

The Tower

First Congregational
United Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin

LXVIII

October 16, 2011

No. 34

The Gospel Should Be Offensive

The title of this article is taken from the title of an article on the Sojourner's Magazine website. I want to share a bit of what it says.

Before Jesus was born, his mother Mary predicted that he would offend some people.... She probably didn't realize how right she would be; that in fact Jesus would offend and challenge so many people in high places that they would kill him for it....

Scripture constantly should be challenging our assumptions about our lives and every aspect of society. Transformation is needed on a personal and also a political level. Scriptural priorities shouldn't be glossed over in order to protect political ideologies and comfort zones.... As I continue on my own Christian journey, I am growing increasingly certain of one thing: if you never feel uncomfortable when you read the gospels then you aren't paying attention.

Almost 70 years ago, in Mere Christianity, C. S. Lewis said much the same thing about the specific issue of forgiveness:

Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive, as we had during the war. And then, to mention the subject at all is to be greeted with howls of anger. It is not that people think it is too high and difficult a virtue; it is that they think it hateful and contemptible. "That sort of talk makes me sick," they say.... "I wonder how you'd feel about forgiving the Gestapo if you were a Pole or a Jew."

I think these statements are closely related and true – the gospel offends our modern sensibilities about any number of things, and real forgiveness can be a very difficult challenge for us. But I think leaving those statements as they are is incomplete and potentially dangerous. Let me pose a hypothetical situation. Suppose you are the parent of a child who has been abused, molested, or hurt in some serious way. And suppose you are a Christian and take seriously your need to forgive people who have hurt you. How would you go about even trying to forgive the person who hurt your child? How would you start? How long would it take, or would it ever happen? Now suppose you read an article in a Christian magazine that you had to forgive or else, and that's all it said. Do you think that would be helpful?

It is true that the gospel easily offends our modern, secular sensibilities; but it is also true that God's grace in Jesus Christ is more powerful than our sin, and God's love is more powerful than our apathy or refusal. It is probably true that God gets exasperated at times if we refuse to forgive even the smallest, most accidental slight. But it is also certainly true that in the earlier hypothetical situation, God is with that parent and child in deep empathy, love and comfort. In fact, as Christians, we say that in the death of Jesus Christ, the Child of God, God shares the pain and misery of that hypothetical parent. I know that is a metaphorical statement, but I believe it is also a true statement. The death of God's beloved has a permanent place in God's heart, so the pain of every human being is also held close to the heart of God.

The gospel may, indeed, offend us. But God's love calls us away from being offended, and calls us toward the possibility of hope and personal transformation. How do Jesus' words about forgiveness, about wealth, about enemies, about welcoming the Prodigal, about love of God and neighbor, fit with your life?



JOIN US FOR MORNING SERVICE

Sunday, October 16, 2011
Worship at 10am in the Sanctuary
Scripture Readings:
Psalm 96, Exodus 33:12-23

Psalm 96 is a hymn in which God is the universal ruler and creator, and is praised by God's own people, all the nations, and the entire creation. The psalm would fit in well with the difficult postexilic period when it must have been important for the people to hear that God reigns, that God is more powerful than the gods, and that Israel has a responsibility toward the nations. The psalm ends with a personification: the entire creation is urged to break into an expression of exuberant joy since God is coming to judge the earth. However we need to be cautious about the verb "judge". It does not refer to a negative, destructive action. It also has nothing to do with the last judgment. In the context of this psalm it is part of God's royal task and an expression of God's ability to ensure justice and stability.

The reading from Exodus is a conversation between God and Moses. Earlier in Exodus, God establishes a special relationship with the Israelites. However the Israelites have not done the best job of keeping God as their one true God. God changes God's mind. God allows them to go to the new land, but God will not be present with them. God will send an angel. Moses, however is not happy about this change of plan. His conversation with God is pointed and he gets God to change in parts of the conversation. But the one place Moses is not successful with God is allowing him to see God 'face to face'. Even Moses wants to SEE God.

How important is it for us to put an exact face with God? What image does God hold in your mind? We are made in God's image, but what does that mean? How open are we to seeing God's face if it doesn't match our image?

