

The Church of the Damascus Road

Flash!

Volume 1
 Issue No. 5
 December 1998
 Fort Dodge & Rockwell City, IA

Worship and Bible Study Schedules

FDCF Fort Dodge
 7:00pm Wednesdays Holy Communion
 7:00pm Fridays Bible Study

NCCF Rockwell City
 6:30pm Tuesdays Bible Study
 6:30pm Thursdays Holy Communion

Visitors Being Scheduled

Visitors for The Church of the Damascus Road worship services at the North Central Correctional Facility, Rockwell City, and at the Fort Dodge Correctional Facility, Fort Dodge, are being booked for future worship opportunities. Services are held Wednesdays at Fort Dodge, 6:30-8:30pm, and Thursdays at Rockwell City, 6-8pm. If you would like to make one or more visits to either the Fort Dodge or the Rockwell City services, reservations need to be made soon to insure the date you would like. Contact Gail at the Church of the Damascus Road office, 515-955-3579 to schedule a time. The necessary forms and information will then be sent to you prior to your visit.

From the Members

This issue features several contributions from inmates who are members of The Church of the Damascus Road. In the future we hope to have more such contributions of poetry, prose *and art*. If you would like to contribute, don't put it off, do so right away and submit your work to Pastor Lang for inclusion in the Flash.

Inside the Flash

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Some Things I've Learned

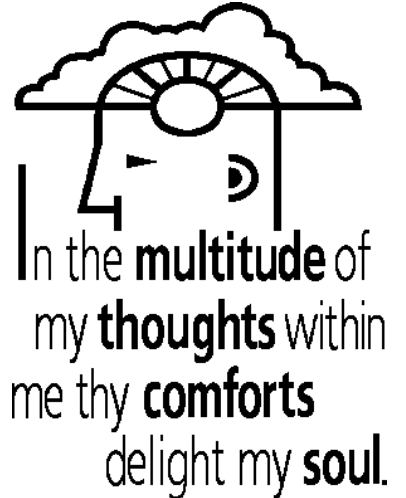
by Jeff Swearingen

It's not for us to know how the Lord does things. It's just up to us to believe that he will do them. So when you ask the Lord for something in your life believe that he is going to give it to you! Don't be afraid to talk to God. For Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins, clearing the way for us to go in and talk to our heavenly Father. We no longer need to have someone else intercede with the Father for us, for we can now stand in the very presence of God. Jesus made this possible by his death on the cross. His death gives us life, because God accepted his death as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. And by raising Christ from the dead, he broke the grip that death held on us! He invites us to turn to him and become part of his family; to become his children. No matter how many times we turn our backs on him, God is always waiting with loving grace to forgive us and to welcome us back into his loving care! We need to know in our hearts that he is there for us, that he will protect us, and give us power through the Holy Spirit to fight off Satan's temptations.

These are things that Jesus promised us, and we know that Jesus did not lie to us, for the same things he taught back then are still being taught today! Is there anything else that has stood the test of time? The word of God has been here throughout the years. It has been told in many different languages. Look, after all these years, it's still here! There have been false teachers over the years, but one by one they all failed. They could not stand the test of time! The Word of God is still here for us to hold on to and to believe in! If you put your trust in him, he will not let you down.

The problem we humans have is we can say "I forgive you" real easy! It's "forgetting" that we have a problem with. So, when we say to someone "I forgive you" and we don't forget, then we have to keep forgiving over and over! Only with God's help can we learn to forget by putting what we forgive in the past and leaving it there. Which is not to say we are forgetful. Just that we can "forget" by leaving those things in the past! That way when we offer to forgive someone, it will be complete!

We need to give more of ourselves! In the world today we have a habit of only doing what



Psalm 94:19

Listen
 Hear
 Understand
 Grow

we have to, to get by. We don't give any extra. In our work place most of us only give enough to get our pay check! And we grumble if we are asked to give more of ourselves. It's the same way in our home. Instead of spending time with our families we have too many other things to do. We need to set aside time for our family. Even if it's only a few minutes out of each day. And it doesn't have to be an exact time of day. When one of your children come to you, take the time to find out what it is this child wants. You'll be surprised how much fuller your life will be!

