

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraph

WAS JESUS A *POLITICAL* REVOLUTIONARY?

That is an extremely important question, especially today, when our country is so fractured, in such constant turmoil, and when numbers of good folks in multiple families no longer speak to one another because of political, religious, and other differences. Since churches throughout our nation will be observing Reformation Sunday this month by thinking about what changes are needed in the church today, the topic is particularly germane. After all, far too many pulpits are silent on political issues, similar, unfortunately, to the response of pastors and church people in Nazi Germany when Jews, gays, and outspoken professors in colleges and universities were being murdered by the unconscionable acts of a godless political regime.

Just when I had no idea what to write about in my article this month, someone raised a very relevant issue: “Was Jesus ever *involved* with political concerns? How would *you* have answered that question? This article contains my own responses.

In Logion 10 of the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus is reported to have made a very thought-provoking statement: “I have cast *fire* upon the world; and, see, I am guarding it until it blazes.” Fire? Yes! You may remember that in a number of familiar biblical texts, the word *fire* is used as a symbol indicating the *presence of God*. Examples include Moses’ encounter with God at a “burning bush.” Also, you may recall an account indicating that, at night, God led his wandering people by utilizing a pillar of *fire*. In addition, it is helpful to recall that fire also is used to cleanse, to purify, to burn away dross, such as the impurities in metal. Consequently, the passage in the

Gospel of Thomas goes on to say that fire (again, God's presence) was celebrated in Isaiah's vision of a world that would be cleansed, *revolutionized*, changed for the better. "Violence will no longer be experienced within your land, wasting nor destruction within your borders.... The sun no longer will be your light by day, neither will the brightness of the moon give light to you; rather, the Lord shall be your everlasting light, ... and the days of your sorrow will come to an end (Isaiah 60:18-20). That kind of world—one in which the *Lord* is the primary source of our well-being rather than limited, non-spiritually oriented human beings, *would* be revolutionary!

Isaiah's vision of a totally *changed* world was adopted by Jesus, and he expressed it by proclaiming that the values of the kingdom of God would *revolutionize* the kingdom of this world for the better. So, he asked *his* followers to help live *into* that reality, not only by their own changed lives but by praying that God's kingdom might come *on earth* "as it is in heaven." That vision was a "threat" to every political, social and religious system in Jesus' day and continues to be in ours. The dross of everything that is not consistent with actions and relationships motivated by spiritual vision the love of God and love for one another would be *purified* by the cleansing fire of God's presence. The *goal would be the transformation of the MERELY human into the DIVINE human*, a humanity and a governmental system grounded in love for God and all other people that would be reflected in our laws (replaced by *God's* law), our courts, and every human transaction—both foreign and domestic, and in all religious, social and political actions. It would change the way that we relate even to *strangers* (foreigners in our midst), and would change radically the way we treat the poor, prisoners (the criminal justice system), as well as any person(s) whom we might perceive as an enemy.

Of course, it can be *costly* to insist on a revolutionized world in which human beings and all human actions—especially political ones—are infused with the values of the kingdom of God! *Because* that is true, it has become popular to contend that religion should be *split off* from politics, that the two of them should be confined in separate, "airtight" compartments and never

mentioned in church. So, “conveniently,” many of us Christians, from St. Augustine to the present, have avoided allowing the radical message of Jesus to cleanse the *totality* of our lives, relationships, and definitely our *political* orientation. Consequently, contrary to the teaching of Jesus, the kingdom of God has been *preempted* from coming on earth as it is in heaven, and Jesus’ dream that the *merely* human might become the *divine* human languishes in its airtight box, unfulfilled. The result: many otherwise good and caring church people, and even some ministers, continue to put secular values *above* spiritual values and *defend* politicians, religious and other leaders whose orientation is incompatible with that taught by Jesus. As Jesus said, even among *his* would-be followers, there were spiritually blind leaders and followers whose values and actions prevented the realization of a divinely revolutionized world. Although two thousand years have passed, the situation has not changed, because the church itself has not changed! In far too many “religious venues, the splitting off of politics from religion and the Church’s failure to apply spiritual values to important political issues continues to anchor us in a spiritually unfulfilling and dehumanizing status quo.

