



STEEPLE NEWS

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Steeple News
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Edited by Mary Mackenzie

EARTH-FRIENDLY CONVERSION from a recent sermon by Pastor Dan Stern based on Acts 9:1-9

This year, two of my very favorite parts of the Bible are being featured as the recommended readings for the church – the Gospel of Luke and the Books of Acts. Although Luke and Acts are divided chronologically in the New Testament by the Gospel of John, they were written by the same person – the apostle known to us as Luke; and the two parts – the Gospel of Luke and The Acts of the Apostles – really do belong together as one continuing narrative.

In my young adult days, I could really relate to the Book of Acts. It seemed a most exciting adventure story. But more – at the time in my life, I was very earnestly trying, with others, to embody what I still today think are the basic values of Jesus’ lifestyle – to live simply, to live together, to live peacefully. Peacefully, simply, together – these ways sum up the way that Jesus taught us to live. And the very early church really did live that way. It’s perhaps most clearly described at the end of the 2nd chapter of the Book of Acts, where it refers to the early church as having had ‘all things in common’. It seemed clear to me in my young adult days that this meant we were supposed to live communally, and we more or less did. And we spoke out rather strongly for peace; and we lived as simply as we knew how, and we shared what wealth we had with each other, and with the poor, refusing to share the part we were expected to give to Uncle Sam to pay for war. We didn’t have much, because we earned our way doing farm labor; we lived together in temporary housing for farm workers; we read aloud to each other at night from scripture or from theologians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer instead of watching TV, we didn’t have TVs, and we often traveled by thumb or by boxcar, spending virtually nothing.

We related strongly to the life-transforming, counter-cultural stories contained in The Book of Acts. These stories tell us of Christianity’s early counter-cultural origins.

One powerful conversion story to this counter-cultural way (Acts 9) tells of a most horrific persecutor, Saul. Portrayed almost like a Guantanamo-style mercenary who

tortured these early followers of The Way, Saul is, for three days, struck blind by the light of God. And a voice tells him to stop persecuting these people, to realize their way could be his way. He emerges with a new name (Paul), whole new insight, wholly committed to the new way.

To this day, I am still rather moved upon hearing dramatic tales of conversion such as these. I once knew a former National Guardsman who, during the Vietnam era, was repeatedly called to duty over against anti-Vietnam War student demonstrators. His conscience – and his reading of scripture – had for some time been telling him that he belonged on the other side. Finally one day, he just lay down his weapon, took off his guard insignia and walked to the demonstrators’ side; for a time, he went to prison for doing it, but he never went back to where he’d been before.

Conversion. It can happen in many powerful ways, either gradually or suddenly. It’s not about getting saved so much as about being transformed, getting changed, or even falling in love – because conversion is more about be-loving than it is about believing. Conversion means change, transformation, falling in love. But what, exactly, are we being converted from, and to? This of course, depends on whose version of faithful Christian living you’re buying into.

Are we converting to a way of life more in keeping with, say, the gospel of Luke? What is Luke’s gospel conversion emphasis? Well, here’s what Eugene Peterson says in his introduction to the Gospel of Luke:

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“Most of us, much of the time, feel left out – misfits. We don’t belong. Others seem so confident, so sure of themselves, ‘insiders’ who know the ropes, old hands in a club from which we are excluded. ... (Institutionalized) religion has a long history of reducing the huge mysteries of God to the respectability of club rules, of shrinking the vast human community to a (club or clique). But with God there are not outsiders, and Luke is (perhaps the) most vigorous champion of the outsider. An outsider himself, the only Gentile in an all-Jewish cast of (early) New Testament writers, he shows how Jesus included those who typically were treated as outsiders by the religious establishment of the day: women, common laborers, the racially different, (the sexually different, the physically impaired, the sick, and) the poor. Luke will not countenance religion as a club (or clique). As he tells the story, all of us who have found ourselves on the outside looking in on life with no hope of gaining entrance (and who of us hasn’t felt it?) now find the doors wide open, found and welcomed by God in Jesus.” Are we being converted to this kind of religion, this kind of faith community?

