



BROADVIEW COMMUNITY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

STEEPLE NEWS

325 N. 125TH ST., SEATTLE WA 98133
206-363-8060, FAX: 206-363-4791
HTTP://WWW.BROADVIEWUCC.ORG

Steeple News
Volume 4: Issue 3
April 2008
Edited by Mary Mackenzie

EXCERPTS FROM A RECENT EASTER SEASON SERMON ON DOUBT, FORGIVENESS, AND FAITHFULNESS

by Dan Stern

At the time of those early resurrection appearances of Jesus, I'm pretty sure that the absent so-called "doubting" Thomas didn't so much doubt the *facts* of the matter as he did long to participate in the *experience*. Thomas didn't just want to *believe* in the resurrection; he wanted to *see* it, *feel* it, *touch* it, and *experience* it. And good for him! Because that's pretty much what *we* want and need today too! "What is critical for the contemporary church," says Sean Gilbert, "Is not a pure and watertight belief system, but a radically open heart and mind. ... The *faithlessness* Jesus admonished Thomas for had more to do with his need to be certain and 'right' in himself than it had to do with a genuinely (questioning or) searching (kind of) faith."

Recently I went to hear writer and journalist Chris Hedges at Town Hall, speaking about his new book, *I Don't Believe in Atheists*. The title's been widely misunderstood. He means it not as a put-down of all atheists (though he brilliantly critiques some of them) but rather, in a tongue in cheek way, he means to suggest that everyone, for better or for worse, believes in something. Let's not kid ourselves, he seems to be saying. Human beings are constituted to *believe* things, and based on beliefs in one thing or another, sometimes in the name of God, sometimes not, we do both wonderful and absolutely terrible things. Several of the so-called "new atheists" for example, are major proponents of both the current war in Iraq and in the threatened one with Iran as well—basically because they've so demonized all forms of Islamic religious faith. Some make similar generalizations about "all Christians". But we who lay claim to Christian discipleship don't, as a whole, have much to brag about either. We too become afraid, lay blame on others, get led into unjustifiable wars, and betray our best faith values.

One thing that is very telling is this: when Jesus makes his first post-resurrection appearance to his first disciples, they'd pretended they didn't know him; they'd run away when he was dying; they'd hid out when he was arrested, and now still, here they were, frightened and hiding. They knew themselves to be cowards, and were feeling deeply, deeply ashamed of themselves.

We may or may not realize and admit it, but we've all been there. At times, we've all been frightened. At times, we've run away. At times, we've all been cowards. At times, we've been, sometimes for very good reasons, ashamed of ourselves. But when Jesus appears to them (and, by extension, to us), he doesn't say, "Hey, what happened? Where were you? You screwed up." He says, "Peace be with you." And that's the reason we say that too, and mean it, every time anyone enters this sanctuary. "No matter who you are, no matter where you are in life's journey, no matter what you've done or think you've done, whoever you have betrayed or let down, no matter how far you have gone from God, from Jesus, Jesus doesn't say to you, "Where were you? You screwed up." Jesus greets you saying, "Peace." You are not accused, you are invited. You are welcome here. (Paragraph based on UCC God is Still Speaking slogan & Sojourners commentary on it.)

This kind of open-spirited welcome continues to be so very much needed in our world. It is perhaps the most significant announcement we at Broadview Church need to keep making. So we'll keep making it – with newcomer inquiry groups with children and youth in faith formation, and with a brand new high-tech sign out front helping us to more effectively announce our welcome and succinctly proclaim our identity to the wider community. Why? Because announcing and embodying that identity of ours is our common life's calling – we are to be a truly welcoming, all-forgiving, spiritually-nourishing presence in the lives of people who have been afraid, ashamed, oppressed, and put down.

