

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS
Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

a

Pastor's Paragraph
IS FORGIVENESS REALLY IMPORTANT?

The issues that you and others bring to me seem increasingly to be about how to apply spiritual principles to everyday life. My most recent experience was a question about forgiveness. The individual who raised it said she couldn't understand how a person could forgive *everything* that happens to him or her- or even why doing so would be important. She said that she had been hurt by a comment from one of her friends whom she had called just to chat. The friend told her, "I don't have time to talk to you now." That statement hurt the caller deeply, so she decided not to have anything to do with her again. "If she calls *me*, I'll say 'I don't have time to talk to *you*;' and, before she can respond, I'll hang up."

Another person who was listening to the offended person's comments remarked, "Well, I might be able to forgive something like you experienced, and to hang up on the person if she called you back seems a little vindictive; but I don't think I could forgive an individual who killed a member of my family." Then she added, "I'm thinking of Dylan Roof, the guy who murdered the pastor and parishioners of the Emanuel Church in Charleston. How the families of those deceased loved ones could forgive such a deeply personal loss is beyond me. In my book, forgiving such a heinous crime is neither important nor necessary." There are a lot of good folks who would agree with that last statement and who feel that forgiveness is not important when faced with a monumental loss or gross injustice. So, to address the issue more broadly, I asked the two people with whom I was talking if it would be okay for me to use their comments in this newsletter article if I kept their identity confidential. Both of them gave me permission to do so because they felt that an article on the subject could be helpful to a lot of people.

So, when we experience hurtful words or actions, *especially* acts of gross injustice, is it really *important* to forgive, and if so, *why*?

One of the most startling teachings of Jesus on the importance of forgiveness is his insistence that we forgive another person 70 x 7 times. That's a seemingly ridiculous 440/ *occasions!* Since no one would go to the trouble of keeping a record of such instances, Jesus obviously was using hyperbole to emphasize the value of our *endlessly* forgiving an individual who has hurt us or someone whom we love. Endlessly? That's a "tall order," so Jesus *definitely* considered forgiveness to be *extremely* important. But why?

It appears that Jesus' deep spiritual awareness enabled him to understand that forgiveness *is* important, not just for *another's* wellbeing, but even for our *own* welfare! Some remarkable scientific research has added to our insight on that issue. So, what

can we learn from science that might help us to understand more fully the import of Jesus' seemingly extreme emphasis on forgiveness?

Scientific research has enabled us to understand that *underlying* our human *reluctance* to forgive are some deep feelings of *anger*. Many of us seem to want to avoid saying that we are angry. Instead, we say "I am deeply *hurt*, and that, of course, is true. But research tells us that always, always, *underlying* that hurt *are* understandable feelings of anger.

Of course, the *capacity* to feel anger is a God-given ability that can be extremely helpful if we use it *appropriately* by taking positive action to *resolve* a situation that gave rise to the hurt and underlying anger. If we do *not* take positive action to resolve the issue, the anger does not dissipate. Research teaches us that the tension created by unresolved anger takes up residence in our muscles and can have extremely detrimental effects on the human body. Internalized, unresolved anger can result in polymyalgia--extremely painful limbs and, over time, cardiac problems and, especially, even crippling arthritis. There also is evidence that holding a grudge can suppress the functioning of the immune system, thereby making us more vulnerable to multiple potentially serious illnesses. In all of my churches, I have known numbers of good people whose physicians diagnosed the source of their physical, mental and emotional problems as an inability or unwillingness to let go of what became *repressed* anger; consequently, without realizing why, their patients suffered *unnecessary* pain and disability. But why do I say that their suffering was unnecessary?

Enter the *importance* of forgiveness. It appears that we cannot continuously ignore spiritual wisdom without paying a price for that neglect by developing one or more physical, mental or emotional symptoms. Those symptoms can be a cry of the body to alert us to the critical significance of forgiveness. Forgiveness is important because it is not just for the offender, it is even *more* important for the *offended!* It is a way of freeing ourselves from the unnecessary suffering that we can experience from "sentencing" ourselves to carry the heavy burden of an unresolved grudge that our physical bodies are not equipped to handle without potentially serious consequences. If that is true, why is forgiving someone so *hard*, so difficult for us to do even if it is the key to our having more fulfilling lives and relationships?

The *reason* forgiveness can be hard is that, without realizing it, we may have *plateaued spiritually*. What we frequently do not realize is that *forgiveness is the highest level of loving*. It is a crucial *aspect* of what it *means* to love. So unforgiveness is a challenge in our process of spiritual becoming, the final and most advanced step toward spiritual maturity qualitative state of being that God seems to have intended for us to begin experiencing life in all its fullness.

Since Jesus is reported to have said that the whole purpose of his ministry was to *enable* us to experience a more abundant, fulfilling life, the insights from modern scientific research that I have cited seem definitely to *underscore* his spiritual wisdom on how best to deal with anger when we are hurt or "turned off" by another's apparent

insensitivity. Forgiving is never a way of *condoning* someone else's hurtful words or actions, and it has nothing at all to do with whether the other individual does or doesn't *deserve* the highest expression of loving. It has nothing at *all* to do with who or what the *other* person is. Forgiveness is about who *we* are. *That*, I think, is why Jesus thought forgiveness is so important.

As always, dear people, please remember how much I love and believe in you!

Warmly, your pastor and friend,

John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

As usual, our fellowship will gather this month on the 2nd and 4th Sunday. However, if you are a visitor who is planning to join us, we suggest that you call 331-9999 before coming so we can alert you to any unanticipated change in our announced schedule.

We look forward to seeing you!