And then by way of describing the Acts of the Apostles, Peterson says this: “Because the story of Jesus is so impressive, there is a danger that we will be impressed, but only be impressed. As the spectacular dimensions of this story slowly (or suddenly) dawn upon us, we could easily become enthusiastic spectators, and then let it go at that – become admirers of Jesus, generous with our oohs and ahs, and (only) in our better moments inspired to imitate him. It is Luke’s task (in the book of Acts) to prevent us from becoming mere spectators to Jesus, fans of the (Way, but not followers, not doers). Of the original quartet of writers on Jesus, Luke alone continues to tell the story as the (early followers) live it into the next generation. The remarkable thing is that it continues to be essentially the same story. Luke continues his narration with hardly a break. ... The story of Jesus doesn’t end with Jesus. It continues in the lives of those who (follow after him). Luke makes it clear that these Christians he wrote about were no more spectators of Jesus than Jesus was a spectator of God – they are in on the action of God, God acting in them, God living in them. Which also means, of course, in us!”

Is God acting in you today? In you and in me? I may today be living as peacefully as I know how, but I’m not currently refusing war taxes, nor am I living as simply, as much like Jesus or like St. Frances, nor as fully together, as communally as I once tried to do. But to live as Jesus taught, as the early disciples lived it, we do still need to live in this world, in this society, in simple ways, in earth-friendly ways.

We at BCUCC ARE increasingly being converted to an earth-friendly way of following Jesus. We are sponsoring forums to learn new, practical skills, we’re taking carbon-reduction pledges, riding bikes, hanging laundry outside, replacing

lightbulbs, and so much more. We’re being converted here and now to a way that is simple, earth-friendly, free of empty materialism and from endless self-centered wanting.

We’re still free to imagine a simply beautiful heaven wherein all earth’s struggles are finished, and all is joy and peace. But in the mean time, earth is our home, and we must bring heaven’s joy and peace a bit closer. All the way to heaven IS heaven afterall; the way to peace is to live peacefully, the way to beauty and joy is to be there now.

BULLETIN BLOOPERS

Submitted by Joan Henjum

They're Back! Church Bulletins: Thank God for the church ladies who type them. These sentences actually appeared in church bulletins or were announced in church services:

The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.

The sermon this morning: "Jesus Walks on the Water."
The sermon tonight: "Searching for Jesus."

Our youth basketball team is back in action Wednesday at 8 PM in the recreation hall. Come out and watch us kill Christ the King.

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.

The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been canceled due to a conflict.

Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our community. Smile at someone who is hard to love. Say "Hell" to someone who doesn't care much about you.

Don't let worry kill you off - let the Church help.

Miss Charlene Mason sang "I will not pass this way again," giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.

For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

Next Thursday there will be tryouts for the choir. They need all the help they can get.

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The Rector will preach his farewell message after which the choir will sing: "Break Forth Into Joy."

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "What Is Hell?" Come early and listen to our choir practice.

Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.

Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.

The church will host an evening of fine dining, super entertainment and gracious hostility.

Potluck supper Sunday at 5:00 PM - prayer and medication to follow.

Ladies Bible Study will be held Thursday morning at 10 AM. All ladies are invited to lunch in the Fellowship Hall after the B. S. Is done.

The pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the congregation would lend him their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast next Sunday.

The Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 PM. Please use the back door.

The eighth-graders will be presenting Shakespeare's Hamlet in the Church basement Friday at 7 PM. The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.

Weight Watchers will meet at 7 PM at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.

SUNDAY READINGS JUNE/JULY

JUNE

June 3, 2007

Trinity Sunday (First Sunday after Pentecost)

The World's Becoming
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8
Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

June 10, 2007

Second Sunday after Pentecost

Daring Compassion
1 Kings 17:8-16, (17-24); Psalm 146
Galatians 1:11-24; Luke 7:11-17

June 17, 2007

Third Sunday after Pentecost

Grace-filled Hospitality
1 Kings 21:1-10, (11-14), 15-21a; Psalm 5:1-8
Galatians 2:15-21; Luke 7:36-8:3

June 24, 2007

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Deep Down Questions
1 Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a; Psalms 42 & 43
Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39

