



# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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

July 24, 2013

## Is Jesus Insane?

<sup>21</sup> *When his family heard [the crowd], they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." Mark 3:21*

Put a label on someone. Call them evil, insane, stupid or maybe even irrelevant; unimportant. If you can sell that label to enough people you have laid the groundwork for most any attack that you want to make. We may like to think that is a tactic created by modern politics. But here it is at work in the first century and preserved in scripture. Jesus is labeled as insane.

Mark says that Jesus went throughout Galilee preaching: "The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe." Jesus has gathered his disciples and chosen the twelve from among them. He has garnered criticism by sharing table fellowship with sinners. He has been criticized for healing on the Sabbath. Wherever he has gone he has performed miraculous healings and cast out demons. By this time, wherever he goes, he's followed by those who need healing and by those who want to watch him work.

And, by this time, he is seen as dangerous to some of people who do not like his message or who do not like the apparent power he is gathering. In the Rock musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* there is a song that goes,

*"What can we do about this Jesusmania?  
How can we deal with the carpenter king?  
Where do we start with a man who is bigger  
Than John was when John did his baptism thing?"*

You see the problem? It is not just Jesus, but the fact that he has captured the hearts of the people. Something has to be done about Jesus and it has to take into account that the people are following him.

The solution is to try and marginalize him. Make him seem something less than he is. If they can get people thinking that he is either evil or insane, they can do most anything they want to him. Human nature was no different then than it is today. If we can put a demeaning label on someone, we can justify saying most anything about them; if we put a demeaning label on someone, we can justify destroying them.

Those opposed to Jesus first declare him insane. And their charge is so persuasive that Jesus family buys into it:

<sup>21</sup> *When his family heard [the crowd], they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind."*

Imagine how that must have hurt Jesus! There is an old saying that goes that no one can hurt you like your family can hurt you. To have his family go against him must have been very painful. It's understandable when he later says, <sup>35</sup> *Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.*"

The other label for Jesus is that he is really a demon himself. That is how he has authority to cast out demons:

<sup>22</sup> *And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons."*

Jesus' ridicules this claim. If Satan is doing God's work by destroying his own work, then the Kingdom of God must truly be near. Satan's nation cannot stand if Satan is working for its downfall. Satan's House cannot stand if it is divided against itself. He then, in effect, says that he is like one who entered Satan's House, tied him up and is now working to plunder Satan's house. And he couldn't do that if he was not empowered by God. The effort to marginalize Jesus and undermine Jesus' ministry fails.

And what of us today? Don't we, at times, act in ways intended to marginalize Jesus and the Gospel? I've heard people speak of Jesus as an interesting historical figure, sort of like Buddha. They admire his ethical code and his teachings, but just shake their heads at the idea that he was God become flesh; fully human and fully divine. And they also express doubt that it is really practical to live according to those teachings. They say that it would be nice if love for one another was possible, but it's impractical.

Just like the authorities of Jesus time, they seek to marginalize Jesus. Instead of calling him evil and insane, they label him a deluded dreamer with an impractical message. They marginalize Jesus, and the Gospel, as being irrelevant. And, if we aren't very careful, we can find ourselves buying into that message. Welcome the stranger into our midst? "Foolishness." Providing for the care of the sick and the injured? "Not possible." Providing for the poor? "Unaffordable. Impossible." Loving another as you love yourself? "Why should I want to do something as useless as that?"

Do you see how easy it is to fall into the trap that captured Jesus' family? If Jesus was just an interesting historical figure, there is no reason to give his teachings any greater consideration than we would the teachings of Thomas Jefferson or any number of other figures you could name. If we abandon our faith that God can bring the Kingdom of God into our midst, then our fear will prevent us from living according to the Gospel. "It's just not practical," we'll tell ourselves. Even trying is bordering on insanity.

