. The organization is offering a \$1000 scholarship to a deserving young woman who is currently pursuing an Education degree or to a High School Senior who intends to pursue an Education degree. The application deadline is April 7th. If you are interested, or know of a young woman who would be, applications for the scholarship are available in the pastor's office.

The Journey to Easter

The first five Sundays in Lent I am offering a sermon series titled, "The Journey to Easter." The series, based upon the Lectionary readings for those Sundays, focuses on our life journey as Disciples of Christ. I have also written a Lenten Study Guide for this series. The Adult Sunday School class is using this study for the first five Sundays in Lent. For those not attending Sunday School, but who wish to use the guide, I have made it available on our web site in the Newsletter section.

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 Exodus.

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

March 19th. Sermon: The Journey to Easter: *God Walks With Us*. If this is a journey, where is the map; the document that tells us where we're going? The bad news is that there isn't a map. The good news is that we don't need one. You see, what's called for is commitment to the journey itself, not a map.

March 26th. Sermon: The Journey to Easter: *Sometimes It's Hard to See The Road*. When travelling a road in an automobile we can become distracted by the weather, traffic, or something in our lives that has us worried. Many factors affect how we see the world around us. So it is in our faith life.

Worship Leaders Schedule

March 19

Linda Robinson, **Liturgist**

Gina and Brandon Stewart, **Greeters**

Mike and Elaine Rohrig, **Ushers**

March 26

Jason Aldred, **Liturgist**

Greg and Sherry Locke, **Greeters**

Ken and Jan Strait, **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.

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.

Birthdays in March

Pat Moran, Marty Bauguess, Sherry Locke, Lilly Otto, Herb Haynes, Ava Fetting, Isabella Stafford

Happy Birthday to each of you!