



Cedar Grove UMC

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From the Pastor's Desk . . .

The Beacon July/August 2015



Summer Office Hours

Monday	10:00 am to 4:00 pm
Tuesday	10:00 am to 4:00 pm
Wednesday	10:00 am to 4:00 pm

SUMMER 2015

Just a short one for this July/August issue of the newsletter as it is good to take a break, slow down, and relax. I hope and pray that all of you will get the opportunity to take a break, slow down, and relax this summer. You might take some of your free time to read the Bible more, spend extra time in prayer, and so on during this time of less 'busy-ness'. Of course the church remains active with ministries continuing such as the Homeless Trip, Breakfast Club, the Praise team preparing for Worship, adult Sunday school classes, the SPY trip, and so on.

So enjoy your summer and be ready as we head toward September to be rested and ready for all that God is asking us to do.

Your fellow servant of our Lord and Savior,

Glen

CHURCH NEWS

Please pray for the adults and youth going on **SPY** July 18th to July 24th.

Have you noticed that the **Scripture reading** on Sunday mornings is now often done by lay people? If you would like to read the Scriptures on any given Sunday please let Pastor Glen know. If someone has not already taken that day, the office will send you an email with the text so you will be ready on Sunday. The pastor always has printed version of the text at the pulpit which you can use if you would like to use it. (Please give it back to the pastor when you are done reading it.)

The **Nominations Committee** will begin sometime during the Summer to begin the process of filling committee positions for the Board of Trustees, Staff-Parish Relations Committee, Missions Committee, and Nominations Committee. If you are interested in serving please let a chair person (as mandated by the UMC that is your pastor) or member of the committee know.

Our **Charge Conference** will be held at St. Matthews UMC in Shady Side at 1pm on November 7th. We will be meeting at the same time as other churches and it is a chance for you to hear from our District Superintendent and vote the pastor's salary, the church budget, and elect officers for 2016.



Book Corner



Conversations With Scripture: The Gospel of John
Cynthia Kittredge Morehouse Pub 2007 117p

Well, it is another month and time to review a book for the newsletter but nothing comes to mind. Thankfully I have hundreds of unread books, so I looked for a short one I wanted to read and sat down to read it. The 'Conversations With Scripture' series is a series that I have used before on different books of the Bible and found them to be thought provoking. Often books that I disagree with will have this effect and that was certainly true of this volume on the Gospel of John in this series.

Because this book includes a study guide, its text is really just a little over 90 pages divided into six chapters. The chapters do not take you through the six sections of the Gospel of John but rather looks at the Gospel of John from the standpoint of various themes, with the exception of one chapter on the prologue. The other chapters trace the history of John's interpretation since it was written, the role of signs, conflict between Jesus and the Jews, the community from which the Gospel of John was written, leadership, and modes of knowing.

This book is written from the biblical critical perspective where much of the Gospel is doubted and at times challenged. Take for example from page 54 the following statement by the author about Jesus' conversation with 'the Jews' in chapter eight of the Gospel of John, 'One way to read this difficult passage in the gospel is to see it as a horrifying example of failed inclusion or dialogue gone wrong, failed negotiation –not a positive example to be imitated but a cautionary example of failure. Appreciation of the historical situation helps us to understand the presence and intensity of the polemics, but understanding does not change or excuse them. To change them requires reading differently, seeking different choices than the text itself provides, to help us find respectful ways to be in dialogue with faithful Jews.' In other words some of what Jesus says is just plain wrong or to be as generous to the author as I can be, Jesus gives us an example of how not to do it. Now this is not a problem for the author of this book because she doesn't believe Jesus said everything the authors of the Gospel of John claims and thus we should have no hesitation to either ignore, deny, or change what Jesus is said to have said or hold it up as the way not to do it because He didn't say it. Regardless of where you stand on the accuracy of the Gospels in terms of quoting Jesus accurately, they are Scripture, meaning texts that are to lay out for us what we believe about Jesus and the faith He teaches. Once we start saying we can change it, because we don't like it, it means that the biblical books are no longer Scripture or Canon and instead books for us to fix and improve. Once we start saying that what the Scriptures say Jesus said is not authoritative or even right by what standard do we do this critique? Where does the author of this book go, to determine right from wrong? Most likely she has a 'canon within the canon' meaning she only accepts as authoritative the parts of the Bible she agrees with and then using that part, criticizes, ignores, or eliminates the rest.