Something similar happens when people point out all the harm the Church has caused throughout its existence. That's just like the effort to declare Jesus in league with Satan. Has the Church done evil? Yes it has, to our shame. The church is made up of people and people sin. That is why we must always be vigilant about what we are preaching and teaching and what we support. But, we needn't allow the label some people place on us to stick. Each day we are given the opportunity to live in this world as the Body of Christ. Each day we are given the opportunity to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the lives of those around us. The closer we come to that ideal, the less the label of evil is able to stick.

And, Jesus warns that we must not lose faith in the ability of God to reach into our world. That, says Jesus, is the unforgiveable sin. Forgiveness, God's forgiving Grace, is a gift of God's spirit. God acts in our world through the power of the Holy Spirit. If we abandon our faith in the power of the spirit we deny ourselves the grace of God. It's like someone bleeding to death refusing medical attention to stop the bleeding. If you refuse to accept the gift of God's grace, given through the power of God's spirit, you cannot receive forgiveness for your sins. It is an unforgiveable sin because it is your choice to cling to the belief that Jesus was not God made flesh and that God cannot really affect the world around us.

## Conclusion

Given the current political climate, in the coming months you will have many opportunities to watch people being labeled and marginalized. It has become the standard way of doing politics in this nation. But recognize it for what it is, and be careful that the message isn't actually aimed at the Gospel. You see, Jesus came preaching that the Kingdom of God has drawn near. Our choice is to embrace that message, or label Jesus as insane.

## 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, 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>10</sup> *When you make your neighbor a loan of any kind, you shall not go into the house to take the pledge. <sup>11</sup> You shall wait outside, while the person to whom you are making the loan brings the pledge out to you. <sup>12</sup> If the person is poor, you shall not sleep in the garment given you as the pledge. <sup>13</sup> You shall give the pledge back by sunset, so that your neighbor may sleep in the cloak and bless you; and it will be to your credit before the Lord your God. Deut. 24:10-13. NRSV*

The people of Israel were allowed to make loans to one another and allowed to take collateral as a guarantee of repayment. However, even if a lender made a risky loan to a poor person, the lender was not always free to keep the collateral. The poor debtor might only own one cloak and that cloak might be the only thing of value he owned. If that cloak was given as a guarantee, it had to be returned by night because the debtor needed the cloak to keep warm. The value of the loan was not more important than the debtor's life. The Law of God dictated that the lender owed an obligation to the poor debtor separate and apart from the obligation related to the debt.

<sup>23</sup> *“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. <sup>24</sup> When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; <sup>25</sup> and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup> So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ <sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup> But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ <sup>29</sup> Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him,*

*'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'*<sup>30</sup> *But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.*<sup>31</sup> *When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place.*<sup>32</sup> *Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.'*<sup>33</sup> *Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?'*<sup>34</sup> *And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.*<sup>35</sup> *So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."* Matt 18:23-35 NRSV

Jesus' parable of the Unforgiving Servant has much the same message. We who expect mercy must be merciful. We who have been forgiven by God must be willing to forgive our brothers and sisters. It's never just a matter of "business." We have obligations to one another because of our common Father. I was thinking about this parable recently when Congress voted to strike the Food Stamp program from a bill that contained subsidies for farmers, some of whom were congressmen voting on the bill. As proverbs remind us, the poor have few friends. However, scripture reminds us that we are nevertheless to treat them as we would a member of our family; treat them as people to whom we owe obligations.

## **“Un-named” Prayer Concerns**

From time to time I will lift up an un-named prayer concern. Some have inquired why the concern is un-named. There are times when people share a concern with me asking for prayer but they do not wish the details of the concern discussed within the congregation. As I point out when that concern is raised, God knows what it is. If we simply lift that concern up together, we can confidently leave the rest in God's hands. Anyone in the congregation could offer such a concern as well.

And, to address concerns several of you have raised, no recent requests have concerned me or my health. While I have used such a request that way in the past at other churches, I don't believe I have made an un-named request for myself since I have served Trinity UMC. I thank-you for the concern.