continued on pg. 2

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PG. #
Excerpts from a Recent Easter Sermon	1-2
Obama Deserves Praise...	2
Open Letter to Rev. John Thomas	2-3
On Obama, Rev. Wright by Rev. Mike Denton	3-4
Note from Judy Zibbell	4
Jokes	4, 5
Readings April/May	5
Birthday List April/May	5
Sharehouse April/May	5

continued from pg. 1

Even now, Jesus is forgiving us, breathing on us anew, and calling us to go forth and also forgive – to blame no more – neither others nor ourselves, but rather, to lay claim to something far more wonderful than cynicism and nihilism. “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

“May we, O God, by grace believe
And thus the risen Christ receive,
Whose raw imprinted palms reach out
And beacons Thomas from his doubt.”

OBAMA DESERVES PRAISE FOR STANDING BY PASTOR (Excerpted from Saturday PI Column Sat. Mar. 29)
by Anthony B. Robinson

Some have said the question to come out of the story of Barack Obama and Pastor Jeremiah Wright is, “When do you leave your church?”

I’m not so sure that’s the right question. How about, When do you change the channel? Somehow I don’t think Fox News, whose project this is, just suddenly took an interest in a black preacher from the South Side of Chicago. Obama is the target. Politics is the agenda. Fox seems more in business of creating “news” than reporting it.

...I think it’s tacky that from 36 years, or 207,792 minutes, of Wright’s preaching, Fox has extracted a sample that amounts to 0.000012 percent of the whole and gone wild.

Should Obama have exited Trinity Church in protest when, after 9/11, Wright charged that “America’s chickens are coming home to roost?”

Sounds like what the Bible calls a prophet. Biblical prophets...were according to Old Testament Scholar Walter Brueggemann, preachers who “regularly exposed the failures of a society in savage rhetoric.”

...The Bible’s Jeremiah told his people their end was coming for sure on account of their unfaithfulness and injustice.

The mark of the true prophet is that they bring God’s judgment on their own nation and their own people. They tell us things about us that we don’t want to hear. False prophets, there were plenty of those back then, too, tend to specialize either in sunny optimism or attacking our enemies and naming scapegoats.

Just so, Jeremiah Wright indicts his own nation, America. Beyond that, he challenges his own people, calling African-Americans to be self-reliant. Though Trinity welcomes whites (I’ve experienced that welcome) and counts whites in its membership, the agenda in South Side Chicago is black uplift.

But when do you bail on your pastor or church? Judging from the recent Pew survey that shows Americans switching churches like they change shoes, you head for the door

whenever you hear something that doesn’t suit you. but not everyone operates that way.

There’s more to a person’s relationship with their pastor than one or two sermons. Recently deceased preacher—and prophet—William Sloane Coffin told the story of a politically conservative friend who suggested that Coffin should meet his pastor. So Coffin went to worship with his friend and heard a sermon that could only be characterized as theologically and politically liberal.

“Why would you stay in such a church with such a preacher?” Coffin asked.

The man answered, “This pastor held my wife’s hand in the last 24 hours of my wife’s life and then he held my hand in the 24 hours that followed her death. I’d come to hear him preach if he just read the Yellow Pages.”

Rather than condemning Obama, we might want to admire him for not dropping his old pastor and friend like a hot potato when it got difficult. We might want to admire a pastor who, in Brueggemann’s words, knows about “God’s passion for truth-telling in risky places.”

NOTE: If you would like a copy of the NY Times full page ad about the UCC being a diverse, welcoming church you may visit the national UCC website: www.ucc.org, or pick up a copy in the Narthex here at BCUCC.

OPEN LETTER TO REV. JOHN THOMAS

The following is Pastor Dan’s recent letter to our UCC general minister and president, Rev John Thomas (who was with us here for our 75th Anniversary a few years ago, and who has been much attacked recently for defending Barak Obama’s home congregation, Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, and its vocal long-time pastor, Jeremiah Wright). Rev Thomas’ reply follows after.

