

The Communicator

April 2007

April 1 (Palm Sunday):

Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
Luke 22:14-23:56

April 5 (Holy Thursday):

Exodus 12:1-14
Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

April 6 (Good Friday):

Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Psalm 22
Hebrews 10:16-25
John 18:1-19:42

April 8 (Easter Sunday):

Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
1 Corinthians 15:19-26
John 20:1-18

April 15:

Acts 5:27-32
Psalm 150
Revelation 1:4-8
John 20:19-31

April 22:

Acts 9:1-20
Psalm 30
Revelation 5:11-14
John 21:1-19

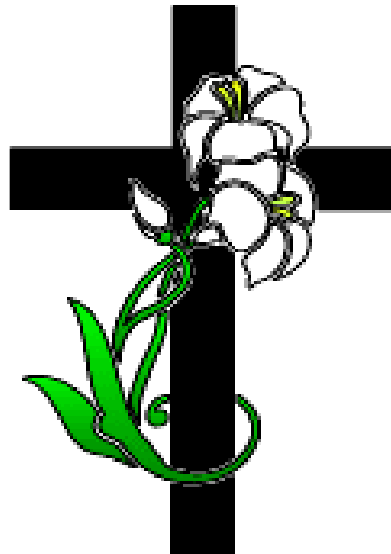
April 29:

Acts 9:36-43
Psalm 23
Revelation 7:9-17
John 10:22-30

From the Pastor's Desk

Then Jesus told his disciples, *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?* - Matthew 16:24-26

Easter is a joyous holiday with new life abounding everywhere. We always hope for a sunny day with flowers blooming both in the sanctuary and in our gardens. While the Easter bonnet may be a rarity, colorful dresses still adorn the women folk and bright shirts or ties brighten the men. Will Julia and Charlotte wear their cowboy hats or will they have



some other carefully chosen garment? For Charlotte it had better be purple. Easter as the name implies is a celebration of spring and new life. We have made it through another cold, snowy winter with broken legs, sore muscles, and sniffing noses. Now we can look forward to picnics, times on the beach, and hikes along the river.

Yet, the above passage from Matthew reminds us of a darker and more profound part of Easter. Before Jesus could experience resurrection, he had to be crucified. Before we can have new life, we must deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow him. Now that is serious business and not quite the joy we associate with Easter. Being Christmas and Easter Christians has a lot to commend itself but it isn't the Christianity of Jesus. It is a watered down, domesticated Christianity for the timid; not for the true believer. It is much easier to attend the candle light services of Christmas Eve and lily-filled services of Easter than to truly engage the living Christ who first had not only to die but also to be crucified. Which Christianity do we choose? Which Easter do we want?

Before answering that question, we must be sure we understand what Jesus is asking of us. What is it we are denying? What cross are we picking up? What does it mean to loose our life in order to save it? These are strange paradoxical words. Yet they are found not only in Matthew but also in Luke and John. They are at the heart of the Gospel. Without them, Easter is a children's picture, a superficial Hallmark card.

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The Communicator

Brighton Community United Methodist Church
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The Charles Wesley Series

by Greg White

Reverend Johnson has been feeding me various publications on Charles Wesley recently, including the latest Circuit Rider, a United Methodist periodical intended to assist clergy. This issue is entirely devoted to Charles Wesley in honor of the anniversary of his 300th birthday in March. The following is a quotation from Paul Wesley Chilcote's article entitled "Grace upon Grace: Charles Wesley as a Spiritual Mentor." As I read this I was reminded of one of our key strengths at Community UMC.

"The Wesley brothers modeled accountable discipleship and developed structures that affirmed each Christian's need of others to successfully complete the journey of faith. Charles celebrated in his hymns...mutual encouragement and genuine care for one another:

Help us to help each other, Lord,
Each other's cross to bear;
Let each his friendly aid afford,
And feel his brother's care.

Help us to build each other up,
Our little stock improve;
Increase our faith, confirm our hope,
And perfect us in love."



Pastor's Note

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Jesus did not ask of us what he would not do himself. His whole life including his horrific death is the supreme example of a person who denies himself, loses his own life, and literally picks up his cross and then gets his life back eternally. We are born with a strong selfish inclination. There is nobody more self-centered than that sweet, innocent looking baby we all adore. If that baby is not fed, changed, and held according to her self-determined schedule she will be screaming, crying, scolding and demanding. Not quite so innocent or so sweet. That baby can be found in all of us no matter what age. We never get away from seeing the world through our own eyes and wanting things our way. Even when we do the most loving act, we hope somebody notices and appreciates what we have done. Yet, that is what Jesus asks of us. Give up the self-centered approach, look at the world through the eyes of the dispossessed, the oppressed, the depressed, and seek for a kingdom that will be of more benefit for the other than for oneself. A hard job, a hard cross to bear, and, yet, that is what Jesus asks of us. Why? Simply because he loves us. Simply because that is the path to eternal life. Simply because there is no other way to Easter.

If my world revolves around myself, I will live a life of fear. I will be afraid of losing my life, my possessions being taken, of my justice being denied. With my treasure being on earth, it can easily rust, be destroyed, and just disappear. However, if my life revolves around Jesus, then I have nothing to be afraid of. Love replaces fear. I am free to care about others instead of being afraid for myself. Myself denied. My cross embraced. My life assured. And I don't mean just after I die. I mean in this life. Eternal life begins the moment you give up seeking your own kingdom and start seeking God's kingdom. The doors open up. The sun/Son comes in. Resurrection is now. Easter is here.

