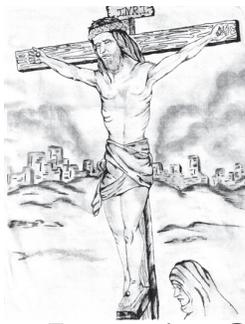


The Church of the Damascus Road Echo!

Volume 14
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Fort Dodge & Rockwell City, IA



Hang It on the Cross

If you have a secret sorrow,
A burden or a loss,
An aching need for healing...
Hang it on the Cross.

If worry steals your sleep
And makes you turn and toss,
If your heart is feeling heavy...
Hang it on the Cross.

Every obstacle to faith
Or doubt you come across,
Every prayer unanswered...
Hang it on the Cross.

For Christ has borne our brokenness
And dearly paid the cost
To turn our trials to triumph...
Hang it on the Cross.

—Lisa O. Engelhardt
shared by Spencer Fitzpatrick

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The Cab Ride

Twenty years ago, I drove a cab for a living. One night I took a fare at 2:30am, when I arrived to collect, the building was dark except for a single light in a ground floor window. Under these circumstances, many drivers would just honk once.

But I had seen too many impoverished people who depended on taxis as their only means of transportation. Unless a situation smelled of danger, I always went to the door. This passenger might be someone who needs my assistance, I reasoned to myself. So I walked to the door and knocked. 'Just a minute', answered a frail, elderly voice. I could hear something being dragged across the floor.

After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman in her 80's stood before me. She was wearing a print dress and a pill box hat with a veil pinned on it, like somebody out of a 1940's movie. By her side was a small nylon suitcase. The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets. There were no clocks on the walls, no knickknacks or utensils on the counters. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware.

'Would you carry my bag out to the car?' she said. I took the suitcase to the cab, then returned to assist the woman. She took my arm and we walked slowly toward the curb. She kept thanking me for my kindness. 'It's nothing', I told her. 'I just try to treat my passengers the way I would want my mother treated.'

'Oh, you're such a good boy,' she said. When we got in the cab, she gave me an address, and then asked, 'Could you drive through downtown?'

'It's not the shortest way,' I answered quickly.

'Oh, I don't mind,' she said 'I'm in no hurry. I'm on my way to a hospice.'

I looked in the rear-view mirror. Her eyes were glistening. 'I don't have any family left,' she continued. 'The doctor says I don't have very long.' I quietly reached over and shut off the meter. 'What route would you like me to take?' I asked.

For the next two hours, we drove through the city. She showed me the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator.

We drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived when they were newlyweds. She had me pull up in front of a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl.

Sometimes she'd ask me to slow in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing.

As the first hint of sun was creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, 'I'm tired. Let's go now.'

We drove in silence to the address she had given me. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico. Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as we pulled up. They were solicitous and intent, watching her every move. They must have been expecting her.

I opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair.

How much do I owe you?' she asked, reaching into her purse.

'Nothing,' I said.

'You have to make a living,' she answered.

'There are other passengers,' I responded. Almost without thinking, I bent and gave her a hug. She held onto me tightly.

'You gave an old woman a little moment of joy,' she said.

'Thank you.'

I squeezed her hand, and then walked into the dim morning light. Behind me, a door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life.

I didn't pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly, lost in thought. For the rest of that day, I could hardly talk. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver, or one who was impatient to end his shift? What if I had refused to take the run, or had honked once, then driven away? On a quick review, I don't think that I have done anything more important in my life.

We're conditioned to think that our lives revolve around great moments. But great moments often catch us unaware—beautifully wrapped in what others may consider a small one. People may not remember exactly what you did, or what you said, ~but~ they will always remember how you made them feel. Make the world a little kinder and more compassionate.

—Author Unknown



Cost of Grace — Paid

There once was a man named George Thomas, pastor in a small New England town. One Easter Sunday morning he came to the Church carrying a rusty, bent, old bird cage, and set it by the pulpit.

Eyebrows were raised and, as if in response, Pastor Thomas began to speak.

"I was walking through town yesterday when I saw a young boy coming toward me swinging this bird cage. On the bottom of the cage were three little wild birds, shivering with cold and fright.

