



# *The River*

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER | MARCH 2019

## Message from the Pastor

Greetings one and all,

As I write to you, I have been listening to the Called General Conference of the United Methodist Church that was convened primarily to address how the UMC moves forward on the primary issue of Homosexuality. My instincts tell me that a split is coming to us no matter how the decisions and voting ends.

This is not a new issue in the life of the church, as they have wrestled with the question of Homosexuality and the life of the UMC for more than 20 years. During this time a majority of states have legalized Same Sex Unions and this lifestyle has become more publicly accepted throughout this country as well as other nations. So as public opinion has become more tolerant the fervor and presence of these voices have increased it has entered the church (specifically speaking the UMC). During General Conference, I have heard the passion from both sides and it appears that there is not a truly common ground for all to stand. This is why I feel that those who view this issue as loss will not remain with the UMC.

A delegate from South Africa said, that this was supposed to be a conference about unity, all he heard was division. That while he would welcome unity of all peoples, from all races, genders, and status; if we are to be divided we should stand divided united by the truth and promise from Christ and God's word.

If you followed my sermon series from January and into February, either in person or online; I spoke about paradigm shifts and changing world views. Traditionally the church (the living body of Christ) as a whole moves about 20 years behind the culture. While this Called General Conference is focused on Unity and Homosexuality, I believe the bigger issue is, are we as individual really following all of God's commands. The divorce rate is higher from people in churches than those out in the world. Is this because at least church members feel some need to become married in the first place? Co-habitation, sex outside of marriage, abortion, children born to unmarried parents, lies, deception, manipulation all have gotten out of control. Where do we stop willfully and arrogantly snubbing our proverbial noses at God.

This trend was summarized by Evangelist Joni Eareckson Tada: And gradually, though no one remembers exactly how it happened, the unthinkable becomes. And then acceptable. And then legal. And then applaudable.

When we minimize the cost of salvation and what that means to us, we fail to really follow God and be obedient. Jesus gave his life to pay for our sin to give us eternal life. As we look at this cost of grace for our forgiveness and salvation, how if we believe in God through Jesus Christ, can we continue to disregard God's will and live by the ways of the world? We must change and strive to follow and live within God's will.

This is unmeasurable Grace. Jesus said for us to love our enemies. There are those who are passionate but we find ourselves in disagreement with. We need to live in and through God's Grace and extend grace to them even if and when we find ourselves on different sides. There are good and well-intended people that will be hurting. We can pray for them, agree to disagree, Love the person and live in the Grace that we would want if the tables were turned.

The question is always asked of me what do I believe, so I'm going to give you a complex answer: I believe in that Jesus is the resurrected Son of God. I believe that throughout the Bible we see God's love revealed in a story of Humanity through history. I also see the repeated disobedience of humanity and God always continuing to extend His love for humanity through Grace to reclaim and restore us to the righteousness of the Kingdom of God. I believe that everyone attempts to define / interpret the Bible in ways that it is beneficial to us as individuals. I believe that all of humanity continues to in some manner rebel/sin against God. That without Grace and Forgiveness we are all doomed. Yes, I do believe that Homosexuality is against God's Will. But, that is just one dimension of sexual sin.

I encourage each of you to become truly curious about God's will and read the Bible and spend the time in prayer in direct conversation with our Lord.

Then I encourage each of you to be open-minded and then have a conversation with someone to whom you have no real contact or understanding of their way of life. Ask questions about what they believe and why. Ask how they came to believe what they do. This opens a safe non-judgmental space to engage in real dialog. After you have given them a real opportunity to share what they believe, then you can share what you believe and why as well as how you come to believe what you do. This is extending Grace and provides both of you to come to some understanding of an opposite point of view. Neither one of you may change the other, but non-judgmental understanding of where someone is coming from and generally will allow for future opportunities for more conversations.

Jesus said in John 3:17; "I came not to judge and condemn but to love and to save." We are also commanded to love our neighbor and to pray for our enemies.

How are we doing?

Peace and Love

AJ