I could go on with my other problems with this book but I think the above example will suffice. When the author actually addresses the text at face value and explores it, the book is quite good. This book is definitely written in an academic style and some knowledge of the way biblical critical type interpreters read the Bible is needed to fully understand what this book is trying to say. I am glad I read the book as I enjoy and benefit from reading books I disagree with. It is a good habit to have for by doing so you hear what the other side of the debate is saying, are then better able to counter their arguments, and to see whether or not you can answer their challenges to the way you read the Bible. I would not recommend this book for every Christian, but if you have some background in knowing about biblical criticism (or read the book with someone who does), want to know what biblical critics are saying about the Bible, and are ready to put your position to the test I would recommend you read this book. And if you do, read the Gospel of John too, for it is Scripture, a part of our Canon, Conversations With Scripture: The Gospel of John is not.



Sunday school for all ages will resume on September 13th. The two adult classes run all year.



MISSIONS CORNER

(The Missionary we are highlighting this month is Bob Lanning and his work in church planting in India.)

This last year in India was directed at a close thorough review and examination of the workers and the fruit of their labors. God has led us to a possible replacement for our Home Cell Group Organizer and given us new focus on training and not getting directly involved in the maintenance of the village works after training. He has also led us to a relationship with a Christian Indian leader who may well prove to be a key member of our leadership. We have come to understand that God wants to demonstrate His greatness by redeeming the recent setbacks by the might of His power. We have been asking God to redeem this situation in such a way as to be able to say, "Only God could have done it!" In order for that to be the case though, the situation has to deteriorate to the degree that there is no hope apart from God. I have come to understand that that can be a little discouraging and depressing! There's no greater encouragement than God's miraculous intervention, which we fully anticipate. He has, in at least one instance, proven Himself in our behalf against all reason and probability. We expect more of the same when the time is right—His time and His way. In the meantime, we march on providing training and seeking out those believers who are clearly called by God and can be educated to utilize the model God has given us to reach Hindus and Muslims. No worthwhile missions ministry goes forward without huge resistance by the enemy. We are engaged in that struggle right now but we don't give up or get distracted from our commission to train and support workers who only need to be channeled and guided. That we will do!

ANNUAL CONFERENCE REPORT

From May 27th through May 30th I attended my 27th Annual Conference and with a few exceptions it was an incredibly boring conference. Now I have always disliked going to Conference but it has only been in recent years that it has become completely boring and for the most part devoid of any work being done by the Conference. Do not get me wrong we took the votes we needed to take, because it is the year before General Conference we elected delegates to go to both General and Jurisdictional Conference, and we heard the same old presentations and reports that we always hear. What was different was that there was little or no debate even though our conference and our denomination are much divided over many issues.

I believe that what is driving this lack of public debate is the desire by the bishop and the Conference leadership to have the image of unity and lack of disagreement and yet still get the business of the Conference done by having these 'Circles of Grace' and controversial legislation either withdrawn, settled behind closed doors, or oops we ran out of time. Given how much time, in my opinion, we waste at every session with gifts being presented to the Bishop, the Bishop's spouse, or to visiting dignitaries such as the mayor of Baltimore, other bishops, etc... it is frustrating to me that we gather 1200 clergy and lay delegates to Annual Conference to simply be an audience. (by the way when were voting for clergy delegates and only clergy can vote, of the 600+ clergy who are supposed to be at the Conference most times there were only about 300 and some there)

Let me give three examples of what I am talking about. First, the only real debate we had on the floor of the Conference was over adopting 'Circles of Grace' as a part of our regular order. The debate and amendments got moved and then we ran out of time. When we came from lunch, the two main people in the debate had agreed over lunch to withdraw the issue from the floor of the Conference. This was hailed by the Conference as a great moment. It made me wonder why I was there! Second, we continue to have 'Circles of Grace' to discuss the controversial social issues facing our denomination. These circles are groups of ten people discussing the issue, after having heard the bishop and the makers of the motions speak on the issues to the whole Conference. After the circles are done talking we then vote. The votes reveal major disunity in the body, but you wouldn't hear it or see because of the way we are doing things. Finally, there were motions to be voted on that we didn't get to, because we ran out of time.

What did we do? We approved the Conference budget; minimum salary for clergy (going up a little); relieved to hear our health care premiums should not be going up; approved candidates in the process of ordination; elected delegates; and heard many presentations that required no votes. We did hear an interesting presentation from the pastors of the churches that were right in the middle of the rioting in Baltimore. While solutions to the problems of the city are not clear, I was proud to hear that our clergy were there and that the laity of their churches was there and our denomination should be proud.

As always I read a whole book while I was at Conference and the book I read was Emil Brunner: A Reappraisal by Alister McGrath as I like to accomplish something during those four days. A good book on what for most people would be to obscure a topic to read about. (Do you know who Emil Brunner is?) Next year the Conference will be held in Washington DC June 1-3 at the Wardman Park Hotel right near the National Zoo. If you have any questions about this year's Annual Conference please don't hesitate to ask me about them. You can also learn about the Conference at the conference website.

Pastor Glen Arnold