JULY

July 1, 2007

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Take Up the Story
2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14; Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20
Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62

July 8, 2007

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Unexpected Prophets
2 Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 30
Galatians 6:(1-6), 7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

July 15, 2007

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Compassionate Neighbors
Amos 7:7-17; Psalm 82
Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

July 22, 2007

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Faithful Listeners
Amos 8:1-12; Psalm 52
Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42

July 29, 2007

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Prayerful Disciples
Hosea 1:2-10; Psalm 85
Colossians 2:6-15, (16-19); Luke 11:1-13

BIRTHDAYS JUNE/JULY

June

Jessie Paterson	6/3
Norma Meyers	6/4
June Bender	6/11
Henry Thompson	6/15
Kay Groves	6/17
JoAnne Conard	6/18
Mary Mackenzie	6/18
Marie Fortune	6/22
David Warfield	6/22
Eileen Elliott	6/25
David Anderson	6/27

July

Pete Thorn	7/5
Peter Kujac	7/7
Day Murti	7/14
Jeff Lundt	7/19
Frances Squaglia	7/19

SHAREHOUSE JUNE/JULY

For more information about Sharehouse see Lin Takahashi. The collection is supposed to be on the Second Sunday of the Month.

June

Laundry Detergent and Disposable Diapers

July

Toothbrushes, Toothpaste, Floss

THE COST OF SILENCE

by Brooks Ladwig

Here we go again. It always begins like this. She bounces down the stairs to the living room, falls onto the sofa with abandonment, looks up at me with her big, brown, smiling eyes and throws out her weekly "hypothetical" baseball. Of course, there is never anything hypothetical about it. But, the pitch has been thrown and she expects me to take a swing. The situation is always the same. If I swing and hit, the game will go on for hours. If I bunt, she grabs control of the ball and chases my old body between home and first until I give up.

The question is always about her and something she's done. Well, that's not exactly correct; it's more like something she would like to do and is seeking approval with justification. I already know that this little Bulgarian "bulldog" is the most stubborn exchange student I have had in sixteen years. She rarely, if ever gives up, even if it means trouble. There are days when I want to scream, "Move out now, at 19, while you still

have all the answers." But, would she here? She's turned a 'deaf ear'. Why? "Because, she's too busy formulating her rebuttal to her own question, and my response, to listen to what I am saying.

If she's not listening, why say anything? I debate with myself whether to play the game or not. If I don't play, if I am silent, what responsibility do I share if the outcome is disastrous? After all, if you see someone walking out in front of a bus, and they are too distracted to see it coming, do you stay silent and think, "This will be a good lesson to learn;" or do you speak up and try to change their direction... especially if you have been hit by the same bus yourself. Is it better to be guilty in your silence or is their refusal to hear an abrogation of your responsibility and an absolution of your guilt?

Suddenly, I feel as if I am being transported back in time via Jules Verne's *Time Machine*. Thoughts of other places and times whirl past me like paintings of Salvador Dali. Finally, I am deposited in another living room, circa 1982. Nineteen years ago I decided to conduct my own experiment on hearing or, more specifically, what it would be like if I were deprived of that sense.

I explained to my family that I wished to spend the day being deaf. It took them the better part of an hour to quiet down from their moaning and groaning. My [former] husband rolled his eyes so far back in his head, while complaining of this latest folly of mine, that I thought they might be lost forever in the nether regions of his brain. Finally, they offered their cooperation, or should I say pseudo-cooperation. Bolstered by the fact that our Sign class had just spent a lovely evening together over dinner, my confidence level was at an all-time high. This experiment was going to be a piece of cake.

I chose a Saturday when we would all be together for an extended period of time. The use of some very good earplugs, that I usually wore when my [former] husband is auto racing, kept me from "cheating." My fifteen-year old daughter was confident that there wasn't going to be any problem on her part. After all, she knew how to fingerspell and was eager to show off. My [former] husband, on the other hand, was quite skeptical, since he had nothing to rely upon except a pad of paper and a pencil.

