

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

February 28, 2011

Last week I talked about Paul's statement that "real circumcision is a circumcision of the heart," meaning that those who keep God's law whether circumcised or not are the true followers of God. To the zealous Jew in Paul's day that would most likely have elicited a response of "No, no, no!" Even from Jewish Christians Paul's statement might have elicited just such a response. And Paul's statement might well have elicited another reaction that would go something like this. "It is not fair that Gentiles who do not have the laws of God are counted righteous before God just as Jews who have the law simply by their being obedient to conscience." Remember that Paul had said when the Gentiles did what was according to the law out of obedience to conscience that would be counted as righteousness. Somehow the idea of fairness always seems to trip us up whether we are Christian or non-Christian.

Jesus told a story that we know as the story of the prodigal son, and in that story there is an issue of fairness. Basically, the older brother says to his father, "This is not fair. I have stayed here with you, Father, all the while, and you never gave me a party. You never gave a party to celebrate my faithfulness to you, and here you give a party for my brother who has been anything but faithful. This simply is not fair." And it is easy for us to have sympathy for the older brother in this story. It doesn't seem fair.

You may also remember that Jesus told a parable about a vineyard owner who went out at 9 o'clock in the morning and hired men to work in his vineyard. He went again at 11 o'clock, 3 o'clock, and 5 o'clock to hire men, and when it came time at the end of the day to pay these hired men, the ones who went to work at 5 P.M. got the same pay as those who went to work at 9 A.M. And the men who went to work at 9 A.M. didn't think it was fair for all the others to get the same pay they got. And we can understand why they thought it was unfair. Why should those who work less get the same pay?

In the beginning of the third chapter of Romans (the beginning of some quite difficult passages to understand), Paul asks some rhetorical questions. The first is "then what advantage has the Jew?" and the second is "or what is the value of circumcision?" And Paul answers his own questions this way. "Much in every way. For in the first place the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God." The Jews were entrusted with the word of God given in the form of what might be referred to as the "Law, the Writings, and the Prophets," that is Holy Scripture (The Old Testament). The Jews have an advantage over Gentiles in that they as a people they have received from God the good gift of the revelation of God through his word. The Jews know much more of God and about God than would the Gentiles whose only prompting toward God may in fact be that internal part of us we refer to as conscience. The Jews have a much greater Revelation of God than do the Gentiles.

The fairness question often comes into play when persons make a "death bed" confession of faith. How is it fair, seemingly, for the person who has "lived for the devil," so to speak, all of his or her life, to at the last minute by baptism and profession of faith to receive the same reward of eternal life as the Christian who has lived basically all of his or her life for Christ. This is the question that is being addressed in the story of the prodigal son and the story of workers in the vineyard. Why should the "Johnny-come-latelies" receive the same reward from God. The Jews in Jesus's day would have asked the fairness question. And Paul anticipates this same question as he prepares to talk about the Gentiles being brought into the family of God long after the Jews (Israelites) were chosen by God.

And the answer to the fairness question is the same as Paul's answer to his rhetorical questions in the opening of Romans chapter 3. The advantage the Christian has who has lived all of his or her life for Christ is simply that. We've had a whole lot more time to live in, be bathed in, and enjoy the blessings of God than the one who makes the death bed confession. That's the advantage. We've had much more time to receive from God than the one who waits till that last moment, and we haven't presumed upon the grace of God either.

The father's response to the elder brother in the story of the prodigal son sums

up things quite well, I think. The father says, "Son you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours" (Luke 15:31). That, I think, would be the way to interpret what Paul said about the advantage for the Jew. "All that is God's has been available to them." And that surely is the way I would sum up things for the life-long Christian. Our advantage is that all of God's grace has been available to us over a lifetime. That's something about which to rejoice, not envy. What is the advantage of having lived for Christ all one's life? "Much in every way." We have experienced the goodness of God all of our lives. What a wonderful blessing! I hope this helps us understand some of Paul's argument in the Letter to the Romans, and it is just something to think about.

Until next time,

Bro. Jim

NEWS FROM THE OUTREACH COMMITTEE

The Outreach Committee has three primary responsibilities: Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry, the Covenant partnership with the Fountain of Life Church in Amatitan, Nicaragua and the Adopt - A - Highway cleanup.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 9:00 until 11:00 a.m., volunteers from our Church stock shelves and fill boxes of food for anyone in our community who needs it. They also offer words of hope and encouragement to these people and offer invitations for them to join us in worship. In 2010, 34 different volunteers gave out 1822 boxes of food for 4,760 individuals. The non-food items that we collect on fifth Sundays are also included in these boxes when requested.

