

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraph

“ARE THE BEATITUDES OF JESUS RELEVANT IN THE 21ST CENTURY?”

In our final gathering in August, we had an extremely interesting teaching/discussion session as we continued our reflection on what usually are called the Beatitudes of Jesus. One of them was particularly fascinating because so few church members know what it means: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.”

So what is it that many church members do *not* know? They seem not to be able to give a clear, definitive definition of what Jesus meant by “righteousness.”

In Greek, the word for “righteousness” is *dikiosyne*, which can be translated as “justice,” “fair and equitable dealing,” or “doing what is right.” It is doing what is just, right, and best for other people, both individually and collectively—making a positive difference in the world that will benefit not *only* ourselves but each person we encounter and even large groups of people whom we may never meet. But how might serious Christ-followers go about putting that noble ideal into practice in *everyday life*?

Let me give you a very practical, down-to-earth example. Recently, I received a letter from a person whose name is Donna. I found it so moving that I actually wept as I read it. Here’s what she said:

On a beautiful evening in May, her beloved fiancé, Chris, went on a business trip to Panama City Beach, Florida, located on the Gulf of Mexico. When he arrived, he stopped at a local eatery to get a bite to eat. While he was waiting for his food, he was offered an oyster on the half-shell, which he ate and enjoyed. That happened on a Saturday. On Sunday evening, Chris felt quite ill and tried to “sleep it off.” He couldn’t.

Donna was unable to reach him during the day on Monday but finally contacted him at about 10:00 o’clock that evening. By that time, Chris’s breathing was labored and his legs were swollen, so Donna convinced him to go to a local emergency room. The next morning, Chris called to say that he was being admitted to the Critical Care Unit because of the oyster he had eaten.

Donna left work and immediately flew to Florida. When she arrived, she was greeted with the grim news that Chris’s organs were already shutting down by the time he reached the hospital, and he would not be able to live through the day.

Chris died at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday with his hand in Donna’s. It was a tragic death that never should have happened. Donna’s fiancé died from *vibrio vulnificus*, a bacteria that is notorious for contaminating oysters in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Indeed, it is so lethal that it usually kills within a day—even with swift, accurate diagnosis and skilled medical attention.

Why did I say earlier that Chris’s demise was a tragedy that should never have happened? Because, the Food and Drug Administration and the shellfish industry have known for almost a quarter of a century about the lethality of *vibrio*; but nothing has been done to protect the public, even though raw oysters easily can be treated in a way that protects their flavor but kills all the harmful bacteria. So why hasn’t something been done? Why are hundreds of people still allowed to *die* from *vibrio*? The shellfish industry does not want to spend a few extra dollars to make healthful treatment of oysters from the Gulf a possibility, and so they spend that money to lobby Congress; and, thus

far, their “protectors” in Congress have blocked all efforts to bring about constructive amelioration.

Donna wrote, “How many deaths are too many? A thousand? A hundred? If it’s someone you love, *one* death is too many!” That especially is true when legislative action to protect the public is so easy to do and can be so easy to implement. But for *some* of our congressional representatives, the protection of special corporate interests is of more importance than the lives of the people they represent.

Why did I share with you the heart-rending experience of Donna and Chris? I did it because most of our congressional representatives claim to be Christian people or members of a Jewish synagogue or mosque. As such, every one of them is part of an Abrahamic religion that teaches the responsibility of our “hungering and thirsting after righteousness,” that is, doing what is *right*. And all three of those religions emphasize not standing idly by when it is possible to do something positive to make a difference in our own lives as well as those of others: which means that *we*—you and I—have a responsibility to become *involved* in efforts to make our common life better. After all, isn't that what it *means* to love our neighbors as we love ourselves?

Churches, synagogues, and mosques seem to be filled with numbers of people who are happy as long as their *personal* needs are being met in their houses of worship; but doing *justice*, doing what is *right*, loving our neighbors *corporately*, not just individually, is not on their radar screen. And that, dear people, is why our *votes* count, and why our individual contributions to worthwhile causes such as CSPI—the Center for Science in the Public Interest—are of crucial importance. By the way, one of CSPI’s current Safe Food Campaigns is now involved in an effort to override the shell food industry’s highly paid lobbyists who are attempting to block any federal regulation to keep dangerously contaminated food from ever reaching the public. The public? That’s *you and me*, folks!

Maybe that beatitude of Jesus about the importance of hungering and thirsting after righteousness—for individuals *and* for the common good—is more relevant in the 21st century than any of us ever imagined!

With deep caring and abiding love,

Your pastor and friend,

John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM!

September, 2016

A Note to Our Visitors: Our fellowship ordinarily gathers on the 2nd and 4th 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, September 11 (2nd Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. WORSHIP

There are several common assumptions that seem rarely to be questioned, especially in the south: Christianity is good and helpful; and the best way to be considered a Christian is to be a member of a church. End of issue! But how *valuable* is that conventional process? And is it really following Jesus? If not, what is?

Today, our pastor will address the aforementioned questions by utilizing a frequently *overlooked* incident in the life of Jesus—one that could lead to a more vital spirituality for all of us. John's message will be entitled, tantalizingly,

“CASUAL CHRISTIANITY.” Our usual informal time for group discussion of the topic will follow worship. (Out by 12:00 noon)

Sunday, September 25 (4th Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. EDUCATION

As most of you know, we are involved in a fascinating discussion of the famous Beatitudes of Jesus—a helpful part of what has been called his Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes are a collection of guidelines to help all of us to experience a more fulfilling life. Each of our sessions is designed for people who are tired of an all-too-prevalent “casual” Christianity and want to *grow* spiritually. (Out by about 11:30 a.m.)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PLEASE REMEMBER....

As indicated in our last newsletter, our usual practice of gathering together on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month will be different in October and November. In *those* two months, we’ll be meeting on the 2nd and 3rd Sunday. In *December*, we’ll return to our usual practice of gathering on the 2nd and 4th Sunday. If you haven’t already done so, you might want to mark these dates on your calendar.