Dear Lord

Help me, dear Lord, to be content
 With the gifts You've given me.
 And help me not to envy those
 Who seem more used by Thee.
 I would be so yielded, Lord
 That You can use me, too,
 In any way here on earth
 That is most pleasing to You.
 I'm willing to be least, dear Lord
 In your Kingdom here below.
 Just fill me with Your joyous love
 that others may see Your glow.

Five Purposes of Prayer

1. Praise and adoration: responding to the glory and grandeur of God.
2. Thanksgiving: acknowledging the Giver of all good gifts.
3. Confession: admitting our failures and asking for pardon.
4. Petition: asking God to take care of us.
5. Intercession: asking God to help others.

Dale A. Matthews in *The Faith Factor*

Finding God's Will

Author: Joni Eareckson Tada

Verse: 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Passage: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24

There's hardly a Christian who hasn't looked into the future and questioned, "What is God's will for my life?" Today's verse may be short and sweet, but it's all the answer you need. Be joyful. Pray continually. Give thanks. For *this* is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

"But you don't know my circumstances," I hear you saying. "How can I be thankful for pain and heartache?" God is not asking you to *be* thankful but to *give* thanks. There's a big difference between feeling thankful and giving thanks. One response involves emotions, the other, your will. Trusting God has absolutely nothing to do with trustful feelings.

Also, God's not asking you to give thanks for the tough times—only that you give thanks *in* them. Give thanks that he is sovereign ... that he is in control ... giving you grace and peace ... and planning it all for your good and his glory.

Today's verse became my anchor when I was first paralyzed. I gritted my teeth, pushed aside feelings of despair, and willfully gave thanks for everything from the hospital breakfast of cold cornmeal mush to the grueling hours of daily physical therapy. Many months later a miracle occurred. I began to *feel* thankful. My brighter attitude enabled me to give thanks for greater things. Later on another miracle happened: I was able to rejoice in suffering ...

I want to find your will for my life, O Lord. In other words, I want to find your heart.

God's Message

There's no means for escape,
 It's time you're punished for your mistake.
 Hopefully this lesson will stop you from doing wrong
 By you being locked up for so long.

You have hurt friends, strangers, scarred them for life
 You have caused unnecessary pain and strife
 Yes, the things you have done are sad,
 But that doesn't mean you are all bad.

I'm telling you stuff at times you didn't see
 only one person should come first that is me
 I know you are confused, and this may sound strange,
 I can stop you now or give you a chance for change.

I am God of you and God of all
 I can give you life in heaven or into hell you can fall.
 I have power of eternal life and death.
 I allowed you to walk, see, hear; I even gave you breath.

I gave you commandments for life to follow
 Not for just today or tomorrow.
 You break them time and time again,
 But in faith you'll be forgiven your sins.

By being honest, respectful, just a friend
 You can start your life all over again.
 My last words, I hold no grudge,
 Just remember, in the end, I will be your Judge.

by Chris Swartwood



They Walked

A young boy had just gotten his driving permit. He asked his father if they could discuss the use of the car. His father said, "I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up, study your Bible, and get your hair cut and we'll talk about it."

After about a month, the boy came back and again asked his father if they could discuss use of the car. His father said, "Son, I've been real proud of you. You have brought your grades up, you've studied your Bible diligently, but you didn't get your hair cut!"

The young man replied, "I've been thinking about that. You know, Samson had long hair, Moses had long hair, why even Jesus had long hair..."

To which his father replied, "Yes, and they walked everywhere they went!"

A Greater Need

Mother Teresa, whose sisters in Calcutta run both a hospice and a clinic for leprosy patients, once said, "We have drugs for people with diseases like leprosy. But these drugs do not treat the main problem, the disease of being unwanted. That's what my sisters hope to provide."

