



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Judgment and Forgiveness

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ ²³ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’ Matthew 7:21-23

It is the Monday morning after the dramatic events of Friday April 19th, the day the surviving suspect in the Boston Marathon bombing was captured. What happened and why it happened is still to be determined. But already there are those who are reigniting the fear of Islam and condemning changes to immigration laws as if the act of this 19 year old man and his dead brother confirmed something sinister about Islam and immigrants. To some extent such a response is understandable, but it is also potentially harmful and, I believe, unChristian. In order to explain what I mean by that I’m going to ask you to assume that these brothers viewed themselves as faithful Muslims and that their acts were somehow related to events in the land of their birth.

The fact that these brothers may have believed themselves to be doing the will of God does not make their conduct representative of Islam. No one can doubt that individuals can pervert the teachings of any religion to meet their needs and support their own view of the world. This has happened many times with Christianity. Christianity has been used to support the institution of slavery. From the thirteenth through the early 20th Century much of the world was subjugated by “Christian” nations spreading “the Gospel.” The Pope even took it upon himself at one time to divide the non-Christian world in two, giving half to Spain and half to Portugal. The people living in those lands were not consulted, and nothing in scripture hinted that such an act would serve the Gospel. It was simply how members of Christianity interpreted their faith.

Closer to home we have the misuse of Christian scripture and symbols supporting so-called Aryan Christianity; a white Supremacy version of Christianity. There is also the Westboro Baptist Church which claims that the Gospel calls for the picketing of the funerals of soldiers and others because, in their view, these deaths are God’s punishment for the sins of homosexuality. The vast majority of Christians are appalled that such individuals seek to clothe themselves in the mantle of the Gospel. What they are claiming as Christianity has little or nothing to do with Christianity. Their interpretation of the faith tradition merely gives the appearance of legitimacy to their fringe beliefs.

Jesus dealt with those who would clothe their conduct in religiosity. As quoted above he pointed out that simply claiming the faith, while failing to live in accordance with the faith, does not make you a Christian. The evil deeds of such persons, even if done “in the name of Christ,” are worthy of condemnation. In the same portion of Matthew, Jesus speaks of Judgment:

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. ² For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³ Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye. Matthew 7:1-5.

This passage does not prevent the judging of these brothers for their crimes in a court of law. But it does challenge those who would choose to condemn all Muslims, or all immigrants, for the crimes of these two brothers. The first judgment is an exercise of justice. The second judgment is an exercise of ignorance, at best, and hateful prejudice and bigotry at worst.

Islam does not support the killing of non-Muslims, although there are a few passages of the Quran that can be read in such a way. However, in order to follow those passages most of the rest of the Quran has to be put aside. Just as a few isolated passages of the bible supported the institution of slavery, in order to practice slavery it was necessary to ignore most of the scripture. The Quran also preaches tolerance of all people and religions. The vast majority of Muslims find the terrorism of the extremists as abhorrent as the vast majority of Christians.

Likewise, even assuming that these brothers were motivated by some passion associated with the country of their birth, that is no reason to make sweeping judgments about the dangers of treating immigrants fairly or coming to grips with immigration reform in the nation. After all, being an immigrant is not a prerequisite to mass murder. Adam Lanza of Newtown was born in the USA and was raised a Christian; Jared Lougher, the Tuscon shooter, was born in the USA; James Holmes, who killed 12 and wounded 58 in Aurora Colorado was born in the USA and raised Christian; Eric Harris and Dylan Kiebold, the Columbine killers, were both born in the USA and Kiebold was raised Christian; Eric Rudolph who killed 2 and wounded 111 with his bombs, including the Atlanta Olympics bombing, was born in the USA and claimed to be a Christian; and Timothy McVeigh who killed 168 and wounded over 800 in Oklahoma City was born in the USA and raised Christian. The immigrant status of these brothers is not a basis for condemning all immigrants. We are, after all, a nation built by immigrants. As Christians, we are called to care about justice and righteousness. There is nothing just or right about condemning whole classes of people for the crimes of a few.

Finally, there is Christianity’s teaching on forgiveness. The Gospel of Matthew records Jesus’ teaching in this way:

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. Matthew 18:21-22.

In effect, Jesus tells Peter to forgive so many times that he loses count and will never stop forgiving. Forgiveness can best be thought of as letting go of the anger you are holding against the person who has hurt you. Does it mean that you also forget what was done? No. Does it mean that you must be good friends with the person forgiven? No. Does it mean that you let someone continue hurting you? Again, no. But, if you let go of the anger that is eating at your soul you are in a position to deal with that person in accordance with the Gospel, seeking a just and righteous response.

In the days and weeks ahead the story of these two brothers and the warped thinking that led them to these acts will be developed. I strongly doubt that we will find any of the answers satisfying. But I pray that, as

a nation, we do not use this tragedy unreasonably. As with the Newtown shootings there may be lessons to be learned that could help prevent similar incidents in the future. Let us learn those lessons. As Christians, let us view those around us, regardless of their history, as children of God. As Christians let us continue to work toward peace in this world that God has so richly blessed.

