

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraph

LUST!

When I was a professor, in addition to research, writing and teaching, I did a lot of counseling with students and faculty. Among them there were a rather large number of individuals who tried to take their Christian commitment seriously. But doing so came with a price! Many of them had emotional “baggage” that they had acquired from years of indoctrination in rigid fundamentalist churches from well-meaning but not very well-informed pastors. That baggage included abundant shame and guilt related to sexuality—a concern that numbers of them shared with me.

A recurring theme was that of *lust*. Expressed pain was related to the reported words of Jesus recorded in a passage of scripture that most individuals had difficulty squaring with some of their private thoughts and fantasies. The scripture was one in which Jesus states that if someone looks at another person to *lust* after that individual, the one doing the lusting has committed adultery in his or her heart. So, lust definitely was an important issue for Jesus and, obviously, he wanted it to be a concern for us.

But what does ‘lust’ mean? We may *think* we know, but the majority of folks have no in-depth awareness of its significance, and although I have heard lust condemned repeatedly from a number of pulpits, I have never heard an accurate explanation in any sermon of what lust *is*.

In only a couple of sentences, please allow me to give you a little helpful background information so you can better understand what the term ‘lust’ signifies. It is important to know that, in New Testament Greek, the word usually translated as ‘lust’ is *epithumia*. The root of the word is *thuo*, which refers to fire; and when *epi* is placed at the beginning of the word, it evokes the imagery of a fire that is raging out of control. So *that* is what *lust* means. It is an inner fire that is allowed to burn with no restraints.

You may be surprised to learn that, in the Bible, lust is *not* always associated with *sex*! One can have lust for money, possessions, unhealthy food, alcohol or other drugs, or just about anything else. To value or desire something that we can control is not discouraged, but if it *is* for something that can control *us*, Jesus and other biblical writers posted warning signs to help us realize that we could be “playing with fire.”

In Buddhism, desire is referred to as one of three poisons that can lead to great suffering. But in the teachings of Jesus, desire is *not* condemned; indeed, it is considered normal. It is only *out-of-control*

desire that is a concern; and that certainly is the case with Jesus's teaching about desire related to sexuality.

So, when does sexual desire *become* out-of-control lust—a fire that can burn so extensively that it consumes us and others? It begins when we have an overpowering desire to “use” another human being for our own self-gratification. It is when we are focused primarily on only a *part* of someone else's anatomy rather than on the *whole person*. It is the urge to take, to have, to use. Indeed, lust is the opposite of love, which treats every human being as sacred, seeking the highest good of the *total* individual with emphasis upon *mutual* giving and receiving. Moreover, *genuine* love is marked by continuity, and it refuses to relate to another merely as an object to satisfy one's own narcissistic desires.

Jesus seems to have considered sexual desire, not as an evil, but as a *God-given* capacity, a wonderful gift to be used for pleasure and for the perpetuation of the race. But when one's desires and actions are an expression primarily of self-gratification with little or no continuing concern and involvement for the *total* personhood of another, it has degenerated from potentially enabling love into harmful lust.

Jesus, unlike many of his misguided followers, was not asexual or anti-sexual. He simply was protecting the personhood and well-being of *both* valuable individuals from pain and pointing them to their highest potential for the most fulfilling self-realization.

So now, finally you know “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” about lust!

With abiding love for all of you, I remain, gratefully,

your pastor and friend,
John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

July, 2019

*Unless otherwise announced, all of our gatherings
Are scheduled to take place on the 2nd and
4th Sundays for the rest of the year.*

Sunday, July 14th (2nd Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. WORSHIP THROUGH VITAL SHARING: CONVERSATIONS WITH OUR PASTOR

From our inception, CCM has been a fellowship that values the importance of dialogue; and probably no church anywhere honors that opportunity more than we. Indeed, we have a cherished tradition of providing time for it in the form of a “talk-back” to the sermon almost every Sunday; and, of course, our Enlightenment sessions for personal and communal growth feature them as well.

But a few years ago, as an experiment, we added yet another opportunity for interpersonal sharing that we called *Conversations with Our Pastor*—a time when the congregation could ask questions to which John would respond. Not only did it prove to be of value to most of us, the suggestion was made that we might consider doing it more than once or twice a year. So now, we provide “sacred space” for Conversations with Our Pastor *three* times each year; and, in 2019, this is our second occasion, with a final opportunity scheduled for November.

But do these events deserve to be considered a form of *worship*? Absolutely. Persons who study the meaning and derivation of words tell us that the term ‘worship’ *originally* was ‘worthship.’ It referred to an action, event, or experience that declared the worth or value of something. So, the sharing of questions and insights related to spirituality and more meaningful living definitely would qualify, *especially* in an *ecclesiastical* setting. We are indebted to dedicated etymologists (the folks who study the origin and development in the meaning of words) for teaching us that worship is much broader and more significant than sitting in a pew and staring at the back of someone’s head in what we call a worship *service*, as valuable and vital as we hope a really good one can be.

So, with that *deeper* understanding of the meaning of worship, we can look forward to our time together to ask questions about beliefs and how to apply spiritual principles to the many issues of daily life. Enquiries about the ups and downs we all experience in life, in our human relationships, as well as queries about relevant ethical concerns are

always welcome and generally are of great interest to the group. This opportunity will be as potentially rich, vital and profoundly significant as we choose to make it by our presence, openness, and continuing thirst for deeper understanding; so *come with your questions, and they will be honored!* With the Spirit of God working in and through us, who knows what vital insights might surface?

Depending upon the extent of discussion, we plan to adjourn between 11:30 a.m. and 12 noon.

Sunday, July 28th (4th Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. HOW MINDFULNESS CAN HELP US TO DEAL WITH UNWANTED HABITS

We all have them: habits that are not helpful and, in some instances, actually can be harmful. They range from simple things such as eating unhealthfully, getting too little exercise, neglecting proper oral care, talking too much or rarely sharing, procrastination, to—well, you name it. And, of course, there are more serious threats to our wellbeing and that of others such as drinking too much, use of harmful drugs or other substances, smoking, avoiding annual complete physical examinations, getting too much or too little sleep, being overweight—and other threats to our health and longevity. Also, but frequently rarely considered, there is a tendency to neglect the quality and depth of our relationships and the issue of paying too little attention to our spiritual well-being.

When does a habit that may not be in our best interest become an addiction? And what, if anything, can we do to help ourselves too overcome or limit the potentially harmful impact of the habits or addictions with which we all, at least to *some* degree, experience?

Our session today will focus on what spiritual insights and the latest scientific research teach us about how mindfulness can contribute most helpfully to our well-being—and *even* how long we will live!

(Out between 11:30 a.m. and 12 noon)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A dear member of our spiritual family, Harriet Hancock, had an emergency medical situation that necessitated her having major surgery. The good news is that the surgery went well and she is recovering nicely. After treatment in two hospitals, Harriet is now in another facility in which she is receiving rehabilitation therapy. Since Harriet has so many friends and acquaintances, she and her family have requested that she have no visitors or telephone calls that could interrupt her sleep, therapy, and otherwise impede the progress of her recovery. Harriet and her family have kept in close touch with John during this difficult ordeal, have expressed their deep appreciation for our prayers, and send their love to each of us. Harriet says she is doing well and looks forward eagerly to seeing us again soon.

CCM:

**HELPING PEOPLE TO CONNECT
MORE DEEPLY WITH GOD,
THEMSELVES, AND
ONE ANOTHER!**

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 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!