

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraph

WHY DON'T CHRISTIANS BELIEVE IN KARMA?

One never knows what questions or issues will surface while having lunch with the diverse constituency at Compton's Kitchen. I rarely eat alone there—for two reasons. One is that I have a variety of great friends who call regularly and want to get together for a meal. The other reason is that Compton's is quite different than most other eateries. There, people tend often to gravitate from one table to another. It is not unusual for individuals I don't even know to drop by my table to talk or even to say "May I join you?" To say that it's a "folksy" kind of place would be an understatement! One day I ended up with four persons at my table with whom I had not previously shared a meal! It was on that occasion that someone, after discovering my occupation, asked: "Why don't Christians believe in *karma*?"

Actually, despite the fact that no one ever posed that question to me before, I think it was a good one. After all, both Hinduism and Buddhism, two of our oldest world religions, believe in *karma*. But what does the term *karma* mean? It's a Sanskrit word that can mean deed, act, or fate: the effect of one's actions can have on his or her future as well as the wellbeing of others. (That is a very simplified definition because, for Hindus and Buddhists, the concept of *karma* is more complex and all-encompassing. For instance, *some* of them believe that even a butterfly's flapping its wings can have an effect worldwide. But I am limiting *my* explanation to the cause and effect on *human* actions.)

So, let me simplify by putting it this way: *Karma* is the awareness that every action we take, every word we say, every thought we think, sows a seed—has a result, makes a difference that affects ourselves *and* others. The “seeds” that we sow do not disappear. They produce fruit. It’s all about action and reaction, stimulus and response. The *importance* of that reality is this: the result of that which we do or do not do, as well as what we say or don’t say, can be either positive or negative. It also matters *how* we say something: the tone of voice, the words we choose, the degree of loudness, even the facial expression that we present. All of this is very *basic* information; but it also is extremely significant—because wars have been fought by people who have not taken it seriously; and every day, human relationships are irreparably scared or completely shattered by our *failure* to live life with the cause and effect reality at the center of our awareness.

One of the persons at our table at Compton’s voiced a common misconception about *karma*: she thought of it primarily as a system of reward and punishment. If I behave badly *now*, some great scorekeeper will make sure that I pay dearly for my actions in the future. That is a popular but erroneous understanding of *karma*. In Buddhism *and* Hinduism, there *is* no karmic recordkeeper. For them, *karma* is just an impersonal process based on a scientific principle: If I do something positive, there is likely to be a positive result. If I do something negative, there likely will be negative consequences. *Karma* is about the influence of *this* moment on the *next* moment. The basic principle is that my actions or inaction will influence the quality of my life *and* that of others. Again, there are no divine scorekeeper writing down my blunders so that I will be punished in some future life. And, again, the process is completely impersonal.

Well, how does that compare with the teaching of Jesus? Jesus did not talk about *karma*. But the basic principle *is* taught in our scriptures. The principle is that we tend to reap that which we sow. That which we do or do not do makes a difference—not *just* in the present, but in the future, as well. Early Christian writers *did* talk in terms of future punishments. They said there would be serious repercussions that they called hell or hellfire—

continuous torture by burning forever and ever! So, what can we make of *that* horrific assumption?

It is important to know that the idea of eternal punishment developed slowly over a long period of time. In Stage 1, ancient people seem to have believed that death meant *total extinction*. The person simply ceased to be, with no punishment at all.

In Stage 2, the ancient Hebrews believed that a person actually *continued* to exist in a shadowy place under the earth called *Sheol*. The place was devoid of any sense of community, awareness, or joy; but *Sheol* still generally was *not* associated with any form of punishment.

Stage 3, in which punishment after death *did* play a prominent role, did not appear until about 300 years before the birth of Jesus! The image people of that era adopted for “hell” was described by the Greek word *Gehenna*, which referred to a valley just outside of Jerusalem where fires were kept burning continuously to dispose of trash and the bodies of slain enemies whose death was considered a result of the judgment of God. Our Bibles translate *Gehenna* by the English word “hell,” and hell came to be considered a future place of unending torment for enemies of God who have died. So strong was the belief that when the New Testament was written decades after the death of Jesus, numerous warnings against ending up in hell were attributed to him.

Did Jesus *himself* actually believe, teach and warn about hell? We do not know, but there are good reasons to think that he may *not* have done so. Why? The problem is, we *know* that Jesus believed in and taught that God is a God of love who will never forsake us, so the possibility that God *would* torture anyone endlessly for *any* infraction is inconsistent with Jesus’s picture of a loving God. Moreover, it would make God *less* caring, loving and forgiving than the average *human* parent. Although, at times, every parent inevitably gets frustrated and angry with his or her children, no *sane* parent would want to *torture* his or her child forever and ever. That a God of love far greater than that of human parents would ever do so is illogical, inconceivable, and completely antithetical to the overall teaching of Jesus

concerning the character of the One whom he called by the intimate term “daddy.”