Our sympathies to the family and friends of Sue Larkin. Sue died September 27.



IMAGINE - worship with a little different twist. On October 16, be sure to join us in our regular worship service to experience a service with innovative elements suggested by a number of members. You may really like some of the changes, and may not like others. And some may not seem like changes at all. Don't worry; this is just an experiment to help us IMAGINE how our worship experience might be renewed and enhanced. There will be ample opportunity for feedback after the service - what worked, what didn't, and what other changes you would like to suggest.



REACH and RENEW Church Tour On Sunday, October 16, starting at 9am from the Sanctuary, a member of the Space Utilization Committee will lead us on a tour of all the work that might be done in our building if our capital campaign is completely successful. For example, see how easy it would be to add a room for a Sunday School class simply by putting in a hallway.

FIRST CONG YOUTH

Youth Group Meeting Change! Just a reminder to all First Cong Youth (7th Gr – High School) that meeting times will now be following worship on Sunday mornings. Noon – 1:30pm. **BOUNCE** (Gr 7 & 8): first Sunday of the month/**SAGE** (Sr High): third Sunday. (no meeting in October due to CROP Walk)



Youth FOOTBALL PARKING

Just a reminder that First Cong Youth are responsible for football parking on Saturday, October 15. Shift runs from 9 – 11am. Please let Jeff Rabe know if you plan to work. Call the church office or email him at jrabe@firstcogmadison.org

ATTENTION ALL YOUTH Help is needed on Sunday, October 23, from 1-3pm to do yard work. The highest bidder at a past auction earned the Youth for 2 hours. All Youth are invited. Please contact Jeff Rabe today if you are available to help!

WAYS TO SERVE

Bread for the World and UCC Mission 1: 1,111 Letters? Advocacy for hungry and poor people is a matter of faith. We are moved by God's grace in Jesus Christ to help our neighbors—whether they are next door or on the other side of the world. We push for changes in laws and systems that enable hunger and poverty to persist.

The Outreach Committee invites you to advocate on behalf of those who are hungry by writing to our representatives in Washington. On Sunday, October 16, a table will be set up in the narthex where you may stop before and after the service to write your letters. This year members of faith communities are joining together to seek change on four fronts.

- A stronger U.S. government focus on reducing poverty.
- Clearer accountability for how U.S. aid dollars are spent and their results.
- A transformed U.S. development agency.
- U.S. aid that meets the needs and wants of local people.

In this electronic age, actual letters make an even bigger impact. At First Congregational, we will continue to write and collect letters through our denomination's Mission 1 Campaign, November 1-11: one united church on a shared mission to feed the hungry and confront food-related injustice. Can we collect 111 letters? Or 1,111? Join us in this challenge!

Madison Area CROP Walk! More loaves of bread are still needed for the Sunday, October 16 Madison Area CROP Walk! Bread can be brought in during the week or on Sunday morning. First Congregational Church also has a team ONLINE for you to join in or offer your support! Check out www.cropwalkonline.org/madisonwi and look for *FirstCongWalkers*.



The Neighbors in Need offering, which we will receive on October 23rd, supports the UCC's ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. Two-thirds of the offering is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries to fund a wide array of local and national justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects. Through UCCTakeAction.org, our national Justice and Witness Ministries office offers resources, news updates, and action alerts on a broad spectrum of justice issues. Working with members of the UCC Justice and Peace Action Network (a network of thousands of UCC justice and peace advocates), Justice and Witness continues its strong policy advocacy work on issues such as the federal budget, voting rights, immigration, health care, hate crimes, civil liberties, and environmental justice. Neighbors in Need also supports our American Indian neighbors in the UCC with one-third of the offering supporting the UCC's Council for American Indian Ministries (CAIM).

MUSICAL NOTES

You are invited to help celebrate con vivo! chamber music ensemble's tenth anniversary with a concert of quintets by Mozart and some dazzling foot work on the organ! Join us on Friday, October 28 at 7:30 in the Sanctuary. Tickets at the door for \$12/\$10 seniors and students.



