

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraphs

THE ARTICLE I NEVER INTENDED TO WRITE

I thought I was going to write an entirely different article for our newsletter this month, but events that occurred in my life significantly altered that plan. Instead of following through on my original intention, I ended up in the emergency department and, ultimately, the cardiac unit at Providence Hospital.

Prior to my admission at Providence, I had been experiencing a palpable shortness of breath—initially when exercising on a treadmill, but later, even as I walked from my car to the house. When I reported the problem to one of my physicians, he advised me to go to a hospital emergency department immediately. However, I waited until the next day to follow his advice because I already had made an important commitment to someone that I felt I needed to honor. I'd never advise anyone *else* to make such a decision, but I'll admit that I do not always do what is in my own best interest when another person's welfare depends upon my fulfilling a previously made commitment.

But I *did* go to the emergency department at Providence the next day. When I arrived, the attending physician, upon hearing about my symptoms, said "I need to do some tests to determine whether or not you're dying." I'll have to admit that his statement elicited my attention! Many hours passed before I received the diagnosis: hypertension, coupled with a massive pulmonary embolism. "You are lucky to be alive," my physician said. "You could have dropped dead in split-second timing, and you would never have known what hit you. Another person said, "We need to begin therapeutic measures immediately. We're admitting you to the cardiac unit." Another doctor came in and tried to soften the dire nature of the earlier physician's comments, but I understood the seriousness of the situation. As the old saying goes, time was of the essence—indeed, crucial. Nevertheless, I experienced an amazing feeling of peace about all that had transpired and was transpiring. Perhaps it was the tranquility to which Jesus referred when he talked about "a peace that surpasses our ability to understand it."

I am out of the hospital now; however, I was informed that, in addition to the large embolus in one of my lungs, another was discovered in my left leg, and there could be additional clots in other areas that were not detected. The doctors placed me on medication, referred me to a hematologist and told me to see my primary care physician within one to two weeks. The hospital graciously made those two appointments for me and, on the whole, gave me excellent care until I was discharged.

Through the years, I have thought it might be interesting to stand outside a church as people were leaving a worship service and pose a question to each of them: What, if anything, did you receive from the sermon today that you intend to apply to your life during the coming week? If people's

responses were *honest*, I have the feeling that, often, there could be a lot of blank stares and very few *positive* responses!

Of course, fortunately, we are not limited to sermons for guidance. It seems that we have the potential to receive important insights that can give greater meaning to our lives by simply paying attention to various events such as unanticipated happenings that alter our lives and give us a chance to experience a stronger awareness of reality. That awareness may be of something that we already know but to which we have paid little attention. That, I think, is what occurred for *me* during my long hours in the emergency department at Providence. Lying flat on my back, with plenty of time to think, knowing that my life could be hanging in the balance, reminded me how crucial it is to take *advantage* of every opportunity to focus on that which is *most important*. After all, as we are aware, *none* of us has *forever* to do that. One day, we know not when, time *will* run out and all of our golden opportunities will cease. I was—and am—profoundly grateful for that salient reminder.

During the long hours I was in the emergency department waiting for a diagnosis, I reflected on our last time together, the occasion on which we were able to experience a continuation of the healing ministry of Jesus by learning about the latest important research on stress and how we can manage it more effectively as well as perhaps helping others to do so, as well. And I couldn't help wondering: What if that were my *last* time to share valuable time with you, *your* last opportunity to share valuable time with *me*? None of us would have *anticipated* that possibility; but, given the seriousness of the emergency physician's comment that I could die instantaneously, that last gathering of our fellowship could *indeed* have been our final opportunity to be together.

The truth is, as we know, that tomorrow is never promised to *any* of us. Actually, I feel confident that I'll be able to live somewhat longer and continue to share with you the best that I have to offer. I look forward to that; but the reality that such an opportunity will continue *forever* is, of course, an impossibility. So, my recommendation to everyone in our community of faith is this: If you feel that I have anything of value to offer to you and to our fellowship, I would suggest that you take advantage of the God-given gift to be present twice each month while we *have* the opportunity!

My recent brush with the possibility of leaving this planet and having to leave each of you whom I love and value so much helped me to be more keenly aware than ever before of the importance of taking advantage of our best and *highest* opportunities without *delay*! I am reminded of poet Robert Browning's trenchant words that can be applied wisely to our spiritual opportunities:

This could but have happened once, and we missed it, lost it forever.