Our Troops Support Us

A great pastor, preacher and teacher of mine is Dr. David Buttrick. Dr. Buttrick is long retired from preaching but I still exchange e-mails with him from time to time. During a class on worship he once told us that it was a pastor's job to point out God's work in the world wherever we see it. For me in this past week I saw God most clearly in the simple ministry of presence offered by disabled veterans to the victims of the Boston bombing. These veterans, who had lost limbs in combat, went to Boston area hospitals to visit with those who lost limbs in the bombing. They went to offer hope to people they knew were likely overwhelmed by hurt, pain, grief and despair. Almost every week I close with a benediction encouraging all of us to dare to be the presence of Christ in the world. This is an example of what that means. Praise be to God.

Bishop McAlilly Promotes a 40 Day Period of Prayer Leading Up to Annual Conference

40 Day Walk



Daily devotionals of **The 40 Day Walk With God** will post each morning on the Bishop's Blog during our season of intentional prayer. If you would like to Follow the Bishop's Blog during this time, posts will be delivered to your INBOX daily – enjoy them each morning on the device of your choice!

To download a copy to your computer for reading or printing, please follow the instructions below:

1. [CLICK HERE](#) to download .PDF file (you may “right click” and “save as” to your desktop or destination of choice)
- 1a. **NEW:** If you're here to download the Children's prayer guide, [CLICK HERE](#) to download (.PDF)
2. The cover image below also provides a link for download
3. NOTE: The .PDF prayer guide is 84 pages, please allow ample time for downloading depending on your connection speed

Defeat of the Welfare Bill in the State Legislature

On Sunday April 7th I did something I do not usually do from the pulpit. I described a bill in the State Legislature dealing with cutting Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) as being contrary to the Gospel. I was also part of a protest at the State Legislature building on April 11th when that Bill came before the State Senate. The Bill was withdrawn because of opposition from both parties. I know that some of you also contacted politicians you know to speak against this legislation for which I give my thanks. I wanted to take a few moments to discuss why I believed that speaking out against this bill was important.

I make every effort to avoid delving into the world of politics when I preach. Some might disagree since I often speak of the need to help those in need and to care for the sick. However, those are Gospel issues. What I try to avoid doing is endorsing, from the pulpit, particular political solutions. While I do believe that all persons should have access to healthcare under conditions that does not leave them destitute, and while I do have opinions on such things as “Obamacare,” I do not intentionally mix those opinions with the Gospel from the pulpit. For me, addressing the problem is the important thing. How it is addressed is a political issue.

The bill before the State Legislature was a different situation from my perspective. The bill supposedly would have induced parents to participate in their children’s education by penalizing the parents with a cut in state financial assistance if their child was failing in school and the parents did not take particular steps to correct the problem. The sponsor believed this was necessary to stem the “cycle of poverty” brought about, in his judgment, by poor education. Although the sponsor claimed that this approach had been used in a number of nations there was no study supporting his claims nor any request from any department for this measure. At least one of the countries that the sponsor claimed used this device actually paid families **additional** money for proven participation in the child’s education, not denying benefits already being paid.

I said from the pulpit that the bill was contrary to the Gospel because its primary purpose was to demean and humiliate the poor. I based this statement on the following:

- While some poverty is certainly “generational,” many people in this nation have incomes below the poverty line because of loss of jobs through no fault of their own, disability, crushing medical bills, single mothers fleeing abusive domestic situations and other causes having nothing to do with family educational background. In fact, the single largest growing segment of those living under the poverty line is formerly middle and upper middle class families who have lost their sources of income. (If you look on the internet you will find a short documentary called “*The Line*” that provides a more realistic picture of poverty in this nation. It is about 30 minutes long.)
- The TANF payments, which can reach a maximum of around \$185 a month, are temporary payments that are only paid for a lifetime maximum of 60 months. Those receiving these payments have to be working, looking for work or in job training. If their children do not go to school their payments may be cut. A detailed description of the TANF plan can be found online.
- Poverty does not equate to being a poor parent. Poor parenting is a problem that crosses all social and economic lines. This bill did nothing to encourage other parents to participate in their children’s education.
- A child can be failing in school for any number of reasons not directly related to poverty including an undiagnosed learning disability, depression, ill health, bullying, a problematic teacher etc. The

measures described in the bill would not have impacted these situations. The legislation in question would have punished a family if two of three children were doing well but the third was not.

- Adding new burdens to those receiving these payments was unrealistic in light of the working realities of these parents. Many are working multiple part-time jobs and simply could not meet the burdens that the legislation sought to impose. Parents in poorer counties would not have had access to many of the educational assistance programs that the legislation assumed existed everywhere.
- No efforts were directed at others receiving state aid. The only class targeted for this special treatment was the poor.
- The bill would have put an unconscionable burden on children already under incredible stress. As pointed out by several legislators, if the child happened to be in an abusive situation this bill could endanger the child even more.