The sick and the poor, she said, suffer even more from rejection than from material want. "An alcoholic in Australia told me that when he is walking along the street, he hears the footsteps of everyone coming toward him or passing him becoming faster. Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty."

One need not be a doctor or a miracle worker to meet that need.

Philip Yancy in *The Jesus I Never Knew*

A note to secretaries and pastors—

Copy Me, Please!

Although there are many individuals included, our database primarily lists congregations, to which a copy of our newsletter is sent. It is printed on white paper so that (all or portions of) it can be copied into your newsletter or bulletin, or simply copied and made available to the members of the congregation.

Please make this newsletter available to the members of your congregation. If any of the members would like to be on our mailing list, have them send names, addresses, and phone numbers to The Church of the Damascus Road, PO Box 834, Fort Dodge, IA 50501-0834

-- Pastor Carroll Lang

The Church of the
Damascus Road
Flash!

Volume 1.5

December 1998

The official publication of The Church of the Damascus Road, a Christian Community of Reconciliation, serving the inmate population of the medium security units at Rockwell City and Fort Dodge, Iowa.

If you are reading a copy of this letter that is not yours, you can subscribe and receive your own copy by writing to:

The Church of the Damascus Road
 PO Box 834
 Fort Dodge, IA 50501-0834
 Office at St. Olaf Lutheran Church
 239 North 11th Street, Fort Dodge
 515-955-3579

A Creed

For those who have suffered

Anonymous

I asked God for strength, that I may achieve.
I was made weak, that I may learn to humbly obey.
I asked for health, that I may do great things.
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy.
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men.
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life.
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing I asked for, but everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am, among men, most richly blessed.



What is Epiphany?

Are you acquainted with the word "epiphany"? It is derived from the Greek word, epiphaneia, and means "an appearance." Centuries ago, the church set aside January 6th, following the 12th day of Christmas, and called that day Epiphany, intending for it to refer to the revealing of Jesus as the Christ to the Wise Men who were Gentiles. The very first followers of Christ were Jewish. The story of the revelation of Christ to the Wise Men, who were non-Jewish, is a reminder that God meant for Christ to be the Savior of the whole world. As an old hymn puts it: "The light of the world is Jesus." The whole world! Have a Merry Epiphany!



Invite the Pastor to Worship

The worship services at The Church of the Damascus Road are scheduled on week-nights for two reasons. One is to enable people on the outside to worship with the inmates and not miss worship in their own congregations. The second is to make the pastor of Damascus Road available to visit area congregations on Sunday mornings. The pastor can give a brief update on the ministry, sermon, children's sermon, adult forum, children's Sunday school opening or cross-generational class session, any or all of the above, and/or is open to suggestions. All that is asked is that there be time to prepare.

Call 515-955-3579 or write to: The Church of the Damascus Road, PO Box 834, Fort Dodge, IA 50501-0834 to arrange for a visit to your congregation. The pastor speaks Episcopalian, Methodist, Baptist, United Church of Christ, Covenant, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Reorganized Latter Day Saints, Catholic, Evangelical, Reformed, Assembly of God, Nazarene, and a host of other denominations, independent, and non-denominational as well.

In Prison

by Arthur J. Greve III

My main goal as a first-timer is survival in a world governed by humiliation, degradation, and isolation. For most of the time inside here, there will be little meaningful guidance for the future. An inmate is trapped into being totally dependent on the system. He is told what to do and when. All a man has to do is to try to remain sane and survive.

In an age of changing technology, prison life remains much the same as it was a hundred years ago. Every long term sentence seems coldly calculated to achieve the maximum possible humiliation. With little or no meaningful work, an inmate can spend up to 23 hours a day locked away. Even letters are censored and visitors are restricted. The whole system is supervised by prison officials locking and unlocking doors and counting heads.

I'm not defending prisoners or criminals. If a man is guilty, then let the punishment fit the crime, but just because some people act like animals, is it right to treat the whole prison population as animals in cages? I feel many of us deserve the chance to change and become assets to society once again.