I stopped the lad and asked, "What do you have there, son?"

"Just some old birds," came the reply. "What are you going to do with them?" I asked. "Take 'em home and have fun with 'em," he answered. "I'm gonna tease 'em and pull out their feathers to make 'em fight. I'm gonna have a real good time."

"But you'll get tired of those birds sooner or later. What will you do then?"

"Oh, I got some cats," said the little boy. "They like birds. I'll take 'em to them." The pastor was silent for a moment. "How much do you want for those birds, son?"

"Huh??!!! Why, you don't want them birds, mister. They're just plain old field birds. They don't sing. They ain't even pretty!" "How much?" the pastor asked again. The boy sized up the pastor as if he were crazy and said, "\$10?" The pastor reached into his pocket and took out a ten dollar bill. He placed it in the boy's hand. In a flash, the boy was gone. The pastor picked up the cage and gently carried it to the end of the alley where there was a tree and a grassy spot. Setting the cage down, he opened the door, and by softly tapping the bars persuaded the birds out, setting them free. Well, that explained the empty bird cage on the pulpit, and then the pastor began to tell this story: One day Satan and Jesus were having a conversation. Satan had just come from the Garden of Eden, and he was gloating and boasting. "Yes, sir, I just caught a world full of people down there. Set me a trap, used bait I knew they couldn't resist. Got 'em all!" "What are you going to do with them?" Jesus asked. Satan replied, "Oh, I'm gonna have fun! I'm gonna teach them how to marry and divorce each other, how to hate and abuse each other, how to drink and smoke and curse. I'm gonna teach them how to invent guns and bombs and kill each other. I'm really gonna have fun!"

"And what will you do when you are done with them?" Jesus asked.

"Oh, I'll kill 'em," Satan glared proudly. "How much do you want for them?" Jesus asked. "Oh, you don't want those people. They ain't no good. Why, you'll take them and they'll just hate you. They'll spit on you, curse you and kill you. You don't want those people!"

"How much? He asked again.

Satan looked at Jesus and sneered, "All your blood, tears and your life."

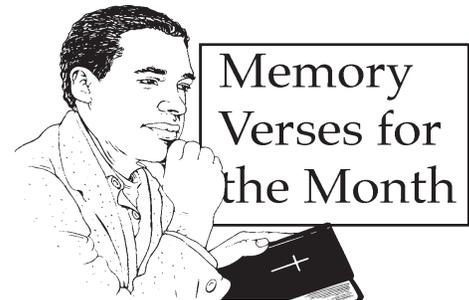
Jesus said, "Done!" Then he paid the price. The pastor picked up the cage and walked from the pulpit.

—Unknown

We forfeit three-fourths of ourselves in order to be like other people.

—Arthur Schopenhauer, German philosopher (1788 - 1860)

For Heaven's Sake by Mike Morgan

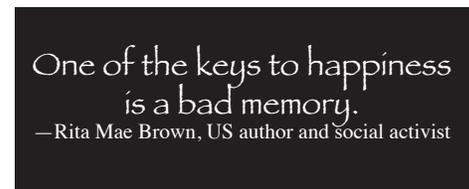


The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love (Psalm 145:8). In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry (Ephesians 4:26).

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).

I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life (John 6:47).

Though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand (Psalm 37:24).



Story Tellers

Story Tellers is the third Friday of every month at FDCF and the third Saturday at NCCF unless a scheduling problem arises. You can read a book to your child on tape, and then send the book and audio cassette tape home for your child to listen to you read to them, and read along with you. The tape, and book are free to you. You just pay regular mail home to your child, or, at FDCF, you can send them out on a visit like regular property through R&D. Sign up with Pastor Stone, or at our regular worship service, or with any Inside Church Council member.

The Church of the Damascus Road
Echo!

Issue 14.1b February 2011

An official publication of The Church of the Damascus Road, a Christian Community of Reconciliation, serving the inmate population of the correctional facilities at Rockwell City and Fort Dodge, Iowa.
Rev. Paul E. Stone, Pastor
Rev. Carroll Lang, Editor

Inmate Artwork



HAVE IT HIS WAY

Russ Klein 1-8-11

Drawing by Russ Klein, FDCF 1-8-11



God Seeks

I have always been taught that God seeks men, not men God; but it has been only recently that I have begun to know that the great longing for Spirit-filled lives comes from the heart of God; that it is the holy God who seeks after men, who yearns and longs to fill men. The secret of being filled with the Spirit lies in letting God do for us what he most desires to do, namely, to fill us.