Dear Rev Thomas (open letter),

Thank you so much for your very personal message of blessing for Holy Week. May I offer back my own meager words to express my high regard for you, and for all the ways you work for the good of our beloved church and the wider world. You have so often been an inspiration to me and to many others who I speak with each week- though we don’t say it directly to you nearly often enough.

I can’t pretend to know what its like to feel all the ‘barbs of outrageous fortune’ that may get hurled your way, not to mention, given your prominent official position with our gutsy denomination, what complicated administrative tasks may put the squeeze on keeping one’s daily life centered and in balance. But I do hope you know that many of us out in the hinterlands not only appreciate you, but feel deepy grateful and full of profound respect. I hope and pray you’ll not fall victim to

continued on pg. 3

continued from pg. 2

discouragement or despair, and that you'll feel motivated in your call to continue to prophetically lead among us.

Prayers also for your son, deployed with his National Guard unit to Afghanistan, your 93-year-old mother, your care-giver sister, and, of course, for you.

Rev Dan Stern, pastor,
Broadview Community UCC, Seattle

Dan: Thank you very much for your kind and encouraging note. I trust the good folk at Broadview, along with you, will have a blessed Easter. John

John H. Thomas,
General Minister and President,
United Church of Christ
700 Prospect Ave. Cleveland, OH 44115

ON OBAMA, JEREMIAH WRIGHT, THE IRS AND THE UCC: EDITED NOTES FROM OUR PACIFIC N.W. CONFERENCE MINISTER, MIKE DENTON

Hey there sisters and brothers!

Greetings in the name of that one called Jesus Christ who was persecuted, executed and then surprised us all!

Well, isn't this an interesting time to be a part of the United Church of Christ...OK, this is going to be a long letter.

Within the last couple of weeks, we've been in the center of a bit of a media storm. Between the announcement from the IRS that our tax exempt status was being investigated and the criticism of Barak Obama's (now retired) pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, more and more people are asking about who we are, what we believe and how we live out our faith. I know that, for many of you, this has lead to conversations with friends and family that, from what I'm hearing, have been equally challenging and supportive. I wanted to throw out at least a few ideas and opinions for you that I hope are helpful. Just to be clear, this is one of those moments that I'm going to be speaking to the church and not for the church. Some of you may agree with me and some of you may disagree. Great. Let's keep talking.

I think we have to be really clear that the attention we've been getting is really not primarily or just about The United Church of Christ. The IRS has stepped up their investigations of religious organizations over all. Although I think it is interesting that the IRS really began to investigate churches at the point when progressive churches began to speak out, they're not just investigating progressive churches right now but more conservative churches too.

After hearing from our legal counsel and listening to the conversations, I'm confident that everything the UCC did was legal. We consulted with counsel a whole lot before Synod and were convinced *before* Synod that we were within legal

guidelines. We invited the man to speak to the church he's been a member of for the last 20 years about the connection between public service and faith. He did. Within that speech, did he talk about his commitments to policy change? Yes, but it was within the context of talking about how his *faith* influences him to act. Did he mention that he was a candidate for president? Sure, but he wasn't asking for our votes. It was a continuing part of the story about how his faith inspired him to act. It was a testimony by a politician not a candidating speech by a politician. Were there Obama supporters outside on the sidewalk? Yes, but we didn't invite them to be there. They showed up on public space as is well within their rights.

However, the *way* this story about the IRS investigation and this speech has been covered and promoted is whole different thing. Although the IRS investigation may not be intentionally political, a whole lot of the coverage clearly has been and the same is true of the speech itself. The IRS investigation has been used as part of a campaign against a political candidate and our denomination has been painted with a broad brush that ignores nuance because these attacks aren't really attacks on us or an attempt to learn more about us. These attacks are to discredit a presidential candidate. The speech itself has been downloaded off of our national site (www.ucc.org) and used both by folks who oppose this candidate *and* those who support him. We invited Barak Obama to give a non-political speech but the speech, and now, the IRS investigation has been used as a political football. The UCC itself was not engaging in partisan politics.