For me there's another dimension: one of hope, forgiveness, and justice from God. From treatment, to after care, to here, reuniting myself with God, I have found truth and reality. Much has changed in my emotional, mental, physical and spiritual life. I have been healed in the areas that have brought me here and have become a new person.

I'm not a religious freak, or someone trying to find an escape route from the past. I'm just an ordinary, simple man who met the living God and went on to know him personally.

It'd be nice to say that, with my reacquaintance with God, everything in the garden is rosy. On the contrary, God seems to be taking me apart, bit by bit, and rebuilding me. The truth is in the fact that, through all the peaks and valleys of my Christian experience, God has never left me. Many a time he's stretched out his hand to pick me up, to strengthen me in a time of weakness, and set me on the path again. The thing is, Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven. There are still areas in my life that God is chipping away to shape me into the person he wants me to become. I am confident that whatever happens in my life from here on, God will be with me every second of the way.

From the depths of humiliation, degradation, and isolation, I have found life in its fullness. I thank God for the love, peace, joy, and absolute freedom he alone can give.



The Greatest Gift

God
the greatest Lover
So loved
the greatest degree
The world
the greatest number
That he gave
the greatest act
His only begotten Son
the greatest Gift
That whoever
the greatest invitation
Believes
the greatest simplicity
In him
the greatest Person
Will not perish
the greatest deliverance
But
the greatest difference
Have
the greatest certainty
Eternal life
the greatest possession

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The Church of the Damascus Road

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God Does Nothing in Vain

God has created me
to do some definite service;
He has committed some work for me
which he has not committed to another.
I have a mission ...
Therefore I will trust him.
Whatever, wherever I am,
I can never be thrown away.
If I am in sickness,
my sickness may serve him.
In perplexity, my perplexity may serve him;
If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve him.
My sickness, perplexity or sorrow
May be necessary causes of some great end,
Which is quite beyond us.
He does nothing in vain.

John Henry Newman



When Angels Cheer

Yale surgeon and bioethicist Dr. Sherwin Nuland, in his bestselling book, *The Wisdom of the Body*, describes the experience of saving the life of a 42-year-old woman who had suffered an aneurysm of the splenic artery:

“Something within me wanted to sing and shout, to dance carefree . . . to acclaim my triumph to the heavens and the ages - a woman’s life had been saved, and I would always remember the wonder of this night.”

The Bible says that the angels cheer the touchdown in heaven of one sinner who repents.

Homiletics

Savoring to the Full

There is only one thing about which I shall have no regrets when my life ends. I have savored to the full all the small daily joys. The bright sunshine on the breakfast table; the smell of the air at dusk; the sound of the clock ticking; the light rains that start gently after midnight; the hour when the family comes home; Sunday-evening tea before the fire! I have never missed one moment of beauty, not ever taken it for granted. I wish I had failed as little in other ways.

Agnes Sligh Trumbull in Leaves of a Diary



Peace Be With You!

The members of the Church of the Damascus Road wish you a very blessed Christmas and a New Year filled with new possibilities and opportunities to tell the good news of God With Us!

We invite you to share a time of worship with us. It means a lot to us to meet Christian sisters and brothers, whose presence reminds us we are not forgotten.



God’s Purpose

God is working his purpose out
as year succeeds to year,
God is working his purpose out
and the time is drawing near;
Nearer and nearer draws the time,
the time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be fill’d with the
glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

Arthur Campbell Ainger (1841-1919)

Sometimes

Anonymous

Sometimes I wonder if souls drift on
And reach that happy house above
Where eternal life will be my home
In a land of wonderful love.

Sometimes I wonder if things are true
About this home so free
Will it heal this heart so blue
Is it truly for you and me?

Sometimes I wonder as years roll by
We see the dawn of a cloudless day
If we will drift to that eternal home
And forever more we’ll stay.

Sometimes I wonder if
we must change our life
From the sinful road of today
And drift from this world
of sorrow’s strife
To that happy eternal home to stay.