Sunday, August 14 (2nd Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. WORSHIP GATHERING

In our newsletter last month, our pastor responded to a concern numbers of faculty, former students and church members have asked him about the biblical teaching on *lust*. Following his explanation, he concluded his article with this statement: "Jesus, unlike many of his misguided followers, was not asexual or antisexual."

A week later, one of John's friends responded to the above statement with a challenge: "You're wrong," he mused, because Jesus said, 'Blessed are the *pure in heart*', so he really *was* antisexual." Was John's friend correct? No, because, although she didn't know it, she was *misinterpreting* the biblical passage that she quoted. Of course, she was simply repeating an interpretation that she had heard many times in her church as she was growing up. That's not surprising, because Jesus' "pure in heart" passage is *frequently* misinterpreted, which has caused a great deal of pain for a lot of people. Therefore, in John's sermon this morning, he plans to help assuage some of the shame, guilt and concern many good people carry with them as a result of consistent misrepresentations of the "pure in heart" comment of Jesus. His message will be entitled. "HAS THE CHURCH MISUNDERSTOOD THE VIEWPOINT OF JESUS ON SEXUALITY?" John's answer will be yes,' and he will tell us why.

If you've ever had a sexual thought (that's all of us, of course) or have ever done *anything* sexual (that's probably all of us, too), the sermon for this Sunday is one that you won't want to miss.

As is our custom, we'll have an informal opportunity to discuss our topic for the day immediately following worship. (Out by about 12 noon)

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

10:00 a.m. EDUCATION GATHERING

As most of us know, the spiritual wisdom in our scriptures and elsewhere highlights the importance of meditation for our total well-being, individual health and longevity. So, for several months now, we have been teaching an easy-to-learn form of meditation called mindfulness. We also have presented results of the latest scientific research, along with

timeless spiritual principles that, when combined, have the power to transform our lives and relationships.

However, there are many people who settle for a life, a marriage, and friendships that are far less than maximally fulfilling, blissfully unaware that mindfulness practice could help them to have as-yet-unexperienced meaning and joy in virtually all of those areas. Despite that unfortunate fact, thousands of people *are* experiencing fuller, more healthful, and longer lives as a result of their decision to be a part of an opportunity to learn and practice mindfulness.

Today at CCM, we'll be able to see a documentary presentation of how and why mindfulness has literally gone mainstream in churches, medical centers, universities, police departments, businesses, and even major corporations. You'll be able, perhaps for the first time, to see and hear several internationally known gurus in the area of meditation, including Jon Kabat-Zin, who introduced mindfulness to the west, and Jack Kornfield, also a prolific author and teacher, as they talk about the power of meditation to impact positively our body, mind and spirit.

(Out by or before 11:30 a.m.)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHRISTMAS IN AUGUST?

There is an organization in North Carolina that celebrates Christmas in August, and it's been doing so for at least 50 years. Well, CCM will *not* be celebrating Christmas in August, but we *can* at least *talk* about our *upcoming* celebrations in December!

Our annual Christmas worship and Candlelighting Ceremony will take place on the fourth Sunday in December (the 22nd) at 10:00 a.m. Of course, traditionally, we also usually have a communal brunch at a local restaurant and ordinarily have a guest speaker. However, *this* Christmas we'll have an opportunity to celebrate in a unique way.

Trustus Theatre has scheduled a special Christmas play on the day that we usually have our brunch, so that happy decision gives us an unanticipatedly different and intriguing option. The holiday production, "Christmas at Pemberly," will take place at 3 p.m. on Sunday, December 11th. Afterward, we'll go for a bite to eat at popular Jason's Deli, just a few blocks from the theatre. Jason's is well known for its qualitative, healthful soups, sandwiches, desserts, and a large, varied salad bar. Jason's also offers unlimited free ice cream (serve yourself) after your meal. Also, the low price of the food is a drawing card for many Columbians.

Tickets for the play are \$28 per person or, for 10 or more persons, \$25 each. In addition to treating yourself, if you want to invite friends or family members, a ticket to the play would make a lovely Christmas gift without the hassle of having to look for often non-existent parking and having to deal with crowds at the malls.

But why think so *early* about this exciting new way for us to celebrate Christmas? Because, in order for us to sit *together* and to *get the best seats*, reservations have to be made *well* in advance. Also, if we want to get the group discount, all tickets need to be purchased at the same time. So, *before* our Christmas play is advertised publicly, we're "striking while the iron is hot" by making our plans early.

A sign-up sheet will be at the Welcome Table to reserve a place for ourselves and our invited guests to take advantage of this opportunity for food, fun, and fellowship. As we look forward to the holiday season, we'll be able, in addition to our usual worship opportunity, to experience a time of enjoyable entertainment at Trustus followed by a simple but delightful meal and the pleasure of good company.

FAREWELL, DEAR ONE

Goodbyes are tough. It is with great sadness that we bid farewell to Sharon Steimle, whose presence graced us all from the moment she became a part of our fellowship. Sharon died unexpectedly on Wednesday, July 17. She served, without pay, as our church secretary for a number of years. Anyone who got to know her well discovered

what a thoughtful person she was and how seriously she took her spiritual journey. A number of us were able to attend her remarkably beautiful memorial service (Sunday, July 28th) which she herself wrote in 1999. As did her presence, her memory blesses us all.

GREAT NEWS

We are delighted to report that one of the wonderful members of our fellowship, Harriet Hancock, is now at home and is recovering nicely after major surgery. Although she has had both good and challenging days, she is now able to leave the house to attend some meetings or events that interest her. After a life filled with outstanding work and remarkable achievements, Harriet continues to exemplify the truth of the maxim that you can't keep a good woman down!

CCM:
HELPING PEOPLE TO CONNECT
MORE DEEPLY WITH GOD,
THEMSELVES, 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

CommunityChurchOITheMidlands.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!