

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH - June 22, 2009

The Pastor's Pen

From the book Wellsprings of Wisdom comes this story. A hospital chaplain was asked by a nurse to visit the patient in room 24. The man was dying said the nurse. The chaplain was surprised to find when he entered the room that the man was sitting up in bed reading. The chaplain introduced himself to the man as the hospital's chaplain, and the young man immediately informed the chaplain that he was in fine shape. He expected to go home the next day, and besides that he rejected religion.

The chaplain continued to chat with the young man and gently persisted in talking with the man about spiritual things. After a while the young man abandoned his pose of indifference to religion and made his peace with God.

The next day the chaplain went back to the nurse's station, and the nurse he had talked with the day before said, "The man you visited in room 34 is doing much better today." "I didn't visit the man in 34," said the chaplain. "You told me room 24, and that's the person I visited." And with that the nurse said, "How strange! The man in room 24 suddenly died last night."

Jesus said, "I am the gate for the sheep" (John 10:7). Now a gate implies entry, and that's what Jesus talked about when he used that image of him being the gate. Jesus said, "Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture" (John 10:9). Jesus is the way to life.

But prior to that Jesus had talked about others coming to the sheepfold and trying to enter by a different way, and Jesus said that those who do such are not there to bring good to the sheep. Rather they come as thieves and bandits. Those who try to enter the sheepfold by another way come only to steal, kill, or destroy Jesus said (John 10:10). They come to do harm.

And so the image of a gate implies two things. It implies entry, and it implies exclusion from entry. And the exclusion from entry is for the purpose of not allowing harm to come to the flock. Jesus as the gate opens the way to life, and Jesus as the gate keeps those away who would steal life.

Church membership is important. Church membership helps to bring us into contact with the one who is the gate, Jesus. Church membership is the avenue by which we may know the one who will give us life and the one who will secure us from that which will take life away. Church membership is not the gate, but it keeps us in touch with the one who is the gate. It keeps us in touch with the one, Jesus, who is the giver of life.

There are those in our world today, unfortunately, who look upon the church as exclusionary. They see church membership as a way for the church to exclude instead of the way the church brings people to the author of life and the giver of life. Unfortunately many of those who see church membership in this way, I fear, want to have life on their own terms. They want to gain admittance into the kingdom without surrender. They want admittance into the sheepfold without trust in the shepherd, Christ.

Jesus as the gate simply asks one thing of everyone, that we trust him. Jesus as the gate asks that we trust him as Savior and that we obey

him as our Lord, and in so doing find entry into life, find sustenance for life, and find protection from that which would take life away.

Jesus as the gate is not about exclusion. It's about opening the way to life and life more abundant. A central part of Methodism has always been that the church is open to all so that they may find life in Jesus. Methodism has always been about welcoming all to come and meet the giver of life, the Lord Jesus Christ, because we believe Christ died for all and Jesus wants to save all who will come. To see church membership in The United Methodist Church as a way of exclusion is to miss one of the primary tenets of our belief. We are Arminian and not Calvinist, and that means that we believe in "Unlimited Atonement" as opposed to the "Limited Atonement" of Calvinism.

Jesus is the gate. Jesus is the way to life, and Jesus wants to give people life. And Jesus wants to keep that life from being taken away by those who wish to do harm instead of good. This is not only something for us to think about. It is something for us to live by. It is something by which we as Methodists live and move and have our being.

Until next time, *Bro. Jim*

TUESDAY LUNCHES

June 30 is the starting date that lunch will be provided to people who participate in the Loaves and Fishes program. **Lunch will be served from 11 a.m. until 12:30 p.m., each Tuesday through the month of July. Anyone who is interested in helping cook, serve, clean up, or would like to make a dessert for a particular Tuesday, please call the church office (762-3696) or Carol Beasley (*****) and give the date you are available. We are also accepting donations to help with the cost of the lunch - please label you donation "Tuesday lunches."** Thanks so much for you help with this new ministry and please remember us with your prayers. "The king will say to those at his right hand, '...I was a stranger and you welcomed me...just as you did it to one of the least of those who are members of my family, you did it to me.'" (Matthew 25:34-35, 40)

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CHURCH PHONE TREE

As most of you know we now have our church phone tree in place (One Call Now). This is something we use to let you the church family know of any prayer concerns, announcements about upcoming events, and just general needed information. It will also be used to let you know when some event may be cancelled. The numbers used (unless otherwise requested) were the numbers listed for the church family in the directory. **If you have had a number change, or would like to be notified at another number or even your cell phone, we asked that you please notify the church office. The service is safe and does not give your telephone number out to any third party.** The way it works is that the church office calls a number and gives the message and then activates the system to call your number. The service will try until a person answers or an answering machine and then leave the message. If for any reason you miss the call or the message does not come through clearly, there is a way to retrieve you message if you choose to do so. You may call **1-877-698-3262**, and you can easily retrieve your message. We hope this service has been beneficial to you and if we do not have your number and you would like to be added, please contact the church office at 762-3696.

WITH ONE ANOTHER

David Robertson
Freddie Mae Jackson
Oscar and Agnes McCarter
Bill Evans

Scottie McMackin
Rev. Clifton Johnston
T. J. Moore
Norman Marston
Jean Cone
Gracie Henson
Scott Dean
Georgia Childress
Brian Beller
Robert White
Herman Dunkin
Vita Mae Owens
Flora Benson
Jim Weatherford
Tom Stillwell

A NOTE OF THANKS

Dear First UMC,

Thank you so much for the graduation luncheon you held! It was greatly appreciated, and the gifts were very thoughtful of you.

Caroline Boston

NURTURE & MEMBERSHIP CARE COMMITTEE MEETING

There will be a Nurture & Membership Care meeting on Tuesday, June 30, at 6:00 p.m.

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL MEETING

There will be a VBS meeting on Monday, June 29th, at 7:00 p.m. All VBS volunteers are asked to attend.

UPDATE ON OUR MISSION TEAM

The mission team made it to their destination (the Terrabonn Parish) in Houma, Louisiana on Sunday. They have been roofing this week and battling extreme heat (temps. that feel like 100 in the shade). According to Alecia's latest email, they were working a half day on Wednesday and then going on a swamp tour and a tour of the Houma area.

**I Will Be Loyal
To The United Methodist Church And
Support It With: My Presence:**

Sunday, June 21, 2009
8:15 a.m. Worship Attendance.....40
Sunday school Attendance.....78
10:30 a.m. Worship Attendance.....112

My Service: Sunday, June 28, 2009
Acolytes: tba

Loaves and Fishes: Tues. & Thurs.
Tues. June 30 Loulie Brown, Jean Grimsley, Anita Marston & Jerry Gibbs
Thurs. July 02 Joan Cochran, Joyce Holmes & Jerry Gibbs

AN INVITATION

Everyone is invited to attend the Liberty Festival Church Service which will take place at

