

## MORE ON FORGIVENESS

It seems that my message on forgiveness (“When You Need to Forgive But You Don’t Know How” in our most recent worship gathering struck an immensely helpful nerve for some of you. Our discussion after the service added further meaning to the message by enabling us to delve even more deeply into several related issues than we had time to do in our worship hour.

But, even after that, your interest lingered. Follow-up telephone calls during the next week made it possible for us to address some long-unresolved issues that needed caring attention in order for some of you to bid farewell to a burden that has dragged you down, in one case, at least, for years.

It appears from your comments, as well as some from persons whom you referred to me, that our tradition at CCM of combining up-to-date insights from scientific research with helpful spiritual teachings provides a kind of healing support that otherwise might not be possible—especially when it is integrated with subsequent conversations over lunch. I often have wondered if integration of the timeless spiritual wisdom of Jesus and other great spiritual leaders with supportive information from medical science to promote healing could have been what Jesus foresaw when he said, “The things *I* do, *you* will do; and *you* will be able to do even *greater* things!” But that prediction sometimes takes place anyway when people such as you adopt your usual stance of openness and receptivity. That, in itself, opens us to healing potential.

I wish that I were able to share with everyone reading these words some of the issues and comments that surfaced in our conversations regarding forgiveness; but, because of confidentiality, that, of course, will not be possible.

However, there *is* something of importance that I *can* share with you. Over the years, there is a theme that seems repeatedly to emerge in the great majority of conversations we've had related to forgiveness: *It is easier to be less angry and to forgive another person if we understand the CIRCUMSTANCES that caused a person to act as he or she did.*

Believe it or not, some people do and say things that hurt other people because of factors that are beyond their control. I have found that even the persons who do the hurting sometimes are surprised and chagrined by their own inappropriate behavior and don't understand the reason for it. Examples might be individuals with an undiagnosed mental illness, or physiological problems such as what used to be called Organic Brain Syndrome, damage from a fall or accident, a stage in the development of Alzheimer's disease, an undiagnosed brain tumor, and other organic conditions. Some of these medical problems are not diagnosed while the person is living and come to light only after an autopsy.

Here in Columbia, J. Francis Drake, a wonderful person and the beloved owner of Drake's Fine Foods (at the time, one of the most outstanding restaurants in the city), began to behave in ways that were completely uncharacteristic of his previous behavior. Family members and friends were stunned at things he said, did, and wrote. He screamed at, cursed, and denigrated people whom he treasured. Moreover, he was abusive, at times, to customers, doctors, nurses, and even complete strangers. This previously kind, loving, trustworthy and faithful husband, father, and valued friends eventually was diagnosed with a brain tumor that later took his life. He was extremely upset by his own negative behavior, but he had absolutely *no control* over it. That is why it is so important for us to respond to an uncharacteristically negative word or action with a calm demeanor, to share our hurt with the person who hurt us, and, if appropriate, to help that one to get a medical evaluation if he or she is open to it. (The latter option, of course, should be considered only if the hurting behavior is serious, of recent onset, and *repetitive*.) It rarely is

helpful always to take someone's hurtful words or actions *personally*. A hurtful attack just may *not* be personal, and to assume prematurely that it *is* personal only adds to our pain—and, often, to theirs.

I am humbled and grateful that you feel free to share your deepest concerns with me as well as details of the painful relationships that have made it difficult for you to forgive; and I hope that the aforementioned information can be of value to some of you.

The next time we gather at CCM, two different CDs on forgiveness will now be available to you: my message on “A REALISTIC LOOK AT FORGIVENESS: ISN'T IT TIME?” and another, “WHEN YOU NEED TO FORGIVE BUT YOU DON'T KNOW HOW.” Please feel free to get one of each for yourself or for any friends or family for whom you think they might be helpful.

I can understand why my message on forgiveness at our last worship gathering generated so much interest. After all, we're *all* fallible human beings, and that means two things: *Every one* of us has been hurt by someone whom we need, for our sake as well as theirs, to forgive; and *every one* of us, at *some* time, has hurt someone else and may need to *be* forgiven! Since neither of those tasks is easy, perhaps the aforementioned messages that combine both spiritual *and* scientific insights can point the way to a more healthful and fulfilling life for all of us. As that process begins and progresses, please know that I am available to offer support and, if you want it, helpful guidance. You are not alone!

**Warmly, your pastor and friend,**

**John**

**WHAT'S HAPPENING AT CCM**

## **Sunday, September 13 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Month)**

### **10:00 a.m. AN OPPORTUNITY TO WORSHIP TOGETHER**

For better or for worse, most of us stay pretty much the *same* all of our lives. That is true *especially* in our basic orientation: the way we live, the way we relate, and even the level of our spirituality. That means, of course, that few of us maximize our fullest potential. John's message this Sunday will help us to look at another possibility. His theme will be "BECOMING ALL WE CAN BE."

Our usual informal opportunity for the congregation to respond to the message by listening, making comments, and asking questions will follow worship. (Out by about 12 noon)

## **Sunday, September 27 (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Month)**

### **10:00 a.m. AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW TOGETHER**

What happens when Jesus of Nazareth wrecks our comfortable Christianity—one that "plateaued" years ago, one that is immature, one that rarely changes? The answer: We are presented with an opportunity to *grow!*

Our last two sessions presented the possibility for us to learn what it means to be a *progressive* spiritual person—particularly when it comes to understanding and interpreting scripture in an atypical, but immensely more *productive* way—a method that is consistent with the best of contemporary biblical scholarship but alien to contemporary fundamentalism—an orientation that tends to reign supreme among uninformed people everywhere, but especially in the South. We looked at important information that you are unlikely to encounter in any other church in South Carolina but which every intelligent, sincere Christian needs to know. The discussion was substantive and heightened the awareness of everyone present. But here's the big surprise: the so-called "progressive" approach to meaningful spirituality is identical to that which Jesus himself lived and taught, *not* the one that has developed over the years *since* the 1<sup>st</sup> century!

Today, we will take an in-depth look at Chapter 2 in our nifty little book, *Being a Progressive Christian*; although, as always, John will add abundant insights that are *not* in the book but significantly enlarge upon its wisdom and deepen your spiritual journey.

If you care about your own spiritual welfare *and* that of the people to whom you are closest, we invite you to join us.