However, Jesus and all of the biblical writers seemed to believe in the most *basic* truth of *karma*: We *do* reap that which we sow. The reality of cause and effect cannot be disputed. Every *act* produces a result. That which Jesus taught and emphasized is that

Every word we say—matters!

Every action we take—matters!

Even that which we do *not* say or do matters!

Consequently, Jesus and those who understood his message taught that before we *say* anything, we need to think, will what I am about to say bring harmony and goodness into the world—or its opposite? Will what I am about to *do* build a bond of affection and give joy to myself and another, or will it produce its opposite? *Karma happens*, whether we want it to or not, so we cannot hurt another verbally or otherwise without, at the same time, hurting our self. When we reject another, *we* usually experience rejection. That *IS karma*.

So, the most *basic* truth of *karma* guides us to live and relate to one another with greater wisdom and forethought. If we *do* so, we’ll be able to live more joyful lives, free of guilt and regret.

We began by attempting to respond to someone’s question of why *Christians* don’t believe in *karma*. The truth is that whether we *believe* in it or not, we *live* it every day. The truth that the quality of one moment influences the quality of the next is verified by the result of our every word, action, and thought. Regardless of what may or may not take place in some *future* existence, it would be helpful to face the indisputable fact that we create heaven or hell for ourselves and others in *this* life. Jesus said he came that we might have a more abundant life here *and now!* May God give us the wisdom to take heed.

With abiding love for each of you, I remain, as always,

Your pastor and friend,
John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

November, 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, November 10th (Second Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. CONVERSATIONS WITH OUR PASTOR

As you know, in response to your request, we now have three opportunities for our members and friends to ask John questions about faith, doubt, ethical issues, and how we most helpfully might be able to apply spiritual wisdom to everyday life, relationships, and whatever else may be on your mind.

However, this time, we will include something new and different. The movie, *Judy*, about the life and ups and downs of Judy Garland, is playing at the Nickelodeon Theatre until November 1st. If you can, do yourself a B-I-G favor and go to see this incredible film that *surely* will be nominated for an academy award. Judy's life can teach us a great deal about how to improve our *own* relationships with one another—lessons from which *all* of us probably can profit. So, as a *part* of our time together today, John will be highlighting the frequently ignored wisdom which Judy's life exemplifies—wisdom that can help significantly to improve our marriages, friendships, relationships with children, parents, and all other human encounters, *if* we choose to take it seriously. If you care about ways in which to maximize your potential to have a better relationship with *everyone*, by all means,

don't miss this opportunity to learn how to experience greater joy and fulfillment.

Even after seeing the movie, the "hidden wisdom" we all need and that Judy missed may not be immediately apparent to every viewer. So, we'll elucidate that important information when we gather.

(If you are unable to see the film, you still can derive immense value from our time together. John will explain facets of the most relevant scenes. We plan to adjourn by about 11:30 a.m.)

Sunday, November 24th (Fourth Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. ANNUAL THANKSGIVING WORSHIP

Actually, *everything* we do at CCM is a form of worship, and your regular presence indicates the degree of openness to the possibility of experiencing God in our lives.

But, of course, some times of the year are special, and both Thanksgiving and Christmas are two of them. John will be leading us in worship today and will bring the Thanksgiving message: "GOD'S *INTENTIONAL* APPRECIATORS."

As is our custom, we do not have our usual time for discussion of the sermon following worship on Thanksgiving Sunday and Christmas Sunday. So, we anticipate that we will adjourn around 11:30 a.m. or before.

We look forward to seeing you for this special service.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PASTOR AWAY

If all goes according to schedule, John plans to take a “leaf trip” up to North Carolina to enjoy the fall colors and will be in Asheville for a few days. He plans to leave on November 3rd but will not miss any of our opportunities for worship, education, and fellowship. In fact, as announced in this newsletter, he plans to be with us, as announced, on November 10th. If you need to talk with him while he’s away, please don’t hesitate to call. His telephone number is (803) 331-9999.

CCM BIRTHDAYS

Three of our wonderful CCMers will be celebrating their natal day this month. They are Mark Fox (11/9), Evelyn Clary (11/13), and Betty Jo Sullivan (11/28). Congratulations and applause, dear ones. Please take a bow!

LOOKING AHEAD

We look forward to the coming Christmas season which, at CCM, will be celebrated by our attending a seasonal play at Trustus (*Christmas at Pimberly*) on the 2nd Sunday of December at 3:00 p.m. Afterward, we’ll journey a few blocks away to Jason’s for a bite to eat and fellowship around the table. Then, on the fourth Sunday in December, our pastor will lead us in our annual Christmas Service and Candlelighting ceremony, beginning at 10:00 a.m. We plan to adjourn by 11:30 a.m. or before. As is our custom there will be no discussion following worship on that day. We look forward to sharing this special season together.

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

WHOEVER YOU ARE, WELCOME!

**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!