The same is true of the attacks on The Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright and Trinity UCC. These are really attacks focused on Barak Obama more than they are attacks on Trinity, Rev. Wright or the UCC. The UCC is suffering from an attack by association and the long tradition of confrontive, prophetic preaching in the African-American church is being attacked, as well. This attack is clearly an attempt to divide Christians of different traditions for means that are purely political. Don't be fooled that this is really about the UCC. Our identity, theology and practice made these attacks possible but they are not really the *reasons* for this round of attacks.

Friends, as most of you know, before coming here I worked as Association Co-Minister of the Chicago Metropolitan Association of the Illinois Conference of the UCC and Trinity was one of the churches of this region. I can tell you, from my own experience, that Rev. Wright is a great pastor and Trinity is a great church with a prophetic, relevant and faithful ministry. Were they controversial? You bet. Were they challenging? Always, both to those within and outside their ministries. Were they predominantly African-American? Yes but not *exclusively* and I never heard from anyone of any race who suggested that they received anything but a warm welcome. (And, um, by the way, what about all these all white churches of ours throughout this predominantly white

continued on pg. 4

continued from pg. 3

denomination and the US church? There are some critiques we *need* to hear as we deal with the fact that some churches have emerged because their racial/ethnic identity and practice was not welcomed in white contexts.) Was Rev. Wright outspoken? Wonderfully and beautifully so and I recognized that there were ways he could say things in his context that I could not. Did I always agree with everything he said or the way he said it? No but I respect his clear right to the freedom of the pulpit we celebrate within the UCC and appreciate his uncompromising willingness to say what he believes to be true without rhetorical compromise. What he says is frequently difficult to hear but frequently important to hear.

I really do believe that this particular moment will ultimately be part of this broader turning point moment for the UCC that began with the refusal of two of the major news networks to broadcast our Still Speaking commercial several years ago. Between the time that news story reintroduced the world to us and now, the recognition of our denomination has only increased. For my entire life, I was part of this mainline church of ours that was decreasing in relevance and losing ground to a voice of Christianity that has less and less a connection to the loving, liberating Christ I was introduced to and gave my life to. Suddenly, glaringly and, some days, painfully that's changed. I'm part of a church, now, that's increasing in relevance and lifting up the Christ I know that both comforts the afflicted and, sometimes, afflicts the comfortable.

I found the UCC at a point in my own life when I wondered if I had a home within *any* church. I was finding it to be difficult to faithful to Christ and support a denomination at the same time. Too often, I found myself embarrassed, ashamed and saddened. When I found the UCC, I found a place where I could both be faithful and support the denomination at the same time. I found a community and I found a new spiritual home. Many of us could tell a similar story and, sisters and brothers, that is *exactly* the right moment to tell it.

Peace,

Mike [Denton]

EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER FROM JUDY ZIBBELL
(Southern California)

Hello, Hello,

I am excited about my new venture in life in San Diego. Everyone is both friendly and helpful. I can hardly believe it. The only thing that concerns me is San Diego seems a bit too conservative politically. I already have located a Jewish temple to visit this Friday night and I have a feeling that will work out. It only has 100 members so it's nice and cozy. Tomorrow, I am going to Balboa Park where I will apply to volunteer at the Museum of Photography and Film. (Gift shop or Docent) I have already called St. Vincent de Paul's regarding feeding the homeless. I will take the coaster into downtown and then #7 bus to Balboa Park. Once I find a place I liked, (I could use a

prayer) I can hopefully return to playing tennis. The active older adults also have many trips a week which sound like fun.

Warm Regards, Judy

JOKE

I FELL INTO A PIT AND I COULDN'T GET OUT...

submitted by Alma Turner

A SUBJECTIVE PERSON came along and said:

"I feel for you down there."