They were patient and slightly amused in the beginning. My daughter, slowly and dutifully, spelled out every word she wanted to say... tedious, but effective. My [former] husband spoke to me with great animation and exaggeration. In fact, there were times when he reminded me of the mimes I saw on Sunday afternoons in Central Park. The more "over-the-top" he became, the more infantile I felt. Ultimately, he began to relay messages to me through our daughter... "Tell your mother... etc." Hello, I'm in the room! It was as if I weren't even there.

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Soon it was beginning to become apparent that the “fun” was wearing thin. I sensed a feeling of annoyance whenever they had to stop what they were doing in order to communicate with me. My daughter’s finger spelling quickly became a chore and she began to look through my sign dictionary in order to communicate faster. She frustrated rather rapidly with all of her page turning. By mid-afternoon, my family wasn’t even speaking to me unless it was absolutely necessary. I began to feel a sense of isolation and found myself forever saying, “What?” when they were laughing or talking to each other. Most of the time, the response to my question was met with, “Oh, nothing” or “It’s not important.” The feeling of isolation was enhanced by the fact that my telephone had become just an object on the wall. There was no e-mail in those days to connect you with the outside world. As for entertainment, the television suddenly held no interest for me without words. When evening came, I found myself in suffocating solitude, withdrawn into the pages of a book, feeling somewhat depressed and quite lonely. It wasn’t at all easy without having someone to communicate with who could understand me.

By 10 pm, the experiment had come to an end. We were now on the verge of not speaking to one another. There were a widespread run of emotions and characteristics that had surfaced, some of which I didn’t even know could ever exist in our family. There was talk of resentment and withdrawal to mild hostility and paranoia. Communication had broken down almost completely in one day.

It was difficult to sleep that night. The question that kept running through my mind then and still does today is, “If one has been blessed with the ability to hear, doesn’t he or she have a responsibility to listen?”

It’s now 10 pm present day and my time machine has deposited me safely back into my own bed. Comfortably propped up against the pillows, I repeat this evening’s dialogue question to my [former] husband: “How do I feel when I am talking to you and you don’t seem to be listening?” This time I get a response: “Ah, what were you saying?” I heave a sigh and toss my notebook across the room.

OLD TESTAMENT FINAL EXAMINATION PART ONE by Jason Boyd; Submitted by Dan Stern

- Amos: He saw the Word, Israel didn’t see the light.
- Hosea: Hear this! You might have a Baal with the whores, but God knows what’ll happen to you.
- 1 Isaiah: Oh, if I hear that “Walk Like An Egyptian” song one more time, you’re gettin’ an ass(yrian) whuppin’.

- Micah: Step outside your Jerusalem ivory tower, see what your greed and corruption has wrought.
- Jeremiah: Chaos, exile, and temple destruction are the consequences for not partaking of his mighty fine *whine*.
- Ezekiel: Mortal, the glory of the Lord will bring you home. . . .without leaving you breathless or agog.
- 2 Isaiah: Take comfort, coming home is twice as nice. (with a feminine touch)
- Jonah: The fishy tale of a man who couldn’t stomach hardly anything God told him.
- Psalms: This year, send God Psalms. Because Hallmark doesn’t make a *we praise you but please get our enemies off our backs and deliver us from a whole bunch of stuff we lament and thank you for all of that even though we don’t always listen to you* card.
- Proverbs: The wisdom of the (s)ages, shared with.*the rich kids?*
- Ecclesiastes: Enjoy all life’s vapor, the Teacher’s no clod Just go with the flow, and let go and let God!
- Job: *God’s piñata* ends up with *more* goodies when all is said and done.
- Song of Songs: OT women among God’s people had sensual desires, even if they had to import an Egyptian love poem to talk about it.
- Esther: A pretty face and a good dinner can do wonders.
- Daniel: Be true to who you are and what you believe, and you’ll see your way through to the end.

YOU ARE CORGIALLY INVITED

You are invited to the installation of the (now complete) leadership team (program director, administrator, pastor: Joan Henjum) at the Church of Mary Magdalene on Sat, June 23, 10:30 am. Lunch follows. We would like rsvp’s so we know our food needs. It will be held at the Mary’s Place site. 424 Columbia St, (5th & Columbia in Basement of First Methodist Church) Use alley entrance.

ADDRESS CHANGES

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