

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraph

“DANGER, CHALLENGE, AND OPPORTUNITY”

Today, it seems that no matter where I go or whom I'm with, the conversation turns inevitably to politics. Of course, that is understandable because, currently, politics dominates the news as a result of seriously disturbing events and reports over which, as individuals, none of us has any control.

I hear a multitude of expressions of profound concern—for people and for our country. Sometimes I hear anger. Occasionally I hear judgments based on premature assumptions that go a bit too far, despite the fact that all of the evidence is not yet in. From some individuals, I hear desperate attempts to defend the apparently indefensible. But, mostly, I hear comments that indicate dismay and a deep-seated desire to withdraw from the whole process.

Withdraw? What *kind* of withdrawal? The *nature* of the desire for detachment varies, but I most often have heard two expressions of a yearning for disengagement. The first is never to vote again—for *anybody*; but the second is even *more* drastic: the possibility of renouncing citizenship in this country and moving to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or elsewhere.

I can appreciate the desire for distancing when one is deeply concerned, distressed, or alarmed. I can appreciate the feeling, at times, that “I've had it”—the wish simply to *get away* from a situation that is causing pain, *especially* if it is accompanied by disgust. It is the second aspect of the “fight or flight” response that seems to be a part of all of us when we are profoundly fearful, disappointed or upset. Even married couples who deeply *love* one another can feel a need for distance from time to time. But is fight or flight always *wise*? And what about the possibility of other options?

There almost *always* is another option! Yes, I have friends that do not vote; and I understand that *most* Americans did not vote in the last national election. Moreover, I *personally* know of a few people who *have* actually moved to other countries.

But there is one thing I have noticed that characterized the conversations I've had with *all* of the hurting people I have referenced in this article. *None* of them took *spiritual* principles into consideration in their decision making! They seemed to be motivated solely by negative *emotions*. That is true despite the fact that most of them were quite actively involved in a church. Would consideration of spiritual principles have made a positive *difference* in their decision making? And, if so, what spiritual principle(s) might have been helpful?

We all encounter darkness in life. That is inevitable. But the spiritual principle that seems most relevant here is the encouragement of Jesus to let our light shine in the midst of any darkness in which we find ourselves. His advice: Whenever possible, instead of *disengaging*, *engage!* Try to make a *positive difference*: Even in the midst of a deplorable political situation, and the unfortunate reality of a seriously divided country, be *light!*

Politics and the state of the nation couldn't have been much worse for Israel in the sixth century BC. The city of Jerusalem was attacked and completely destroyed by the Babylonians. Not only that, but thousands of Jews, against their will, were forcibly removed to Babylon. The situation for them was one of *all-encompassing* darkness. All those captive Jewish people wanted to do was to disengage from that painful situation and go back home, forever leaving the darkness behind. But the prophet Jeremiah had a shocking word for them: Instead of *disengaging*, *engage*. Let your light shine *in* the darkness. Here's how Jeremiah interpreted God's will for them:

This is what the Lord...says: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters.... Increase in numbers WHERE YOU ARE...! Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city.... Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

What? Let their light shine in the city of the enemies who defeated them, destroyed their houses, and carried them off into unspeakable darkness? Yes, because if their influence could bring light into the darkness, not only their enemies but they *themselves* would benefit!

In the midst of the unfortunate animosity, hyper-partisanship, divisive rhetoric and other forms of darkness within our country, can we learn from the spiritual wisdom at our disposal? There will always be *some* darkness in *every* political party; and, recognized or unrecognized, there is at least a little darkness in every person. But, there is light within us, too; and light shining in the darkness *can* make a *difference*. However, that hopeful result will not take place if we *disengage*! My memory might be a bit hazy on this, but if I remember correctly, our Chinese friends sometimes use two important symbols when they encounter a difficult situation. One symbol stands for *challenge* and the other indicates *danger*; but when they appear *together*, they mean *opportunity*! It seems to me that the DANGER present in politics in our day (and in every era) *also* presents a CHALLENGE to each of us to let his or her light shine *in* the darkness. Instead of *disengaging*, engagement offers the exciting OPPORTUNITY of a better life for *all* of us!

Is anybody listening?

I send my love to all of you—some of the *best* listeners I know!

Fondly, your pastor and friend,
John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

June, 2017

Sunday, June 11 (2nd Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. SHARING EXPERIENCES OF “THE BEYOND”

As you may remember, our Easter celebration this year has been spread over three Sundays instead of just one. On Easter Sunday, our pastor shared with us a message entitled “THE MEANING OF EASTER: THINKING OUTSIDE ‘THE BOX’,” in which he presented biblically based information that usually is ignored in most churches—information with the power to change in a spectacular way our traditional understanding of the New Testament accounts of Resurrection.

During that message, John promised to share with us, on another Sunday, six personally experienced apparitions (sudden appearances) of deceased persons and creatures—some of which correspond to those described in biblical accounts; so on Sunday, May 28 (the 2nd Sunday of our Easter celebration), John described in vivid detail each of his own surprising experiences that seemed to point to “a reality beyond.” He then related them to biblical accounts of the appearances of Jesus after his death. John considers this as one of the most important sessions we have ever had together as a church.