Our partnership with the Fountain of Life Church began in 1997. Eight delegations from our Church have visited Nicaragua. Our delegations have ranged in size from one to fourteen people. They have helped rebuild homes destroyed by Hurricane Mitch, helped build the church and church school in Amatitan and attended partnership conferences. In the past one and a half years we have hosted two different delegations from Nicaragua to visit our church and community. Since this partnership began our church has given educational scholarships for approximately 150 students each year in the Amatitan community.

Our Church has a need for volunteers four times a year to pick up trash along a two mile section of Highway 64 west from the Parkview Motel to David Crockett Elementary School. We have been involved in this project for 9 years.

As Christians worshipping at First United Methodist Church, we are all called to volunteer to help or donate money to help feed the hungry, reaching out beyond our walls to be good stewards of the earth.

NEW LIFE FOR THE OLD KITCHEN

The Aldersgate Sunday School class is hard at work on a project to put the old kitchen in the Fellowship Hall back into use. They have cleared out clutter, and cleaned and refurbished cabinets and drawers. The old stove has been removed and a new one will be installed. They believe that the kitchen and Fellowship Hall will be a more practical and much more intimate setting for small classes and church groups, and will save on heating and cooling.

The Aldersgate Class is asking for donations toward the purchase of an electric range for the kitchen in the Fellowship Hall. If you are willing to make a donation, just mark it for the kitchen fund. Thank you.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

The UMW Executive Committee will meet on **Tuesday, March 08, at 4:15 p.m.**

The Finance Committee will meet on **Tuesday, March 08, at 7:00 p.m.**

The Administrative Board will meet on **Tuesday, March 08, 7:30 p.m.**

NEWS & NOTES

The E. O. Coffman Lady Panthers placed 3rd in the Tennessee TMSAA Regional

Tournament. Our Own **Katie Wayne** made the All-tournament team. Way to go, Katie!

Congratulations to the boys and girls LCHS basketball teams for achieving first place in District 8-3A regular season play and winning the District 8 Tournament. Both teams won the first round in regional play at home and are in LaVergne this week for the semi-finals. **Abby Clayton** and **Andrew Cheatwood**, members of our church family, play important roles on these teams.

***Update:** The Lawrence County Lady Cats basketball team ended their season on Monday night in the first round of the regional tournament with a loss to the defending state champions Riverdale. The Lady Cats ended the season with an impressive 29 wins.

Congratulations are also extended to **Abby (Clayton)**, who was recently inducted into the National Honor Society at Lawrence County High School.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

We would like to extend a welcome to **Susan Fisher** and **Don Grimsley** (husband of Jean Grimsley), who recently placed membership with our church family at First UMC. Here are their addresses if you would like to add them to your directory.

Susan's address is: 249 E. Taylor St.; Lawrenceburg, TN 38464

Don's address is: 234 Debus St.; Lawrenceburg, TN 38464

"ANNIE" DAY TRIP

Those who are signed up to go on the day trip Saturday, March 12, to see "Annie" at Bethlehem United Methodist Church in Franklin, should be at the West end of the CLC to leave by 10:00 a.m.

MARTIN METHODIST CHOIR TO SING AT FIRST UMC

...**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!** On **Sunday, March 20th**, the Martin Methodist Choir will perform at the 10:30 a.m. service. There will be a (**potluck**) fellowship meal in the CLC following the service. Everyone is asked to bring extra food. There are at least 50 members in the Martin Methodist Choir and we will need plenty of food for our guests.

YOUTH NEWS

(By: Lynsey Burns)

The Youth of First United Methodist Church had the opportunity in January to attend "Warmth in Winter". Four youth attended under the watchful eye of our two youth directors, Alecia and T.J.

The meeting was a gathering for all Methodist Churches in Tennessee. It's one of the largest Methodist meetings in the world. Not only were the new people we met well...new, but they were also exciting, interesting, kind and fellow believers.

We listened to many wonderful speakers talking about their life experiences and their beliefs. It was an amazing experience and I strongly advise you to look it up! You won't be disappointed with what you find. I know I wasn't.

CHRISTIANS CONNECT - SUNDAY, MARCH 13TH

Christians Connect will meet on Sunday, **March 13** (which is also the Sunday Daylight Savings time starts), following the 8:15 a.m. service. This month's gathering will be hosted by the **Upper Room class**.

WITH ONE ANOTHER

Scott Healthcare

NHC Healthcare

Children’s Church: Kim & Heath McKnight

Loaves and Fishes

Tues. March 08: Loulie Brown, Jean Grimsley, Anita Marston & Jerry Gibbs

Thur. March 10: Joan Cochran, Susan Fisher, Bruce & Barbara Edwards

WEDNESDAY NIGHT SUPPER
(Menu for March 09)

Lasagna
Salad
Garlic Bread
Apple Crisp
Workers: **Volunteers**

Daylight Savings time begins March 13