The Cherub Choir will resume rehearsals this coming Sunday, October 16. The Cherub Choir meets from 11:15 AM until 11:45 AM in Room 301, and is open to all children in kindergarten through grade 6. If you have any questions, please contact Don DeBruin.

- **Would you like to**
- **save some trees,**
- copier toner, and staff
- time, with the
- advantage of receiving
- the Tower promptly
- and in **full color,**
- anywhere in the world?
- Just email Jill
- Farnsworth at
- office@firstcongmadison.org and **YOU** could be the
- **200th** person on the list for the e-Tower! (Separate
- copies can go to multiple email addresses in the
- same household.)



Church Calendar October 16-23, 2011

Sunday, October 16

9:00am Church Renewal Tour ~ S
 10:00am Sunday Worship ~ S
 10:15am Sunday School
 11:15am Cherub Choir ~ Room 301
 1:00pm CROP Walk

Monday, October 17

5:30pm Table Tennis Club ~ DR
 6:00pm Executive Council ~ FR
 8:00pm SA ~ Room 301

Tuesday, October 18

12noon Bible Conversations ~ SL
 1:30pm Worship at Oakwood
 5:15pm NA Women's ~ Room 301
 7:00pm Boy Scouts ~ DR
 7:00pm NA ~ Room 301
 7:00pm MOSES ~ C
 7:30pm con Vivo! Rehearsal ~ S
 8:30pm UW Table Tennis Club ~ DR

Wednesday, October 19

9:30am Worship Planning ~ MS
 10:30am Staff Meeting ~ MS
 5:30pm Gathering Dinner ~ DR
 6:20pm Gathering Class ~ FR
 6:30pm Coventry Ringers ~ Room 301
 7:30pm Chancel Choir ~ Chapel

Thursday, October 20

5:30pm Eating Disorders
 Support ~ Room 301
 7:00pm Madison Area
 Jugglers ~ DR
 7:30pm con Vivo! Rehearsal ~ S
 8:00pm AA ~ Room 301

Friday, October 21

5:30pm Table Tennis Club ~ DR
 5:30pm Toussaint Wedding
 Rehearsal ~ S

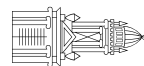
Saturday, October 22

2:30pm Toussaint Wedding ~ S

Sunday, October 23

10:00am Sunday Worship ~ S
 10:15am Sunday School
 10:15am GAS/SAGE ~ YR
 11:15am Cherub Choir
 ~ Room 301

BBQ ~ Mid High Bible Study
 Big K ~ Big Kitchen
 BOUNCE ~ Mid High Youth
 Group
 C ~ Chapel
 DR ~ Dining Room
 FIGS ~ Families Including God
 and Stuff
 FR ~ Fellowship Room
 GAS ~ Sr. High Bible Study
 LRC ~ Learning Resource Center
 MS ~ Minister's Study
 S ~ Sanctuary
 SAGE ~ Sr. High Youth Group
 SL ~ Student Lounge
 SR ~ Salad Room
 YR ~ Youth Room



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
 UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

1609 University Avenue
 608-233-9751 (phone)
 Madison, Wisconsin 53726

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Worship attendance on
 Sunday, October 9, 2011 was 190.

Staff:

Curt Anderson, Senior Minister
 Eldonna Hazen, Associate Minister
 Jerry Hancock, Director of Prison Ministry Project
 Donald J. DeBruin, Director of Music Ministries
 Jeff Rabe, Director of Christian Education for
 Children & Youth
 Rob Eagle, Bookkeeper
 Jill Farnsworth, Church Secretary
 David Krantz, Building Manager

Office Hours: 8am-12:30pm, 1:00pm-4:00pm,
 Monday -Thursday; 8am-noon Friday.

Phone: 608-233-9751

Fax: 608-233-7180

E-mail: office@firstcongmadison.org

Web Page: www.firstcongmadison.org
 Facebook.com/firstcongo

IN CASE OF EMERGENCIES: Curt Anderson's
 phone is 836-1321, Eldonna Hazen's phone number is
 241-8117 and Jerry Hancock's phone is 658-6630.

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
 U.S. POSTAGE PAID
 MADISON, WI
 PERMIT NO. 1395