As most churches observe Reformation Sunday this month, perhaps it would be helpful to look at the degree to which we ourselves, perhaps without realizing it, have turned *our* backs on the values of the kingdom of God by giving unflinching or inordinate loyalty to a particular political party—either in the past or in the present. *Have we ever, or would we now, support a political figure who has little or no respect for or allegiance to spiritual values?* That is easy to do *if* a person, either in office or running for office, has done or stands for *secular* goals that we espouse. It is possible for *any* of us, Republican, Democrat, or whatever, to develop *spiritual amnesia* when we walk into a voting booth—no matter *how* many times we go to a church, synagogue or mosque.

But is there anything that we can do to help counteract our country’s all-too-apparent spiritual myopia? The *good* news is that there *is*! All of us probably could do a better job of responding to the call of Jesus to participate in the marvelous revolution of transforming *mere* humanity into *divine*

humanity by enabling the values of the kingdom of God to be realized more fully on earth. So, here are two simple but important suggestions.

First, by all means, *vote*. For a *serious* follower of Jesus, to choose *no* to vote is unthinkable. It is a blatant refusal to let the light of God shine *through us* to help dispel darkness. I would be less than honest if I didn't admit to you that, personally, I have never encountered an individual, in office or running for office, that I agreed with on *every issue*. At times, I have been discouraged by the people from whom I had to choose that were running—on *both* sides of the aisle! So, the only responsible thing for me to do, I felt, was to vote for “the *lesser* of the evils” and to hope for better choices next time! But to refuse to vote, thereby preventing whatever light of God within me from helping to dispel darkness in the world and to realize more fully the values of the kingdom of God in our common life simply was not in my DNA.

Finally, the only *prudent* way to vote is for us to *educate ourselves fully* on the pros and cons of current issues and *each* candidate's position on those issues—including the viewpoints of individuals who represent a political party other than our own. Our tendency, unfortunately, is to read literature and listen to or watch TV or online sources that espouse *only* a position with which we already agree! Those sources rarely, if ever, expose us to viewpoints that are *contrary* to a position that already appeals to us. Therefore, without *realizing* it, we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to make a fair and *unbiased* decision on vital issues.

So *how* might we best avoid the aforementioned bias by educating ourselves more adequately? Initially, since most candidates running for a national position have an office in Columbia, it would be helpful to call or drop by to request a printed statement of the candidate's position on all important issues. However, an even easier alternative would be to access the same information online. But most people who care enough to do that *still* do not have a fair and *unbiased* grasp of the positions of candidates in an *opposing* party. Here is where the separation of religion from politics becomes a problem.

The best possibility for *healing* the tendency to place spiritual values and political issues in separate, “airtight” compartments to keep them from positively engaging each other is to find a church in which free and open discussion of spiritual values related to *all* areas of life is not only accepted but encouraged and practiced. If you are in a fellowship in which you do not always feel free to express your opinions—religious or political—for fear of rejection by others, you are doing yourself a disservice; and your being there may be contributing substantially to *negating* the possibility that the kingdom of God might “come on earth as it is in heaven.” *Authentic* followers of Jesus do not try to muzzle people who are different than themselves or get angry because of possible differences of opinion. We should be *learning* from our *spiritually* oriented friends *instead* of listening primarily to partisan pundits! If you *remain* in a fellowship that seems to be accepting only if you agree with the majority of if you have to be careful what you say, without realizing it or admitting it, unconsciously you may be there more for *social* reasons than for *spiritual* self-realization and, as our scripture puts it, for the mutual “*building up* of one another.” So, my suggestion is to look for a fellowship that is eager to *learn* from differences, not to avoid or discourage them! So, whenever possible, by boldly announcing and living the values of the kingdom of God, so *different* from prevailing ones, Jesus was, indeed, a political revolutionary. For those of us who claim to be his followers, the only issue of great importance is, are *we*?

And, always, dear people, know that I love and believe in you—*and* your differences!

Warmly, your pastor and friend,
John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

October, 2019

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, October 13th (Second Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. WORSHIP GATHERING

This month, churches throughout the nation will be observing Reformation Sunday, and most of them will be highlighting reforms inspired by Martin Luther and aimed at the Catholic Church, changes that resulted in the establishment of Protestant churches. Of course, that was an important happening, but it took place *in the 16th century!* So, what reforms might we need *today?* What reforms would be helpful for churches in our *own* era?

