

## ***UNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS***

***Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive***

### ***Pastor's Paragraph***

#### **A QUESTION ABOUT “THE ANTICHRIST”? BELIEVE IT OR NOT, YES!**

As some of you know, space to sit down during lunch time in the Rosewood Deli often is limited. On one of my visits there, all tables were taken and a gentleman asked if he could share the place at which I was seated. I agreed. After we introduced ourselves, he asked me what I do for a living. “Well, I don’t exactly do it for a *living*,” I responded, “but I currently am the pastor of a progressive church fellowship.” When I told him that, he shared a personal concern with me.

The gentleman at my table told me that he is a staunch, lifelong Republican, but he was worried because he had experienced what he described as “a terrifying nightmare,” a dream in which the current presidential candidate selected by his party turned out to be a kind of *antichrist*. “In the dream,” my new friend continued, “he won the election but then created chaos in our country and throughout the world.”

My table mate said that he awakened with his heart racing, paralyzed with fear and perspiring profusely. He had never liked his party’s candidate, he said, but had planned to vote for him anyway—*until* he had his dream. “Could *God* be speaking to me through my dream,” he wondered; and “should I vote for Hillary instead of Trump—or, perhaps, not vote at all?” He also wondered if there is anything about an antichrist in the Bible. This dear man wanted, as he put it, “to do the right thing. After all, I am a Christian,” he said. Tears formed in his eyes.

I congratulated the fellow on his desire to do “the right thing,” the Christian thing, as elusive as that might be; but I told him that I would not tell him for *whom* to vote, because God has given him a mind with which to weigh facts and make his own decision. I added that I have never tried to tell people in my own church or even in my own family how to vote; and although I certainly don’t mind sharing my spiritual perspective on politics in private conversations with friends—as well as listening carefully to *their* position, I don’t denigrate, argue, or attempt to *change* their decision. Instead, I try to *learn* from their outlook in ways that might help to refine my *own* viewpoint.

Despite my refusal to tell my luncheon mate how to vote (i.e., what is “the *right* thing”), I *did* try to help him by answering his question about whether or not the term “antichrist” is mentioned in scripture.

Do *you* know the answer to his question? Actually, some of the biblical writers *do* talk about an antichrist. Comments in the New Testament seem to be influenced by the fact that the Old Testament book of Daniel envisions a tyrant who will appear, one who is extremely arrogant and who gains power by deceiving people. Because there are those who do not see through his deceit and oppose him, the result is destruction—a reality that the book of Daniel refers to as “a desolating sacrilege.”

In the New Testament, Jesus is reported to have warned about the coming, during the last days, of several types of deceivers who will attempt to lead people astray; so, Jesus said, it will be imperative for his own followers to be able to distinguish true claims from those that are false—and not to be swayed by appearances or deception.

Paul, or someone writing in his name, also identified the rise of a “son of destruction,” a “man of lawlessness” who leads gullible people away from the truth. This would take place at a time when there is growing human lawlessness.

All previous references talked about such a person or persons with metaphors. The only occurrence of the actual *word* “antichrist” appears

four times in First and Second John. That word refers to an outpouring of falsehood, blatant deception that would take place at the end of the age. The antichrist will gain great popularity with many people, but only because they are “taken in” by and falsely believe in the deceiver and what he claims to be true. So the problem will be the rise of a large group of false believers who unwittingly become antichrists themselves! How can one *recognize* an antichrist? We are told that the demeanor of an antichrist will manifest an easily observable *absence of being loving* toward all others—in attitude, speech, and action.

Although the book of Revelation is rich in difficult-to-interpret symbolism, a “beast” is most closely linked to the characteristics of an antichrist, but unlike the antichrist(s) referred to in other biblical books, this one is extremely violent and is willing to slaughter others with abandon.

This brief and much-too-simplified summary of references to an antichrist in scripture include a warning to be vigilant and wary of any individual who portrays the world as being in a hopeless situation and sets him or herself up as a knight in shining armor, a human messiah who can lead the way to an ideal world. The Bible contrasts that kind of arrogance with the humility, love and caring of Jesus—the *true* messiah—who, if we follow *him*, is the *actual* hope of the world. Anything less, we are told, can lead only to *further* hopelessness and destruction. It is not this human figure but God who can “make all things new.”

Although, as I already have indicated, I refused to tell my new friend for whom he should vote, I did suggest to him that not to vote at all might not be the best way to deal with a difficult decision. That particularly is true if we take spiritual principles seriously.

