



# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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

December 11, 2013

## Understanding the New Testament The letter of James

<sup>14</sup> *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?* <sup>15</sup> *If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food,* <sup>16</sup> *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?* <sup>17</sup> *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:

<sup>28</sup> *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. He didn't believe that he could be "good enough" for God; 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? <sup>2</sup> 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:

*<sup>20</sup> 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.

*<sup>22</sup> 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.

*<sup>2</sup> 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, <sup>3</sup> 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,” <sup>4</sup> have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 2:2-4*

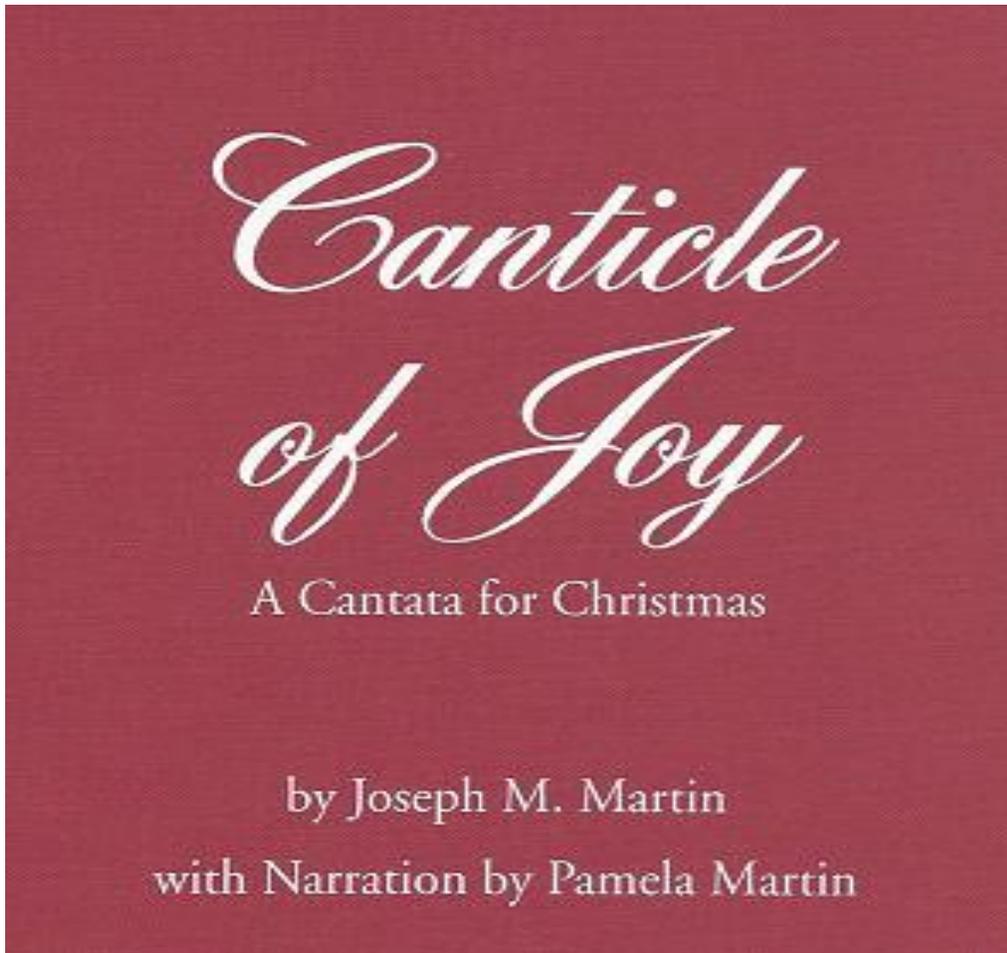
We are too often a society that gauges worth by appearance. James suggests that this is not a new problem.