## **Graceworks' Ministries**

Graceworks has on-going needs in their ministries to the community. In particular, at the present time, the following items are in short supply:

Toilet Paper	Shampoo/Conditioner
Razors	Shaving Cream
Dishwashing Liquid	Cleaning Supplies
Laundry Detergent	Soap
Toothpaste	Toothbrushes

If you are able to contribute any of these items, please bring them by the Church and we will deliver them to Graceworks. Thanks for your support of this ministry.

## Still Looking for Worship Leaders

The Worship Ministry is central to any church because it involves the majority of the members every week. Central to the Worship Ministry is the leadership of the laity. Judy Richardson and I are trying to organize the worship leadership schedule so that it is easier for people to plan in advance when they will be serving as **Greeters, Liturgists, Ushers and Counters**.

I would very much like to see greater participation in worship leadership from the laity. If you would like to make worship leadership part of your ministry in the church, please contact either Judy Richardson or Rev. Meaker.

## 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.

## Up-Coming Sermons

**July 28<sup>th</sup>: Sermon: Are you Now or Have You Ever Been a Christian?** Read the Lord's prayer before Sunday. Really listen to the words. Pray it aloud and consider what you are asking from God. Some might call it un-American. My texts are Colossians 2:6-15 and Luke 11:1-13.

**August 4<sup>th</sup>: Sermon: Bigger and Better Barns.** On its face, it's sort of a joke. This is the story of a man so rich that he tore down perfectly serviceable barns in order to make more room to store his possessions. My texts are Colossians 3:1-11 and Luke 12:13-21.

## Worship Leaders Schedule

### July 28

Charles Wilson, **Liturgist**

Sam Richardson & Tommy Cotton, **Ushers**

Betty & Herb Haynes, **Greeters**

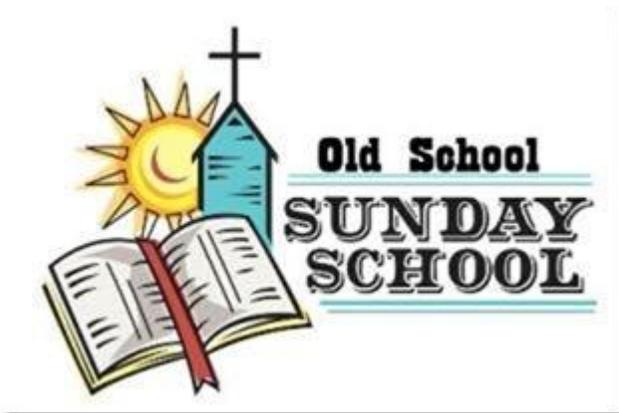
### August 4

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Ushers**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**

## Announcements



You are invited to "**Old School Sunday School**" at **9:45** in the Fellowship Hall. We are singing, praying, studying scripture and caring for one another as we strive to become new people in Christ. Our curriculum is Cokesbury's Adult Bible Studies and our template is Colossians 3:12-17. **Join us Sunday for "Old School Sunday School"!**

**"Companions in Christ" gathers at 9:45.** We are talking about how to be better companions to our fellow Christians, discover what our spiritual gifts are, and dig deeper into what we believe and why. Please come and enjoy this time with your church family and deepen your spiritual connection with God. We will meet in the Youth Sunday School room. All are welcome!

**Ministry with 61<sup>st</sup> Ave. UMC.** The last two dates for our church to prepare and serve dinner at **61<sup>st</sup> Ave UMC this year** are **August 17, and November 16.** We will also be participating at the 61<sup>st</sup> Ave UMC Christmas Toy Store, dates TBD.

**Choir Rehearsal:** There will not be any rehearsals during the month of July.

**Men's Group:** The Men's group will be providing music during the service **Sunday, August 18.** They are looking forward to a **golf outing September 23** and will be hosting the **Pancake Breakfast October 12.** Further details will be provided as these events draw near.

## **July Birthdays**

Nanette Crowell, Mac McAfee, Leslie Eastwood, Shirley Kirk, Linda Robinson, Renita Hartsock.