AN OBJECTIVE PERSON came along and said:

"It's logical that someone would fall down there."

A CHRISTIAN SCIENTIST came along and said:

"You only think that you are in the pit."

A PHARISEE said:

"Only a bad person would fall in a pit."

A FUNDAMENTALIST said:

"You deserve your pit."

AN EVANGELICAL said:

"If you adopted the right attitude you could be content in that pit."

BUDDHA said:

"Your pit is only a state of mind."

A HINDU said:

"This pit is for purging you making you more perfect."

CONFUCIUS said:

"If you would have listened to me, you would never have fallen into that pit."

A NEW AGER said:

"Maybe you should network with some other pit dwellers."

AN EVOLUTIONIST said:

"You are a rejected mutant destined to be removed from the evolutionary cycle. You are going to die in the pit so you do not produce inferior pit-falling offspring."

A SELF-PITYING PERSON said:

"You haven't seen anything until you've seen my pit."

A FAMILY MEMBER said:

"I don't like you being down there in that pit."

A NEWS REPORTER said:

"Could I have the exclusive story on your pit?"

AN IRS MAN said:

"Have you paid your taxes on that pit?"

A COUNTY INSPECTOR said:

"Do you have a permit for that pit?"

A REALIST said: "That's a pit."

AN IDEALIST said: "The world shouldn't have pits."

AN OPTIMIST said: "Things could be worse."

A PESSIMIST said: "Things will get worse."

A PSYCHOLOGIST said: "How do you feel about your pit?"

A MEDICAL DOCTOR said:

"That pit is not healthy for you. Take these pills until your pit is gone."

JESUS, SEEING ME, TOOK ME BY THE HAND AND LIFTED ME OUT OF THE PIT.

SUNDAY READINGS APRIL/MAY

APRIL

April 6, 2008

3rd Sunday of Easter

Risen Indeed

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19

1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

April 13, 2008

4th Sunday of Easter

Life Abundant

Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23

1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10

April 20, 2008

5th Sunday of Easter

A Place With God

Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

April 27, 2008

6th Sunday of Easter

Spirited Love

Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:8-20

1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

MAY

May 4, 2008

7th Sunday of Easter

Community of Prayer

Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35

1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

May 11, 2008

Pentecost Sunday

Life-giving Spirit

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:22-34, 35b

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 20:19-23

May 18, 2008

Trinity Sunday

Creation Continues

Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8

2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

May 25, 2008

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Seeking God's Way

Isaiah 49:8-16a; Psalm 131

1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 6:24-34

BIRTHDAY LIST APRIL/MAY

APRIL

Jackson Witmer	4/3
Marc Hoffman	4/4
Karen Aubin	4/8
Eli Bloch-Garcia	4/23
Deb Schumacher	4/23
Andy Studyvin	4/25
Gisele Weiderheim	4/30

MAY

Jane Witmer	5/2
Terri Toennesen	5/2
Donna Zion	5/2
Amy English	5/4
Melody Gowen	5/10
Ruth Allyn	5/18
Bonnie Thompson	5/20
Rose Bailey	5/26
Patty Haskell	5/31
Carrie Hylander	5/31
Jerry Watson	5/31

SHAREHOUSE APRIL/MAY

Sharehouse is collected on the 2nd Sunday of every month. Please contact Lin Takahashi for more information.

April – Shampoo and conditioner

May – Deodorant and bar soap

JOKE

Tournament Weather

Our pastor, an avid golfer, was once taking part in a local tournament. As he was preparing to tee off, the organizer of the tournament approached him and pointed to the dark, threatening storm clouds which were gathering. "Preacher," the organizer said, "I trust you'll see to it that the weather won't turn bad on us."

Our pastor shook his head. "Sorry," he replied. "I'm in sales, not management!"

broadview community
United Church of Christ

325 N. 125th St.
Seattle, WA 98155

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SEATTLE WA
PERMIT NO. 602