*<sup>5</sup> 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! <sup>6</sup> 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*



**CHRISTMAS CANTATA**  
**Sunday, December 22, 2013**  
**4:00 PM**

**TRINITY UNITED METHODIST**  
**2084 Wilson Pike, Franklin, TN 37067**

**FREE CONCERT PUBLIC INVITED!**

## **Advent Study and Sermon Series A Different Kind of Christmas**

During this season, I am leading an Advent study called “A Different Kind of Christmas.” We meet in the Fellowship Hall at 9:45. Each participant will receive a devotional guide with readings for the rest of December. My sermons for the five Sundays in December will also deal with the topics in the Study. The topics for the study and the sermons are:

Expect a Miracle  
Giving Up On Perfect  
Scandalous Love  
Jesus’ Wish List  
By A Different Road

The study and sermon series is based upon material developed by Rev. Mike Slaughter. Please prayerfully consider being a part of this study.

### **Advent Eucharist**

The Lord’s Supper is the central expression of who we are as the Body of Christ. We come together around the same table bringing all our troubles, all our concerns and all our differences. At the Table of Lord we pray that God make us “One with Christ, one with each other and one in ministry to the world.” We will celebrate the Eucharist each Sunday in Advent.

### **The Last Minute Toy Store and Graceworks**

Trinity UMC works in the ministries of 61<sup>st</sup> Avenue UMC in Nashville. One of the principal ministries of 61<sup>st</sup> Ave UMC is its Last Minute Toy store. This “store” provides gifts for children whose families could not otherwise afford to provide gifts. Several thousand Children in Nashville are assisted every year. The Toy store will need volunteers from December 18<sup>th</sup> through December 21<sup>st</sup> from 11:30 AM through 5:00 PM. If you would like to work in the ministry itself, or have questions about the ministry, please contact Rev. Meaker.

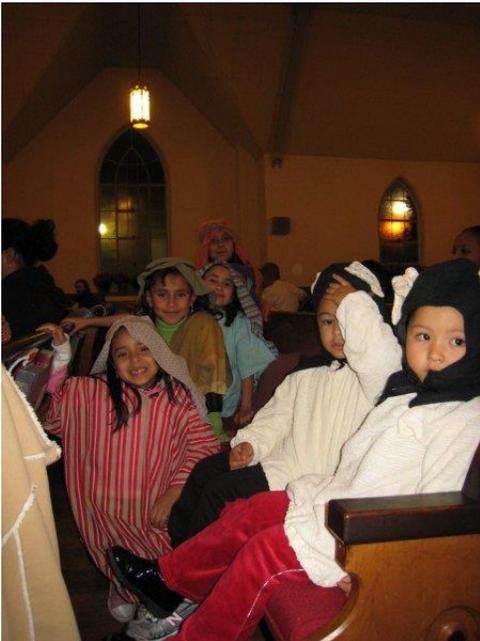
Graceworks here in Williamson County also has ministries directed toward helping those in need to experience a joyous Christmas. Trinity UMC will once again work with Graceworks to help provide a Christmas for families in need and to help with their “Christmas Manger,” which also helps provide gifts to people who otherwise would be unable to afford them. The Graceworks manger will take place from December 16<sup>th</sup> from 4:30 to 9:30 PM. Please contact Nanette Noffsinger if you wish to participate in the manger.

### **What Is An Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant?**

If you have not heard of it yet, we are planning an Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant for Sunday, December 15<sup>th</sup>. But what is an unrehearsed Christmas Pageant?

The typical Church Christmas Pageant is a telling of the Christmas story by our children by means of a play. Usually there are about three weeks worth of chaotic rehearsals which require young children to

memorize lines and where they are supposed to be during the play. The result is often quite jumbled with children showing up in the wrong places at the wrong times and forgetting their lines. None of that usually matters much to the parents and families because they simply came to see their own child anyway.





The Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant produces much the same result without all the angst associated with rehearsals and trying to get young children to memorize a script. The children dress up as Shepherds, Sheep, Stars, Angels and Wise Persons. There is a narrator to tell the story, supported by congregational singing of Christmas Carols. Everyone enjoys participating in the program (there are opportunities for adults to dress up as well) and then we break for the annual Chili supper in the Fellowship Hall.

The pictures here will give you some idea of what is involved in the way of costumes. Julia Moore and Jeanne Rybolt are coordinating this event but will need help from as many members of the church as are willing to help to get costumes together and otherwise organize the event. Please prayerfully consider being a part of this ministry this Advent.

## **The Poverty and Justice Bible**

*The Poverty & Justice Bible* is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to [www.Justicebible.org](http://www.Justicebible.org).

