

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraph

AS WE BEGIN A NEW YEAR, IS IT POSSIBLE TO DO SO WITH *HOPE*?

At our final worship gathering last year, Evelyn Clary sang a lovely and ever-popular Christmas solo, “O Holy Night.” She did it so beautifully that it is virtually impossible to imagine having a CCM Christmas service without it. The words also are beautiful, but are they *realistic*? Consider, for example, the following:

A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

Lovely indeed, but are we *really* rejoicing—filled with exuberant happiness over a life that is more fulfilling now than it was *last year*? Do we *actually* see 2020 as the dawning of what might be described poetically as a *glorious morn*—for us and the world? Thus far in 2020, has the new year really been new for *you* personally, or is it merely a replay of your old self, with the same unresolved issues and less than maximally fulfilling relationships? And *IF* little or nothing has changed for the majority of us, why might that be? After all, it was Jesus himself who told us that the purpose of his coming was *to* give us a new, more abundant life, life in all its fullness. But Jesus was realistic: he also gave us the distressing news that few of us *would* experience the satisfying, higher quality of life that he came to make possible. Again, why might that be?

The New Testament Gospel of Matthew (Chapter 14) gives us the reason, not in a statement, but in a story. In it, we're told that Jesus's disciples were in a boat in deep water. Jesus had stayed behind, so he was not with them when a tremendous storm suddenly erupted, with strong winds and high waves that threatened to overturn the small boat. Night had fallen, it was dark, and understandably, the disciples were terrified. Then, they saw what appeared to be Jesus coming toward them, walking on the water! Stunned, they thought they might be hallucinating, seeing a ghost. But Jesus immediately spoke to them calmly, "It's okay," he said. "It is I. Don't be afraid."

So, Peter called to Jesus: "Lord, if it's *really* you, tell me to come to you by walking on the water." Jesus did so. Then, Peter stepped out of the boat and found himself walking on the water toward Jesus. But soon, he became distracted by the high, churning waves, and his attention was *diverted* from his focus on Jesus. At *that* point, Peter began to *sink*. The story continues, but I have told you what may be the most important part of it—the aspect of the account that I believe gives us the answer to our earlier question: Why is it that, after 2000 years, so *few* of us experience the fullness of life that Jesus said he came to make possible.

We need to be aware that the story in Matthew is not likely to be a historical account as we think of history today. In the era in which Matthew wrote, it was a common practice for writers to compose a story (create a setting) in which an important truth was carefully embedded. The story *itself* may not be true, but the *spiritual message* in it is *powerfully* true; so, let us look for the compelling spiritual insights which the author placed *within* his fascinating story.

In Matthew's account, the storm does not stop suddenly because Jesus appeared or is said to have walked on water. Those incidents are just context or "literary containers" within which the significant spiritual truth was *placed*. The basic meaning for us is that we all encounter storm-like experiences, unexpected difficulties in life; so, the issue of importance is, how can we

successfully walk *through* the storms, the challenges we *do* encounter? In Matthew's story, Peter was on his way to doing that successfully *because* his focus was on moving in the *direction* of Jesus (who symbolized the spiritual maturity that is possible for *all* of us). It is only when Peter diverted his attention *from* Jesus to something *else* that he began to *sink*! If the spiritual of God who is Spirit is accurate, that means that *we*, at our *core*, are spiritual beings, too; and when we fail to take that seriously by placing *inordinate* time, interest, and effort in *anything* else, we, like Peter, create unnecessary problems for ourselves.

For Peter to focus *primarily* on Jesus, *who represented spiritual maturity*, was something *new* for Peter, and to do so would be new for most of us. When we replace our primary goal in life with something else, *that* is why, after 2000 years, so few of us experience the fullness of life that Jesus said God wants us to have. Just as *Peter* began to sink, we, too, sink beneath our highest God-intended potential—the reason that our new year usually is *not* really new. That, of course, is hardly good news.

But despite the aforementioned reality, is it possible to enter 2020 with a sense of *hope*? Absolutely! Jesus, in trying to help us to experience self-realization, to focus more completely on our *true* self, our spiritual *core* self, did not ask us to give up *any* appropriate interests that we may have. He said simply that the way to *genuine* newness is simply to put the development of our spiritual potential *before* all of our other interests—*if* we want to experience a truly abundant life and maximally fulfilling relationships. Then, as we make spiritual maturity our central concern, we will be living in a manner that is consistent with who, deep within, we *really* are; and the words of the Christmas song that Evelyn so beautifully shared with us will take on vibrant new meaning. Remember them?

A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

In other words, we *can* be hopeful as we experience the dawning of a new year that is *really* new, one that is more fulfilling than we could ever have imagined. *Even* in the midst of life's "storms."

Happy, happy new year, dear ones.

Please remember always, how much I love you.

Warmly, your pastor and friend,
John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

January, 2020

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, January 12th (Second Sunday of the Month)

10:00 p.m. WE WORSHIP TOGETHER

The truth is, most church members seem not to grow! Not long ago, a survey was taken of persons in various spiritual communities. A key question put to them was this: “As a result of your being in this spiritual community, in what *ways* have you grown or become more spiritually *mature* in the past three months?” Approximately 90% of them could not come up with an answer.

At CCM, we want to provide opportunities that will *enable* us all to *have* a meaningful answer to the above question. This month, we will begin a new series on the fourth Sunday of January that will help us to *know* that we are growing and to be able to say *how*!

In our worship gathering this morning, our pastor’s sermon will serve as a helpful introduction to our exciting new opportunity to grow—and to *know* we are growing! The title of John’s message will be “THE *EVOLUTION* OF FAITH,” designed to help us to see how *maturing* Christians (and other *deeply* spiritually-

oriented people) *always* grow. May God grant that we shall be among them!

A period of helpful discussion of the message will follow worship. (Out by about 12 noon)

Sunday, January 26th (Fourth Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. WE LEARN AND GROW TOGETHER

In our era, there are many challenges to faith. How ready would each of *us* be to respond meaningfully if someone were to challenge *ours*? How about a question from a friend, a neighbor, our children or grandchildren? There is a salient passage in the New Testament that reminds us, “Always be ready to give a response to anyone who requests a *reason* for the hope that is in you.” (I Peter 3:15b). Our new series, that begins today, will help you to be able to *do* that. The topic will be “Does God ‘Talk’ to Us?” We think you won’t want to miss it! (Out by about 11:30 a.m.)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A NOTE FROM JOHN

My dear people, every Christmas I am humbled by your expressions of love and caring—both verbal and monetary. Those expressions, and you, mean more to me than I can put into words. Thank you, thank you, thank you for your generosity and love. Who and what you are enrich my life beyond measure. May God continue to bless us richly as, together, we engage in the most important journey any human being can take. I feel profoundly blessed to be a fellow traveler with you!

ANOTHER NOTE

We have received a lovely card from Mary Ann and Evelyn Clary expressing appreciation for their Christmas remembrance. We, in return, thank them for the priceless gift of beautiful music that so greatly enhances our worship throughout the year.

HAPPY, HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Birthdays are really important. Why? Because a birthday is the *only* special day that celebrates each of us as an *individual*. Every other special day—Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter, for example—is shared jointly with many others. So, because *each* person is special at CCM, we joyfully share the known natal day of each of the following very special people.

Gary Davis (January 1)

Marti Fritz (January 12)

Bill Ingbretson (January 5)

Mary Ann Clary (January 28)

Thank you for being the special people that you are!

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!