Today, the *last* Sunday in our 3-part series on the Easter reality, we have reserved time for members of our fellowship to share any similar experiences that they, their families and friends have had. Of course, some people have mysterious, inexplicable experiences while others do not; but such potentially significant reports are much more

common than most people probably realize. Indeed, scientific literature is full of them—which is why churches should not ignore what we may be able to learn by investigating those accounts.

It's possible that our time together today will enable us to experience a sense of awe that can deepen our faith as well as help us to feel a more profound connection with God, with one another, and with the reality of the immense Mystery that surrounds us. So feel free to share—or simply to listen, and perhaps we *all* will be enriched! (Out by about 11:30 a.m.)

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

10:00 a.m. **WORSHIP: WE GATHER TO AFFIRM A REALITY
BEYOND OURSELVES**

All news about religion in our time is not necessarily *good* news! Today, fewer and fewer people are participants in any church. Moreover, *membership* in most main line church denominations is declining. Indeed, churches are “going out of business” permanently in unprecedented numbers. It is obvious that institutional churches and the people who still attend them need to ask some potentially painful questions. Our pastor will do so in his sermon for today as he confronts, head-on, the most important issue of all. The title of his message will be, “LET’S BE HONEST: IS CHURCH REALLY ‘WORTH IT’?”

John had planned to share the aforementioned message with us on Sunday, March 12th, but was unable to do so. The service was cancelled because of a forecast of sleet, snow, and ice accumulation. However, that seemingly unfortunate event enabled him to think more deeply about the issue, aspects of which he will share with us in worship today. As usual, the congregation will have an opportunity to “talk back” to the message in an informal discussion following worship. (Out by about 12 noon)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SOMEONE IS CELEBRATING

Of course, we would never divulge information about *who* is celebrating! So don't breathe a word about the fact that it's wonderful Jeannie Marvin who's having a birthday. And, above all, don't let anyone know that the special day is June 4th. Around here, we know how to keep secrets, right?

GUESS WHO'S GONNA "VACATE"?

Don't look now, but our pastor is going to take a little vacation! He plans to stay in North Charleston for several days and commute to Charleston to take advantage of some of their excellent Spoleto offerings. He will be leaving Columbia on the afternoon of June 1st and return on the afternoon of June 9th in order not to miss our church gathering the following Sunday.

Even if John is out of town, he says he is still your pastor; so please feel free to call him at (803) 331-9999 if you need him. Of course, if he is in a Spoleto even, he will be required to silence his cell phone, but he never turns it off! Rather, he keeps it on vibrate so he'll know if you are trying to get in touch and will be able to receive a message and return your call.

APPRECIATION

We express our appreciation to Gloria Stroud for thoughtfully furnishing coffee and refreshments for all of us who met for church on Mother's Day.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER

Dr. Carl Evans and our own Margaret Davis, both became septic and, without prompt attention in a local hospital, would have died. We also want to remember Andy Marvin who sustained a serious fall with extensive damage to his face. He received multiple stitches in an emergency room. All three of these valuable people are still recovering.

LOOKING AHEAD

Something really exciting will be happening at CCM next month. In many churches, interesting events slow to a crawl during the summer months, but not in *our* fellowship! In July, we'll be beginning something amazingly helpful that, to our knowledge, no other church *anywhere* is doing. Sound exciting? We're sure that it *will* be. However, instead of "spilling the beans" *now*, we'll keep you in suspense until the publication of our *next* newsletter. At that time, John will feature this compelling new opportunity in his pastoral article. So, dear people, please *stay tuned*. Our summer, and the months following, will be anything *but* dull. There will be no "slowing to a crawl" during the summer months here!

CCM: REDEFINING WHAT CHURCH CAN BE

*WHEREVER YOU ARE, THE DIFFERENCE
IS WORTH ANY DISTANCE!*

Our Telephone:

Senior Pastor: (803) 331-9999. Our mobile cell phone is more reliable than our landline phone, because it is on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If no one answers, it usually means that our pastor is in a meeting, in a counseling session, doing regular spiritual mentoring, or is involved in some other form of ministry; but he will return your call as soon as possible, so please be sure to leave a message.

Our Website:

CommunityChurchMidlands.com (Also .net, .info and .org)

or

CommunityChurchOfTheMidlands.com (Also .net, .info and .org)

Our Mailing Address: P.O. Box 6946, Columbia, S.C. 29260-6946

Our Location: CCM usually gathers on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month, and any changes will be noted in our monthly newsletter. Please join us at the gorgeous Seven Oaks Community Center in beautiful Seven Oaks Park, 200 Leisure Lane (between St. Andrews and Piney Grove roads, just off I-26 West). When you enter the spacious parking lot, you'll see the main entrance to our newly renovated building on your right. Once you are inside the

Reception Area, our meeting locality is on your left. For updates on our programming, to verify meeting times, to learn about changes in scheduling, or for any pastoral need, please feel free to call 331-9999, night or day.

ALWAYS, WE'RE HERE FOR YOU!