

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

***Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive***

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

### **THE *RESULT* OF EASTER: CHURCH!**

During this Easter season, of course, many people will be thinking about the resurrection of Jesus. That which they may not realize is that Paul spoke of the resurrection as a *vision* or *apparition* through which Jesus was able to communicate with his followers and to leave them with awareness of what seemed to be an impossible possibility: That Jesus not only had *survived* death, he also was able still to relate to his followers with palpable intimacy! If the claims of those early followers are true, any seemingly “impossible possibility” such as that needs to take center stage in our awareness during this important season; and, for us at CCM, it definitely will. I’ll be sharing my own *personal experience*, not hearsay, as well as my understanding of the biblical accounts, although some of those experiences may not be what you are accustomed to hearing on Easter Sunday. I hope, however, that my experience-based insights will be able to help us all move closer to penetrating what we might call the spiritual mystery to top *all* spiritual mysteries. But that is for Easter Sunday!

In *this article*, I want to address a topic that I have never heard mentioned in *any* church during the Easter season, despite its obvious importance: the fact that *Easter and the coming into being of the spiritual community we call church are inextricably linked*. It is a crucial consideration when we remember that, according to Jesus, wherever even as few as two or three people are gathered together in his name, his non-physical presence will be there to guide them. It is people in a spiritual community, Jesus said, that he

would utilize as the *primary* instrument through which his presence and influence for good in the world would continue to be experienced.

Unfortunately, the over-whelming significance of that possibility has not yet been grasped even by many folks today who claim to be his followers. There are numbers of good people who see being a vital part of the spiritual community we call church as an *elective*, something they can take or leave without any significant consequences. But is that *true*? We shall see.

During his ministry, Jesus himself demonstrated the *importance* of spiritual community by calling together twelve disciples to serve as a *model* for what we today call *church* (in Greek, “a gathering.”) Then, after his death and appearances to his followers, they seemed obviously to have recalled his words about the possibility of his being with and continuing to guide them, so spiritual communities, later called churches, were born. They were simply a continuation of the spiritual community Jesus modeled when he called together the twelve and spent his life nurturing them into *greater maturity*.

But why is that important? Although we sometimes forget, Jesus gave us the reason. He said that *the whole PURPOSE of his coming was to help us experience life in ALL of its fullness*—which means he seems to have realized that most of us *aren't* experiencing fullness of life; and frequent *missing* out on that possibility affects not only *us* but the members of our family and everyone else we encounter. Also, people who “miss out” inevitably impact *our* life and hurt *us*! But here's the problem *each* of us faces: *We may not even REALIZE that something is missing from our life.* After all, it is hard to miss that which we have not yet experienced! Despite some really *good* times, we still have moments of unhappiness and times when our relationships are not so fulfilling as we would like. So, it is of overwhelming importance that we remember this: It is those *unfulfilling* aspects of life that many of Jesus' most important teachings *address*; and it is the spiritual community we call church that keeps alive and makes available those teachings which are so vital to our *fullest* wellbeing.

The truth is that, without being aware of it, each of us *hungers* for a more fulfilling life in *some area*—or in *some relationship*. But because we rarely think of what we long for as possibility having a *spiritual* basis, a felt need can go unmet through a person's entire life unless a tragedy occurs to wake us up. Yet, *underlying* hunger *persists*, even if we choose not to talk about it. We can *miss out* on God's intention for us to experience life in much greater fullness.

But here is the *good* news, so listen carefully: Jesus said, with both compassion and assurance, "Happy, fortunate are those who (*do*) hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they *shall be filled*," they *shall*, over time, be able to experience the fullness and wellbeing that they are missing! But how? Jesus' non-physical presence in even the smallest spiritual community will be available to help *assuage* our hunger and contribute to our overall wellbeing. But *actualizing* that potential gift is up to us. However, of course, the gift of healing through spiritual community can be and is often ignored or rejected.

Jesus reminded us that our openness *to receiving* greater fullness of life easily can be demonstrated by our "asking, seeking, knocking" (faithful commitment to a helpful process of becoming) within a meaningful spiritual fellowship. So, let us hear his words once more: "Wherever even only two or three are *GATHERED TOGETHER* in my name, I (my non-physical presence) will be there" to guide them into the more meaningful life God sent me to help make possible for them.

So, when we celebrate Easter each year, it is important to remember the vital reality that Easter brought into being: The Church, the instrumentality through which we are able to become connected to a higher, more meaningful quality of life. For Jesus, it was the *primary* medium through which God has chosen to communicate with us. And the New Testament tells us that all of Jesus' earliest followers understood that and passionately reminded us of the church to which Easter gave birth. The writers pleaded:

If you care about your own wellbeing or that of others, “do not forsake the assembling (gathering) of yourselves together.” It’s the crucial medium through which, over time, we become able truly to experience God’s gift of a fuller life. During this special Easter season, may God help us to remember!