It is important, in *any* election, not to be *inappropriately* idealistic, assuming that we will ever have a *perfect* candidate. We won’t, because, according to scripture, there *are* no perfect people! The Bible teaches that all of us “drop the ball.” There are times when all human beings “fall short of the glory of

God.” That means that in *every* election, *all* of our candidates will be flawed in *some way(s)*. Therefore, the key is to choose “the *lesser* of the evils!” And to do so, that sometimes may mean putting the good of country before that of loyalty to a party; however, since human nature can be amazingly resistant, that will be possible only if we pray earnestly for the strength to do so.

It seems to me that the other important spiritually-based consideration is to realize that no political *party* is perfect. We will never be able to get *everything* we want just the way *we* want it—with *any* party. So, here again, as Christians, we choose, not the *ideal* (from our personal perspective), but that which we deem *closest* to the ideal, *based upon the spiritual principles taught by Jesus*. That is better than *not* to vote. In a flawed world of flawed candidates and flawed parties, we need to learn to accept, work, and even vote for *proximate* goals, something that might be less than the best but may move us a bit *closer* to the best. As someone has said: People of good will need to guard against allowing that which is perfect to be the enemy of the good; and as Christians, we are called to let our light shine before others, not to hide it by abandoning opportunities to make at least *some* positive difference.

Only 9% of the entire population of this country voted for either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton in the primaries. *Nine (9%)!* Obviously, a lot of us are not following the spiritual imperative of allowing our light to shine in the world around us. Therefore, by not following the teaching of the Christ we *say* we aspire to follow, we *ourselves* unwittingly become antichrists (persons who go against Christ). Moreover, since vicious name-calling, hatred, and unkind words directed at others are antithetical to the love taught by Jesus, one has to conclude that there are plenty of *contemporary* antichrists among us—even in numerous churches, *especially* during political campaigns. Kierkegaard was right: Any effort to discover antichrists should begin with *ourselves!*

But take heart. Here's an encouraging word for all of us: It's never too late to become the person we might have been!

With deep caring and abiding love,

Your pastor and friend,  
John

## WHAT'S HAPPENING IN AUGUST?

### *A Handy Summary*

*A Note to Our Visitors: Our fellowship ordinarily gathers on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of each month. Any deviation from that custom will be announced at one of our gatherings, in our newsletter, and on our website.*

Sunday, August 14 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. WORSHIP

Many of us grew up in a church in which we heard sermons about a *Judgment Day* after we die. The message usually was that we needed to “get saved” to avoid God’s wrathful judgment of us. If we were saved, we would go to a place called heaven, and if we were not saved, we would be sent to hell—cast into a lake of fire in which we would burn forever. Today, in more *fundamentalist* churches, that message still can be heard—sometimes frequently. However, in more *mainline* denominational churches a message on God’s judgment usually will be heard rarely, if at all.

Actually, the old-time message about judgment and heaven or hell is in the Bible; but is the *interpretation* of it that we have heard

accurate? Many Bible scholars believe that it is not. If they are correct, what *is* a more accurate understanding? John will tackle that challenging topic and offer a profoundly helpful, *new* way to understand it. His message is entitled, “GODS JUDGMENT: WHAT CAN A *PROGRESSIVE* CHRISTIAN BELIEVE?”

We’ll have our usual informal discussion of the sermon following worship. (Out by about 12 noon)

### Sunday, August 28 (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. EDUCATION

During our last gathering we began what some of you said was a particularly meaningful study of the Beatitudes, an immensely rich part of Jesus’s famous Sermon on the Mount. Since it is impossible to live a truly fulfilling life without understanding and applying the spiritual teachings of that message in our daily activities, today we’ll continue our exploration of the Beatitudes and the ways in which they can help us to have a more qualitative life and deeper, more meaningful relationships. As usual, we’ll have valuable input from our pastor as well as stimulating discussion from anyone who wants to contribute to the experience. We’ll adjourn between 11:30 a.m. and 12 noon.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### ***FUTURE CCM GATHERINGS***

To facilitate your planning in advance, we are making an early announcement concerning our gatherings for this fall and winter. Since we currently meet

only twice a month, it is helpful to know as early as possible the dates we'll be getting together so you can plan family and other events that will not conflict with them; so here's the info you need.

September 11<sup>th</sup> (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday) and 25<sup>th</sup> (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday)

October 9<sup>th</sup> (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday) and 16<sup>th</sup> (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday)

November 13<sup>th</sup> (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday) and 20<sup>th</sup> (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday)

December 11<sup>th</sup> (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday) and 25<sup>th</sup> (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday)

We hope this information will be of value as we look forward to these truly significant opportunities for celebration and togetherness.