Holy week is a liturgical living out of this reality. By engaging and re-memorizing Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we can more easily make it ours. Easter becomes real and the joy becomes greater. I invite you to join your fellow believers, followers of Jesus, on the path to the Empty Tomb. Hope to see you on the way.

Sam Johnson

The Lent season – Grace and Trust from the Cross

by Tony Faber

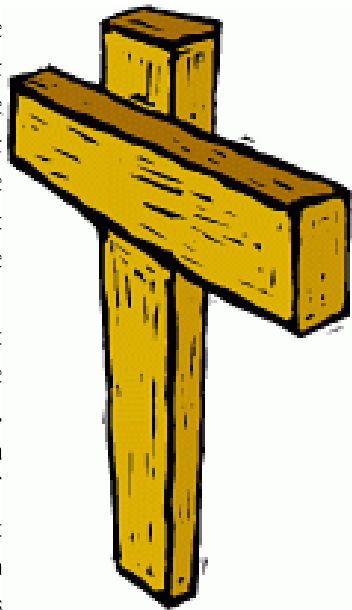
Lent for me is about the Cross, because it bleeds, literally, both Grace and Trust. Nobody wore Grace on their sleeve like Paul. When Christ appeared to him, he was a persecutor of his followers, the self-proclaimed “worst of all sinners”. Grace struck him on his way to Damascus -- it was undeniable to Paul he was on the wrong path. Through humility and faith, the answer of Grace is all around us -- in the Bible, in the world and in the reflection of the old, cracked mirror we have hanging in our bedrooms; they give the same true answer to the question – “you have been saved through grace by believing”. In his bestselling book, “Amazing Grace”, Phillip Yancey writes in 300 pages what could be summed up in one sentence. “Because God has forgiven us for all our terrible sins once and for all on the Cross we should strive to forgive everybody for every time we are wronged no matter the circumstance.” As difficult as this is for people to achieve (see “the world”), the Cross should remind us during the Lent season and on, of the Amazing Grace God has bestowed upon us.

Jesus said, “Whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein”. One of the most remarkable verses in a remarkable Book – and to me a verse of Trust. The importance of Trust that God puts on his relationship with humans is immeasurable. The willingness to sacrifice the lone son, Issac. Noah building an arc amongst the whispers and laughter. The most important question ever asked on Earth addressed to Peter and Martha and others: “Who do you say that I am?” Trusting that even as we continue to sin and give in to temptation and battle feelings of unworthiness and worthlessness in the face of our failings, God still loves us in the same magnificent way as He always has. In his amazing book, “Ruthless Trust”, Brendan Manning puts so much emphasis on this brand of Trust in God he refers to it as “a second conversion”.

I was recently watching HBO in which a “gay” cruise was being documented. Upon arrival at one

particular location, the patrons got off the boat to a protest of “Christians”. Their signs and words were undeniable; their message was that “gays” were not children of God, and they were destined for Hell --that they were not worthy of God’s love. The protestors were loud, vivacious and belligerent. The worst part was children of the couples were there. They were crying. They were hiding behind their parents. They were literally hysterical in fear. Yes, Scripture does denounce and object to homosexuality. But there is a much louder Scripture message that we are all forgiven through the Blood of Christ and are all children of God. End of conversation. Why were these protestors there then? I believe so because of a lack of Trust. And this is just one example of how lack of Trust breeds hate and pain, and ultimately can lead ourselves and others to a life away from God and trust in His love – the kind of sin John warns us against – mortal sin. “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is God’s Child”. Paul finishes John’s thought. “Yes I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now, nothing in the future, no powers, nothing above us, nothing below us... will ever be able to separate us from the love of God...”

Later that evening, one of the parents was being interviewed after the protest. Still visibly shaken, she donned a cross on her neck. She talked about the effect the protest and other public bigotry had on faith and God’s love on her and others like her, and all the children. The interviewer was asking indirectly the question we all ask ourselves at some point, “Do you believe God still loves you?” As she became teary-eyed, fumbling for words, she didn’t realize the answer was already focused on the camera, dangling just inches away from her mouth. The answer was on The Cross. And to answer the weary girl who is helped out of the abortion clinic, scared and scarred, to answer the old man on his deathbed carrying with him the guilt of greed and selfish, worldly ambition, to



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Grace and Trust, cont.

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answer the murderer on death row who lived a life almost totally devoid of love and compassion until he one day in his cell stumbled upon John 3:16, and to the woman who sat, mid-vacation, sad, hurt and confused, God points to The Cross. And it doesn't stop there. When asked how much God loves the scared girl, or the guilt-stricken man, or the death row inmate, or the interviewing woman, or me, or you, Jesus, who left His Godly position to shiver in a manger, to be spit on and deserted and mocked and humiliated and murdered, in His final moments, answered this question: He took His left arm and extended it as far as He could, and took His right arm and extended it as far as He could, and whispered down to us all, "this much my child", and had them nailed to the Cross, so we will never, ever, forget that there is no limit of His love and His Grace. Isn't that a love worthy of your Trust?

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