The Gospel calls on us to demand that people with dealt with justly. The bible directs us to take special care to defend the poor because, even in biblical times, the poor often had little voice in society. The Bible calls on us to speak to those in power. The bible reminds us that when we oppress the poor we are oppressing Christ. For all these reasons I believed it necessary to speak up about this legislation. If you would like to discuss these issues further, either individually or in a class, I would be glad to meet with you.

THE BISHOP'S CEDAR CREST SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Bishop McAlilly has challenged the Churches of the Tennessee Conference to help children attend summer camp who otherwise would be unable to go. The program is outlined below.

GOAL: To raise a minimum of 63 (Bishop McAlilly's football number) scholarships for 63 children to attend summer camp at Cedar Crest this summer (2013).

CHILDREN: New partnerships will be developed from varied churches and programs for children. Key camp recruitment groups are:

- Project Transformation
- Bethlehem Center
- Small Membership Churches
- Churches Serving Diverse and Ethnic Communities
- Children of Deployed Military Families

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS:

- The Board of Camp and Retreat Ministries is leading the way in partnership with the Bishop to furnish scholarships. To date 11 scholarships have been raised or pledged from the Bishop and the Board.
- Each District Superintendent has agreed to provide one scholarship from their district funds. This represents 7 scholarships.
- Each DS will be identifying small membership and ethnic churches who might partner with Camp and Retreat Ministries (CRM) by recruiting children for camp and/or raising money for scholarships.
- Each DS and Board member will be contacting individuals and larger churches who would be willing to furnish matching scholarships for the children in their district.
- The total Goal will be to raise a minimum of \$18,900 for 63 scholarships for children within the Tennessee Conference who otherwise would not be able to attend camp.

HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE:

Everyone in the Tennessee Conference is invited to partner with the Bishop and The Board of Camp and Retreat Ministry by:

- Recruiting at least one child from your church for a faith forming summer camp experience at Cedar Crest this summer.
- Raising or providing a scholarship of \$300 for a child who otherwise would or could not attend camp.
- Celebrating Camp and Retreat Sunday in your church by sharing your camp experience with your congregation and encouraging them to be involved in recruiting children for a great summer camp experience at Cedar Crest.
- Please visit www.tnumcamps.org for the 2013 Summer Camp Schedule and online registration.

Please send all scholarship funds to:

**The Bishop's Cedar Crest Scholarship Fund
Reverend Dickie Hinton
P.O. Box 414
Monterey, Tennessee 38574**

The Problem of Personal Information

At one time it was not unusual to distribute lists of birthdays and other personal information within the Church. Such lists can still be created today if people wish to add their names to them. However, despite many requests to the contrary, I have chosen not to put information about birth dates, other than birth month, or other personal information, in the newsletter. Once this information has been posted in an online newsletter it is available to everyone. Our birth dates are an important piece of personal information that can be used as part of an effort to steal someone's identity. For much the same reason we do not post addresses and telephone numbers of members and we do not publish information about who is in the hospital. If a thief knew that someone was in the hospital they might take the opportunity to target that person's home for a break-in. The potential misuse of online information is something that we all need to be careful about.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Sarah Jordan	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Mac McAfee	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson	

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.

Prayer Requests and Praises

We do not post prayer requests in the online edition of the Newsletter because of privacy concerns. These continue to be included in the mailed version of the Newsletter and in the weekly worship bulletin.

Up-Coming Sermons

April 28: What God has Made Is Not Profane. We hear the words, but when we look around us do we believe them? My texts are Revelation 21:1–6 and Acts 11:1–18.

May 5: The Plain Meaning of Scripture: Ever hear that one? Sounds easy. But is it always easy to find the “plain meaning” of scripture? My texts are Acts 16:9–15 and John 14:23–29.

Worship Leaders Schedule

April 28

Charles Wilson, Liturgist

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, Ushers

Sam Richardson & Marty Bauguess, Greeters

Counter

Announcements

Sundays at 10:00: The topic for discussion this Sunday (April 28) will be, “**Why Are There So Many Religions?**”

This group meets in the Sunday School Classroom. All are welcome to enjoy fellowship with your church family and deepen your spiritual connection with God. **Nanette Crowell** leads this study and will be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Sunday school starts at 9:45am in the Fellowship Hall.

Wednesday, April 24, 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal

The **61st UMC** is in need of men's clothing. When you clean your closets, please consider donating men's items of clothing to a worthy cause. Bring clothes to the church and they will be taken to 61st UMC.

The dates for our church to prepare and serve dinner at **61st Street** are as follows: **May 18, August 17, November 16.**

We will also be participating at the Christmas Toy Store, dates TBD.

April Birthdays

Mary Coleman, Houston Hartsock, Colette Keyser, Jo Oliphant, Betty Whitefield