L. L. Legters

Finding God

"Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might."

A Muslim (Sufi) story says a lot about finding God. "Help us find God," the seeker begged the Elder. "No one can help you there," the Elder answered. "Why not?" the seeker insisted. "For the same reason that no one can help a fish find the ocean."

God is a constant presence. In hard times we endure. In strength we thought we didn't have. In confidence we thought we lacked. In hope and blessing we long for. Isaiah doesn't pray for something we must attain. He's praying about what's already true and present right now: God, along with salvation, trust, confidence, "strength and might." The spiritual task is simply to recognize this, not to keep trying to achieve it.

How did you get through the nightmares you've known? The loss of someone dearly loved. Times when family life was out of control. Periods of loneliness and confusion. And what of the surprises when things you most worried about worked out after all. Or times when you were simply happy, whatever was going on.

We'll never know what we have if we don't remember what we've known before. Named or not, we have known the divine presence. As Frederick Buechner wrote, "God doesn't sign [the] sunsets." But God's there--here, too, with us, all the time.

—Pastor William C. Green

God Knows. So Why Pray?

Excerpt from Matthew 6:5-15 — "...[God] knows what you need before you ask..."

Jesus said that God knows our prayers even before we utter them. That affirmation leads to an obvious question: if God knows all of that already, what is the point of prayer?

Well, imagine a couple that has been married for many years. In spite of all they have been through together (or is it *because* of all they have been through together?) they love each other still. But one night, over coffee and dessert, the husband is obviously disturbed about something. The wife knows to wait. It will come out eventually. And, sure enough, he starts out, "You know, it occurred to me today that you never tell me that you love me anymore."

The wife responds, "Oh, you know I love you. Very much."

"Yes."

"Then why do I have to say it?"

"Because it makes a difference. I need to hear it even when I know what you are going to say before you say it."

So, yes, God knows our prayers even before we speak them, but we need to offer them anyway. It makes a difference. Speaking the words themselves creates tender ties. Words of love are never unnecessary, never redundant, and neither are words of prayer. A silent understanding cannot replace a loving exchange of words, even familiar words, or words that are known before they are spoken.

*Reflection by Martin B. Copenhaver,
Senior Pastor, Wellesley Congregational Church,
United Church of Christ, Wellesley, Massachusetts.*

Worship Opportunities

Worship & Bible Study

FDCF Fort Dodge

6:30pm WednesdaysHoly Communion

6:30pm Fridays Prayer & Bible Study

Pastor Contact Hours

2:00pm - Count Wednesday

2:00pm - Count Friday

NCCF Rockwell City

6:30pm Tuesdays Prayer & Bible Study

6:30pm ThursdaysHoly Communion

Pastor Contact Hours

2:00pm - Count Tuesday

2:00pm - Count Thursday

JustSome Thoughts

Beat the Christmas rush, come to church this Sunday!

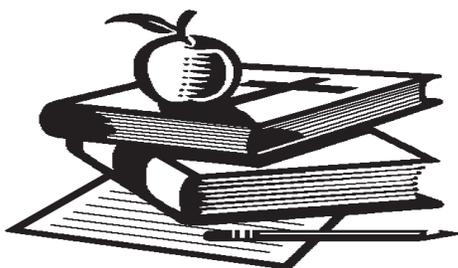
Don't give up. Moses was once a basket case!

Where will you spend eternity — smoking or non-smoking?



Articles Invited

The editor of this newsletter is inviting **all readers** to contribute articles, poetry, art work, and opinions for the newsletter. So don't be bashful. Give all your newsletter submissions to Pastor Stone.



Check Them Out!

The Church of the Damascus Road Librarians are inviting you to come to the chapel (MPR 23 in FDCF H Building; Treatment Center Room A in NCCF), and "check out" the books, tapes and compact discs in our library! There are many genres of books to choose from! We hope to see you there!