

IS OUR CHURCH TOO PEACEFUL?

Peaceful? For most of us, that word conjures up images of an incredibly *ideal* situation. Who *wouldn't* want to be filled with peace, surrounded by peaceful people, and privileged to luxuriate in a tranquil, relatively stress-free life—especially in our world that seems to have so little of it?

Yet, biblical wisdom warns us that if we are making progress *spiritually*, our lives will *not* always be filled with peace! Along the way, if we are truly *growing*, we will experience occasional struggle. Why? Because growth involves change—a process that we human beings sometimes resist, whether it is in religion, politics, family life, or the ways in which we relate to other people.

Our Islamic friends, at their best, seem to understand that the *growing* person is *not* always peaceful. In fact, according to the Koran, a meaningful process of becoming, a process of actually *maturing* spiritually, inevitably involves *struggle*! Few if any of us human beings get up in the morning hoping to *change* our ingrained ways of thinking, living, and relating—even if such change could result in a more fulfilling life. In fact, *resistance* to change is one of the most daunting problems we human beings face, in religion, family life, our political orientation, altering dysfunctional habits, and in responding to the efforts of a clinically trained minister, or psychotherapist to help us. Our Islamic friends are correct: Jihad is not just struggle against unbelievers, it *most* importantly is the *inner* struggle that temporarily may *interrupt* our peace *if* we are open to the process of growing toward greater spiritual maturity and, ultimately, a more fulfilling life!

Our *own* scripture also emphasizes the inward struggle that is necessary for us to mature spiritually. We find that truth set forth even in the maturation process of Jesus, often referred to as his “temptations in the desert” when he went off by himself to reflect on his life. The temptations he faced involved a struggle between his *lower* self and his *higher* self, his *false* self and his *true* self. Which would triumph? The spiritual quest can and, to some extent, *does* interrupt our generally accepted, less-than-thoughtful daily round; so it is not at all unusual for us human beings to resist the possibility of even the most *constructive* reflection and change—the reason we all need

in-depth involvement in a good church in order caringly to help us along the way.

Actually, Jesus, who spoke constantly about unconditional love, often got himself in trouble for trying to help *other people* to move beyond where they were to where they could be, to change from a needlessly stressful life to a more abundant life. The problem: People generally are not *aware* that they are living and relating out of a false self instead of activating the true self—the inner image of God that is the wonderful, latent “potential to become” with which God has graced each of us. We are not even consciously aware that our lives *could* be so much better than they are, so we resist change. Those who *surrender* to the struggle of choosing between a false self and a true self are those who experience what Jesus referred to as entering the kingdom of God, a joyous, *higher* level of existence and relating. But to experience that, the prevailing pseudo peace that results from slavery to our routine, somewhat dysfunctional way of living has necessarily to be interrupted. The *false* peace that comes from *avoiding* spiritual growth needs to be exchanged for the marvelously intoxicating experience of *genuine* peace “the peace that surpasses our ability to understand it” and can be derived only from being willing to make changes that enable us to live a more authentic life.

Therefore, as was the case with the so-called temptation encounters of Jesus in the desert, we need to take time and thoughtfully to exert the effort to move beyond living out of our false self so we can begin to live more fully out of our true self. A really good church will help us to do that, not by condemnation, but gently, caringly, by enabling us to speak the truth in love, both to ourselves and to one another.

So I leave you with the very important question with which we began: Is our church *too* peaceful? I’m referring here, of course, to the *false* sense of peace that comes from *avoidance*, the refusal to surrender to the inner *spiritual struggle* that is necessary to become all we *can* be, to know the joy of discovering the *true* selfhood, joy, and fullness of life to which God has called us.

As each of us answers the big question with which he began, please remember how much I love you—both individually and collectively. To me, each of you is *immensely* special.

Your pastor and friend,
John

Please note: As usual, we will be gathering on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of this month.

Sunday, June 12 (2nd Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. WORSHIP

This morning, we will experience the last of our four Sunday emphasis on understanding and relating to people who, at least in *some* ways, have a different religious orientation than our own. *Every* religion has within it both plusses and minuses, negatives and positives, people who are relatively mature spiritually and those who are not, but our unity is in the reality that we are family—children of one God. There are people in *all* the religions of the world that recognize that reality, and there are some who do not. In *our* church, while respecting the *differences* between ourselves and some other religions, we choose to emphasize the *similarities*, the valuable *aspects* of our oneness. It is with that understanding that we welcome to our pulpit today Imam Omar Shaheed, the spiritual leader of one of our local mosques. You can find more helpful information about our time together in the ANNOUNCEMENTS section of this newsletter.

We plan to have an opportunity for meaningful dialog between Imam Shaheed and our congregation *following* his presentation during our worship gathering. (Out by about 12 noon)

Sunday, June 26 (4th Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. EDUCATION/REFLECTION/DISCUSSION GATHERING

In churches today, very few people know what *progressive* Christianity is; in fact, most congregations have never even *heard* about it! At CCM, we try our best to remedy that unfortunate lack of awareness by living up to our catch-phrase: “Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically *Progressive*”; and we have been emphasizing that exciting potential by exploring the topic, “How to *Be* a Progressive Christian: An Evolution of Faith.” This series

provides a roadmap, as it were, for any person who wants to be *meaningfully* Christian in the 21st century. We will complete this compelling journey toward a more vital spiritual journey in August. However, you still will have an opportunity to participate in this exhilarating pilgrimage today and on two additional Sundays—another in July and a final one in August. We'll value your presence! (Out between 11:30 a.m. and 12 noon)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OUR SPECIAL GUEST

As previously announced, it will be our privilege to have with us on Sunday, June 12, Imam Omar Shaheed, the resident spiritual leader of one of our local mosques: Masjid As-Salaam. Iman Shaheed has addressed our fellowship in the past and continues to be a progressive voice in our area for the Islamic faith. We have asked him to highlight differences between his own thoughtful approach to being a faithful follower of Islam with that of some other more strident approaches, and he graciously has agreed. Imam Shaheed was a part of the Vatican's 1999 Jubilleum Interfaith Conference for World Peace with Pope John II and other world religious leaders, including the Dalai Lama.

Following the worship gathering at which he speaks, there will be an opportunity for constructive dialog with Imam Shaheed. (For additional information, please see IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM in this newsletter.)

LOOKING AHEAD

Some of you may have wondered: What will happen at CCM when we conclude our popular series on Progressive Christianity? It's something to which we can all look forward. In September, we will have an opportunity to participate in a *new* series entitled "Saving Jesus."

What? Saving *Jesus*? Haven't we always thought primarily that Jesus saves *us*? Absolutely. But, in our era, many thoughtful Christians are beginning to realize that there is yet *another* important issue: that of saving *Jesus*—from

the Church, especially from ways in which some no doubt well-meaning churches have been and still are distorting him!

Consequently, we need to re-think the ways in which Jesus often is presented to the world and even to us. Our new series will help us to do precisely that. If you're open-minded and *serious* about your own spiritual journey, we invite you to join us for this challenging and potentially rewarding adventure. We'll keep you posted!