Reform of churches as institutions can be valuable, and, at CCM, we have talked about *those* kinds of reforms previously. But church institutions are made up of *people*, so we may be spinning our wheels and going nowhere if we do not realize that the most valuable reform of all can be *people*-reform—reform of individuals such as each one of us! But, if that is true, how might we begin to reform, not just *institutions*, but *ourselves?*

Based upon the results of a number of surveys, the *biggest* problem that a majority of folks say they would like to reform is—you may have guessed it—how they deal with the very human emotion of *anger*; and many of them state that their

churches have not helped them with that issue nearly so much as they had hoped.

At CCM, we have benefited *somewhat*, we hope, from our pastor's *previous* sermons and educational sessions on the subject. But since we *still* tend, at times, to hurt ourselves and others and *be* hurt *by* others as a result of anger, perhaps it's time for a *new* approach that might help us to deal more *effectively* with anger. So, this Sunday, we'll have a golden opportunity to experience the possibility of our making *additional* progress. Today, we'll learn how to deal more skillfully with our own anger as well as the anger of others. That may be the most profitable and most *needed* way in which to experience *personal* reform! (Discussion will follow worship. Out by about 12:00 noon)

Sunday, October 27th (Fourth Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. ENLIGHTENMENT GATHERING

October is not *just* the month in which we observe Reformation Sunday, it *also* is the month in which many folks enjoy Halloween. Well, we won't be talking about Casper the friendly ghost today, but that doesn't mean we won't be having a *boo*-tiful time together!

Through the years, our pastor has received a number of questions about the Old Testament Story of Noah and the ark that he is supposed to have built under God's direction in order to survive a devastating worldwide flood. We are told that everyone and everything was destroyed except for Noah and the people and animals that were fortunate enough to be in his huge boat. Of course, it's a fascinating story, but can we believe it?

A great deal of scientific research and extensive scholarly investigation has taken place as a result of questions over the years from people such as ourselves; and persons who have spent much of their life looking into the matter have discovered some interesting facts that most church people do not know. So, our pastor has been able to secure a highly qualitative, scientifically based video made especially for lay people, one that can answer some of the questions which our churches usually have *not* helped us.

Following our seeing the video, *Secrets of Noah's Ark*, John will give his own perspective on what we have seen and heard. Also, comments and questions from the group will be welcome.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OUR CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

Most of you know, as a result of reading our *last* newsletter, that in addition to the traditional worship component of our Christmas celebration in December, we'll *also* be adding a *fellowship* component—a holiday play at Trustus entitled *Christmas at Pemberly*. Afterward, we'll be able to enjoy a light meal at Jason's on Gervais, a popular deli just a few blocks away from the theatre.

The play and fellowship meal will replace our usual Enlightenment gathering on Sunday, December 8th, and will take place in the afternoon at 3:00 p.m.; so—hooray! You can sleep a bit later that morning, if you wish!

A number of you have made your reservation(s) already. That's wise since, in order to get the best seats and to sit *together*, we need to reserve our places *early*. What does *early* mean? Our reservations with *Trustus* will need to be made *this month*, on the morning of October 30th. So, please sign up at church on Sunday, October 13th or 27th, or call to get your name on the list, including any guests you would like to bring, by our deadline date of Tuesday, October 29th. We'll take care of all the details for you and have your tickets waiting for you when you arrive on the day of the play. We look forward to spending this valuable holiday time *together*—one of the big “plusses” of the Christmas season. So, don't be left out!

EVELYN SINGS!

Evelyn Clary is not *just* our soprano soloist at CCM: When she is not singing in *our* worship services, she also sings at St. Martins-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church. But, as if *that* didn't keep her busy enough, she has created a “Halloween-ish” musical extravaganza entitled *Vampyr*, in which she will be featured as primary soloist. It will be presented in the Irmo High

School auditorium (6671 St. Andrews Road) at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, October 19th. If you do not have a previous commitment for that evening, Evelyn would love to see you. Tickets are \$10 each.

**CCM:
SEEKING TO
MEET THE UNACKNOWLEDGED
SPIRITUAL HUNGER
OF OUR TIMES**

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!