With abiding love and appreciation for each of you, I remain, gratefully,

**your pastor and friend,**

**John**

P.S.: Just last week someone told me that “*some churches are flawed.*” “I think that is not quite true,” I responded. “Actually, *ALL churches are flawed!*” Indeed, *every* human institution is flawed—and for good reason. That is because each one is made up of fallible, somewhat spiritually immature human beings such as ourselves, still in process of becoming. In this world, it would be necessary to avoid contact with *all* institutions and all *people* in order to avoid flawed individuals—hardly a practicable alternative! But Jesus seems to have understood that avoiding a *church* for that reason would make no sense. It is precisely that very entity through which our flaws (including yours and mine) are forgiven, our higher potential is nurtured, and, over time, that higher potential begins to be realized! The crucial qualification for a church is this: Make sure that the spiritual community of which you are a part is *authentic*. Look for a fellowship with pastoral leadership that has the training, experience, and *depth* lovingly to help people to get in touch with the unexplored potential already within themselves. If those significant ingredients are not there, look elsewhere. *Quickly!*

# IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

*April, 2019*

## PLEASE NOTE

*Although our usual gatherings take place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of each month, that will not be the case in April. Because Easter falls on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month this year, our gatherings in April will take place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday. Please note this change on your calendar.*

### Sunday, April 14th (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Month)

#### **10:00 a.m. CONVERSATIONS WITH OUR PASTOR**

Today, we'll have our first opportunity in 2019 to share in an informal discussion that we call Conversations with Our Pastor. *This gathering will be in celebration of Lent* and will offer an opportunity to ask our pastor any questions you might have about the death of Jesus—why it occurred and whether or not it was necessary. Did *God* want it to happen? Did God, as some people believe, *cause* it to happen (predestination)? However, any other questions about ethics, beliefs, Christian teachings, the Church, or spirituality will be welcomed. Is there anything related to Christianity that you've always wondered about but never had an opportunity to ask? Do you have doubts about something you've been taught in a church but have difficulty accepting? Most churches *never* give their people an opportunity like this. Some wouldn't dare! But in *our* fellowship, this opportunity has become a CCM distinctive! (Out between 11:30 a.m. and 12 noon, depending upon the extent of discussion)

**Sunday, April 21<sup>st</sup> (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the Month)****10:00 a.m. ANNUAL EASTER CELEBRATION**

This morning, our worship gathering will attempt to address *doubts* about the possibility of life *beyond* this life that atheists claim invalidate Christian teachings on the issue. Our pastor will share with us some important data about which even our most sophisticated atheistic friends seem to be unaware. His sermon will be entitled “THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY: HINTS OF THE HEREAFTER.” You may leave convinced that there definitely is a reality that transcends the one that we now know, an awareness that one day will make a great difference to every one of us. *So, if you know someone who has had a loved one taken away by death, please, PLEASE invite him or her (or them) to join you at CCM this Easter Sunday.* By sharing information, they are unlikely to encounter anywhere else, we’ll be sure to make the occasion one that they won’t forget. (Out by about 11:30 a.m. or **earlier**)

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## *SHARING LOVE AND CARING*

Please take time to remember in prayer the following individuals and families.

Inez Register's daughter, Gloria Jean, has been recovering from breast cancer surgery, but she has just discovered that she also has liver cancer. She and her family will be grateful for our prayerful support.

Also, please remember Gloria Stroud's daughter, Myra, who has now completed chemotherapy for breast cancer and is looking forward hopefully to living life more fully again. Let us give thanks and pray that she may experience a future filled with meaning and joy.

## *LOOKING AHEAD*

*Next* month, we'll welcome the coming of May. That always is a meaningful time for many of us because it celebrates our mothers. Mothers' Day comes this year on May 12<sup>th</sup>, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the month. At CCM, we regularly remember *both* parents as we celebrate the Festival of the Christian Home. It is an ideal time for parents and children who do not ordinarily do so to have an opportunity to worship *together*. On this special occasion, we encourage you to invite your living parents and children to join you for a memorable time of togetherness. Let them know that their presence would mean a great deal to you; and, of course, be sure to issue that invitation *early*—ideally *this week*, before you forget! They need to know that they're important to you, and that their presence would be a priceless gift. A meal together *after* church would make the day *especially* meaningful. So, let us each do *our* part to make something special *happen*!

Please let John know ahead of time about the anticipated number of your guests so we can have enough seats for them.

## **WHOEVER YOU ARE, WELCOME TO CCM!**

AS FOLLOWERS OF THE PATHWAY OF JESUS,  
WE ARE A SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP IN WHICH WE  
SEEK TO GROW IN LOVE FOR GOD, SELF, AND  
OTHER PEOPLE IN A WAY THAT AFFECTS ALL OF  
OUR RELATIONSHIPS, ACTIONS, AND DECISION  
MAKING, THEREBY HELPING TO MAKE THE WORLD  
A BETTER PLACE IN WHICH TO LIVE. WE WELCOME  
WITH OPEN ARMS, MINDS, AND HEARTS ALL WHO  
DESIRE TO CONNECT  
WITH US.



***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!***