<sup>2</sup> *From heaven the LORD  
looks down to see  
if anyone is wise enough  
to search for him.*

<sup>3</sup> *But all of them are corrupt;  
no one does right.*

<sup>4</sup> *Won't you evil people learn?  
You refuse to pray,  
and you gobble down*

*the LORD's people.*  
<sup>5</sup> *But you will be frightened,*  
*because God is on the side*  
*of every good person.*  
<sup>6</sup> *You may spoil the plans*  
*of the poor,*  
*but the LORD protects them. Ps 14:2-6 CEV*

A persistent theme in scripture is that God watches everything that happens. And, just because it appears that God does not care when we take advantage of the poor does not change the fact that God protects the poor. How that may play out in the lives of those who hurt the poor is left to the imagination.

*You rich people should cry and weep! Terrible things are going to happen to you.* <sup>2</sup> *Your treasures have already rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes.* <sup>3</sup> *Your money has rusted, and the rust will be evidence against you, as it burns your body like fire. Yet you keep on storing up wealth in these last days.* <sup>4</sup> *You refused to pay the people who worked in your fields, and now their unpaid wages are shouting out against you. The Lord All-Powerful has surely heard the cries of the workers who harvested your crops.*  
<sup>5</sup> *While here on earth, you have thought only of filling your own stomachs and having a good time. But now you are like fat cattle on their way to be butchered.* <sup>6</sup> *You have condemned and murdered innocent people, who couldn't even fight back. James 5:1-6 CEV*

There is nothing wrong with being rich but, in the view of James, too often that wealth has been garnered at the cost of the welfare of the poor. James, consistent with Psalm 14, suggests that God will not be happy.

## **Bible Study**

For the last two years I have led a bible study on Thursday mornings. We have recently begun a study of the Book of Psalms. There is room for as many as would like to participate. Please call me if you have questions or simply come and be a part of our study. We meet from 10:00 to 11:30 on Thursday mornings.

I believe that the study of scriptures with other Christians is an essential part of our journey as Disciples. If you would like to be a part of a bible study at another time, during the day or evening, please contact me. If we can interest four or five people in gathering at a particular time I would be glad to lead another study.

## 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.

## Up-Coming Sermons

**December 15<sup>th</sup>: A Different Kind of Christmas. Scandalous Love.** One of the most difficult books of the Old Testament is Hosea. It contains many statements that seem to demean women and has texts that could potentially be used to justify abuse of women. However, it also has one of the boldest proclamations of the nature of God's love contained anywhere in the Bible. My texts are Hosea 1:2-3, Hosea 3:1 and Romans 3:23-24.

**December 22<sup>nd</sup> : A Different Kind of Christmas: Jesus' Wish List.** What gift do you give to the Son of God? My texts are Matthew 25:31-45 and 1 John 4:7-21.

## Worship Leaders Schedule

### December 15

Rodger Klein, **Liturgist**

**Tommy & Jo Cotton, Greeters**

Donnie & Renita Hartsock, **Ushers**

## **December 22**

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**

Sam Richardson & Marty Bauguess, **Greeters**

Tom & Julia Moore, **Ushers**

## **Announcements**

As mentioned earlier in the letter, please mark your calendars for **Sunday, December 15 at 4:00 PM**. The “**Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant**” will take place and we are all participants! Following the pageant, we will enjoy **singing carols, eating chili and enjoying fellowship**.

On December 18<sup>th</sup> Trinity UMC will host the meal for the workers at the Last Minute Toy Store. If you would like to help with that ministry, please contact Judy Richardson @ 495-4833. Food will be served beginning at 11:00 AM and continue until all are served. Volunteers will need to be at the 61<sup>st</sup> Street church by 10:00 that morning.

You will want to mark your calendar for the **Christmas Cantata, “Canticle of Joy”** which will be presented by the Chancel Choir and the Nexus Chamber Orchestra, Sunday, **December 22 at 4:00 PM**. **You are also invited to a reception following the cantata at 5:00 PM**

Our **Christmas Eve Service** will take place **December 24 at 4:30 PM**. This will be a candlelight service that is a beloved yearly event.

## **December Birthdays**

**Pam Jones, Dorise LeCates, Hal Newman, Rachel Newman**

**Happy Birthday!**