

# ***COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS***

***Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive***

## ***Pastor's Paragraphs***

### **IN SEARCH OF THAT WHICH IS MISSING**

I was shocked by the headline emblazoned across the front page of my newspaper: “Anthony Bourdain, Dead at Age 61.” The day before, I had heard only that he was found unresponsive in his hotel room. That was disconcerting, of course, but I particularly was saddened to get the further word that he had hanged himself.

Based upon Tony’s presentation of himself on all his television programs, the announcement of his tragic suicide was inscrutable, almost impossible for me to understand. Outwardly, he appeared never to be depressed. He joked with others, laughed easily and seemed always to be enjoying himself. Financially, he was quite wealthy. He was well-liked by his co-workers and adored by fans all over the world. Moreover, he was able to travel extensively, always had outstanding accommodations, and had the rare privilege of eating the finest of foods in marvelously exciting locations. In addition, he was intelligent, multitalented, and was a role model for countless numbers of individuals, many of whom, when interviewed on television, said that they always had wanted to be just like Tony. He seemed to have everything most people could ever hope for; but the issue is this: Despite *ALL* he had, *it wasn't enough*. What possibly could have been missing from his life that drove him so distressingly to end it?

Did he discover that he had an incurable disease? Was he experiencing great guilt over something unknown to us? Although more details concerning Bourdain’s situation might surface later, one commentator suggested that we probably will *never* know what vital elements were missing in his life that precipitated the decision to end it prematurely. The commentator’s assumption may be accurate; but as a regular, appreciative observer of

Tony's excellent programs, I am convinced that he, albeit unintentionally, left us some very valuable clues to what might have caused him to conclude that the marvelously storied life he lived was not enough to give him what he needed most.

What *are* those potentially helpful clues? Tony seems not to have had any *truly* fulfilling relationships. He encountered many, many people, but he seems to have connected with them only superficially, not deeply. He knew *who* each person was, but he didn't know the *person!* Not only did he not know others deeply, it appears that others didn't know *him* deeply. Not even the individuals who associated with him most frequently knew that he was struggling with *anything* that could cause him to take his life. In fact, one of them said he felt guilty that he *didn't* know.

We may as well admit it: For many of us, perfunctory social repartee can serve as a convenient cover for profound loneliness. Shallow chit-chat (so-called "cocktail party conversation") always will be limited in its ability deeply to fulfill us. Rarely, if ever, does it touch our most *profound* feelings; and the part of ourselves that remains *untouched*, even if we are not consciously aware of it, can leave us with a distressing feeling of estrangement and ineluctable loneliness.

There are other clues to the lack of meaningful connection that must have been characteristic of Tony's life. He was divorced from his first wife, separated from his second wife, lacked real intimacy with his daughter, and was shown on camera devouring an elegant, sumptuous meal in spectacular surroundings followed by his comment that it's difficult to live life eating such superlative food but not being able to *share* it with anyone. He also indicated that he recently had a tattoo placed on his lean, apparently well-conditioned body: "I am certain of nothing." Was he uncertain that anyone loved him? Was he uncertain that anyone cared about his well-being?

When we look caringly at all of the potentially valuable clues Tony left us, it appears that two important elements were missing. He (1) had nothing to believe in, and (2) he had no fulfilling community to give life meaning. Tony seems to have had a great deal in common with another extremely

gifted person: Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's description of his own life is heart-breaking: "I lie here buried alive in my loneliness." Buried alive? But why? Nietzsche's life *also* reflected two extremely important missing ingredients needed to give it significance. Like Bourdain, he was an atheist who had no loving God *and* no meaningful community—both of which, many of us have discovered, are two essentials that can help us to *avoid* feeling that we are "buried alive in loneliness," entombed in meaninglessness.

If we put *together* all of the extremely significant clues Tony left us, they seem to point inevitably to the two aforementioned missing ingredients: a God of love and a community of imperfect persons in process of *learning* to love more deeply. Isn't that what we *all* need, even if we don't yet realize it? Aren't those the two salient realities that supported Jesus in the midst of the storms of life and to which he pointed each of *us*?

Perhaps, without realizing it, Tony left us a marvelous gift: the awareness that everyone of us is a *potential* Anthony Bourdain. Consciously or unconsciously, since no human relationship is *perfect*, we all are in search of something that is missing. For life to be *truly* meaningful, *most* significant, we need a dimension that is deeper than our usual somewhat superficial, "surface" existence. If we take the teaching of *Jesus* seriously, virtually all of it is about *relationships*: a deep relationship with that which is ultimate *and* a deep connection with a community of persons for whom working toward more profoundly loving relationships is a priority. A deep relationship to that which is ultimate gives life *meaning*, and a deep connection with a community of persons working toward more profoundly loving relationships gives life a *purpose*. Together, those two realities have powerful potential to diminish loneliness and make life more fulfilling.