It is easy to live life in the shallows and miss the God-given opportunities we have to go deeper than we may have been able to do previously, to let less important things take the *place* of that which is *much* more consequential. But a serious threat to life, ours or that of someone for whom we care, can be a wake-up call. Perhaps *my* wake-up call can be of value for *all* of us.

Our lives *always* can be fuller, more rich, more meaningful than they are now; and, thankfully, God gives us many, many chances to tap our tremendous as-yet unfulfilled potential to experience the best and the highest. So, it is my hope and my prayer that Robert Browning's incisive words, "we *missed*

it, lost it forever” may never have to be applied to *us* as we take seriously *each* of the two spiritually-oriented Sundays we have every month to experience the fullest life possible.

Although I wouldn't have thought it possible, the events I've experienced since I last saw you have helped me to love and value you and our precious but necessarily limited time together even *more* than ever before!

If you wish to ponder the implications of my wake-up call for *yourself*, I hope that the experience will be as positive for you as it was for me. May you experience grace, love, and peace on your journey. As you go your way, know that I believe in you, your potential, your marvelous promise, and your undeniable goodness.

With abiding affection,

Your pastor and friend,

John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM***August, 2018***

As usual, our fellowship will gather this month on the 2nd and 4th Sunday.

Sunday, August 12 (2nd Sunday of the Month)**10:00 a.m. ENLIGHTENMENT GATHERING**

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

At CCM, we continue the healing ministry of Jesus by taking your physical, mental and emotional welfare as seriously as we do your spiritual wellbeing; and, in that category, one of the really huge aspects of living a longer, more healthful life is knowing how to manage *stress* effectively. Last month, we had the first session in our new series on understanding and dealing with stress more *effectively*; and, judging from your comments at the conclusion of that session and during the week following it, our time together was marvelously meaningful. You indicated that what you learned was extremely helpful and exceeded all your expectations. In fact, in a private consultation with our pastor, one of you indicated that you were able to put into practice some of the basic principles we discussed when you unexpectedly experienced a very stressful family situation two days later. The comment was: "In what church other than CCM could I have picked up the tools to respond so effectively to a truly difficult situation that thoroughly shook our family?" We're glad our new series is meeting a need—already! But what we have done thus far is, of course only a beginning, only *one step* in what we hope will be a longer, even *more* fruitful journey of discovery in a comfortable, relaxed setting.

Today, in our second session, we'll be talking about happiness and unhappiness—and how we *think* about those experiences can result in frequently *unrecognized* stress. And in our third session on September 23rd, we'll be dealing with the issue of anger—ours and that of others, and how to respond to it in ways that *reduce* stress and contribute to more robust, longer and more fulfilling lives.

Please feel free to bring a friend or neighbor to our new series, to take notes if you wish when something important arrests your attention, and to share your thoughts and experiences with others in our meaningful discussions *or* just to *listen* as you learn—whichever makes you feel most comfortable. (Out by about 11:30 a.m.)

Sunday, August 26 (4th Sunday of the Month)**10:00 a.m. WORSHIP GATHERING**

We may as well admit it: Life doesn't always turn out the way we anticipate! We live in a potentially wonderful world, but it also is an *imperfect* world filled with imperfect *people*. So, what is the best way to deal with that undeniable reality? John's sermon for today will be entitled "PUNCHING HOLES IN THE DARKNESS." He hopes to offer spiritual insights that can help to fill *even* an imperfect world and less-than-perfect relationships with joy, meaning, and deeper fulfillment.

(Please Note: Our discussion of the sermon that usually follows worship will not be held today because of an important commitment our pastor has immediately after the service. Consequently, we plan to adjourn around 11:30 a.m. or before.)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHEERS!

We want to take this opportunity to wish affable Bill Stacey a very happy birthday. He will be celebrating on August 21st.

Also, *special* good wishes go to Inez Register who will be celebrating her 90th birthday on August 28th. Inez is one of three sisters, all of whom have graced our fellowship with their presence.

PRAYERS

We have learned that one of Gloria Stroud's lovely daughters, Myra, has been diagnosed with cancer. She had surgery on July 30th. Let us remember Myra, Gloria, and all their family in our prayers and hope for healing and a speedy recovery.

UNDREAMED OF POSSIBILITIES?

ABSOLUTELY!

CCM

IS HERE FOR YOU.

***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 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!