I am thankful that, in our own fellowship, the two aforementioned elements are at the heart of all we do, are, and hope to be. And I am thankful for the opportunity that CCM gives us to *share* them together.

If *Tony* wasn't able to have that kind of experience, perhaps our awareness of his pain at missing out on it can enable us to take the fullest possible advantage of our *own* opportunity.

I look forward to our next time together—yet *another* opportunity, to transcend unnecessary loneliness *and* to actualize our God-given potential to experience, through meaningful connection, what Jesus called “life—in *all* its fullness.”

In the meantime, please remember, always, that you mean the world to me.

Your pastor and friend,

John

# IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

*July, 2018*

*As usual, our fellowship will gather this month on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday.*

**Sunday, July 8 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Month)**

**10:00 a.m. WORSHIP GATHERING**

Almost every home has one or more Bibles somewhere in the house; but if the residents there were honest, they would have to admit that their Bible is rarely read—in fact, possibly never. Is that because the Bible is of little or no value? Most of us would disagree with that possibility. But the truth is that its contents were written two to three thousand years ago and, as is the case with *any* literature that ancient, most of us need help in order to understand, interpret correctly, and appropriate its powerfully significant insights for our time.

But never fear. Our pastor's message for today will be designed to "come to the rescue." His sermon is entitled "HOW TO READ THE BIBLE WITHOUT LOSING YOUR MIND." After hearing it, you will never again look at the Bible in the same way, and you should be able to appropriate more of the immense value contained in its pages in ways that can greatly enhance your life and relationships. Moreover, you will become acutely aware of the manner in which huge numbers of well-meaning individuals frequently *misuse* the Bible and seriously *distort* its message. So, bring a family member or some friends with you who can benefit from this exciting opportunity to deepen our spiritual journey.

Our usual Q and A time for discussion of the sermon will take place immediately following worship. (Out by about 12 noon)

## **Sunday, July 22 (4th Sunday of the Month)**

### **10:00 a.m. ENLIGHTENMENT GATHERING: APPLYING SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES TO EVERYDAY LIFE**

*(Definition of Enlightenment: Enlightenment is gaining helpful insight or deeper understanding.)*

In our *last* Enlightenment Gathering, we completed a deeply significant series of sessions in which we sought to apply powerfully moving spiritual insights to important issues that face all of us. But *this* Sunday, we'll have an opportunity to begin a completely new series that we hope can add a depth dimension to our lives.

Here at CCM, we take with radical seriousness the emphasis of Jesus on the importance of our *physical* well-being as *well* as our spiritual health. His attention to healing and wholeness was obvious and consistent, so we follow his example in underscoring God's concern for the *totality* of each person—not just *one aspect* of our welfare.

With the aforementioned emphasis in mind, our new series will focus on the all-important topic of *stress*. And we'll do so for two reasons: 1<sup>st</sup>, stress can rob us of a more qualitative life as well as shorten it, and 2<sup>nd</sup>, no one can *escape* the stressors of everyday life.

But here's the GOOD news. There are proven ways that we can make stress work *for* us—actually to *benefit* us instead of affecting us negatively. So, we'll be utilizing some valuable DVDs featuring a renowned expert, Dr. K.B. Bonura, to guide

our thinking and deepen the significance of our discussions: Also, our pastor's clinical background and doctoral level training in psychotherapy will serve as a helpful adjunct to our other important resources.

We are pleased that CCM is once again on the cutting edge of providing ways to enrich relationships and make our lives more fulfilling.

(Out by about 11:30 a.m.)

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### ***LOOKING AHEAD***

Since most of you care deeply about your spiritual journey and now carefully plan vacations, family events and other activities for times *other* than the two days on which our fellowship gathers each month, we are pleased to publish, in advance, the dates on which we'll share together *next* month. They are August 12<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>. We hope this information will be helpful.

### ***BIRTHDAY WISHES***

Four wonderful people will be celebrating their natal day this month: Frankie Stroker (7/2), Don Sayles (7/4), Sue Dillon (7/19), and Andy Marvin (7/22). We thank God for them and wish them "our best."

### ***UPDATE ON MARTI***

Marti underwent his second surgery for cancer on June 15<sup>th</sup>. On June 26<sup>th</sup>, he received good news from his pathology report. The margins on the examined tissue were clear, an indication that the remaining cancer was excised. We rejoice with him as he continues to recover nicely from what

has been an extremely difficult ordeal. We also embrace him with our love and caring upon the news that his beloved mother died on June 23<sup>rd</sup>.

# CCM:

**NURTURING A DEEPER, MORE  
*QUALITATIVE* RELATIONSHIP  
WITH GOD, SELF, AND ONE ANOTHER**

***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 Websites:**

**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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 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!***