

# THE VISITOR

*from Saint Marks*

*United Church of Christ*

April 2008

Sharing changes lives - including our own.



"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have"

*Hebrews 13:16a*

## From the Senior Pastor

The Rev. Dr. John E. Manzo

Spring has Sprung!



Spring, to me, is one of those truly joyous times. Winters in the Ohio Valley is often so gray and the grayness of the sky and the lack of vegetation makes the entire area appear to be almost stark. I love the Spring when the vegetation begins to grow and blossom and the sky begins to turn more and more blue. I know all about the April showers, but April is also the month when we begin to see the sun and blue skies more and more.

I never like to talk about Easter being early or late on any given year. It always seemed to be goofy to me to think like that. But this year, Easter sure was early!!! Wow. Easter is now past.

We are into April and life still goes on at St. Marks.

On April 20<sup>th</sup> we are having an exciting "Munchin for Missions," luncheon after church. This will be used to help raise funds for an upcoming mission trip. Fund raising, eating, and fun all rolled into one afternoon.

You will start seeing in April and May a new push for Evangelism. One of our Vision Goals was concerning Evangelism and we are hard at work at the implementation of this. Keep your eyes open.

Some things to note:

We are taking our One Great Hour of Sharing offering during April. Please give generously.

We have a congregational meeting on April 13<sup>th</sup> after Worship to discuss finances and options to solve cash flow issues. So please come!

April 27<sup>th</sup> is Faith Statement Sunday. Come to hear our confirmands!

See you in church!

John

**Our Mission is to Reach:**

**Up!  
Out!  
Beyond!  
In!**

## "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have"

says the writer of Hebrews to the community of faith. It is a reminder that our actions as Christians speak as loudly as our words and worship services. Over the next several weeks we will have the opportunity to share our material goods with others through the special offering for One Great Hour of Sharing. (OGHS) You will find special envelopes in the pew racks or you can mark your check for OGHS. Our gifts to this offering will:

1. Create sustainable sources of income for rural villages
2. Provide micro-credit to women to start poverty-escaping businesses
3. Teach trades and job skills to people maimed by landmines
4. Offer children a chance to survive past the age of 5 and go to school
5. Help rebuild communities ravaged by natural disasters
6. Resettle refugees into new lives  
and much more.



## THE APRIL WORSHIP SCHEDULE

### Sunday, April 6 - Second Sunday of Easter

Scripture: Luke 24:13-13

Sermon Title: Road Trip!

9:15 am Sunday School for all ages

10:30 am **WORSHIP** with the Sacrament of Holy Communion

### Sunday, April 13 - Third Sunday of Easter

Scripture: Psalm 23

Sermon Title: God as Shepherd

9:15 am Sunday School for all ages

10:30 am **Worship**

### Sunday, April 20 - Fourth Sunday of Easter

Scripture: John 14:1-14

Sermon Title: I Am

9:15 am Sunday School for all ages

10:30 am **Worship**

### Sunday, April 27 - Fifth Sunday of Easter

**Confirmation Faith Statement Presentations**

9:15 am Sunday School for all ages

10:30 am **Worship**

**NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE,  
OR WHERE YOU ARE ON LIFE'S JOURNEY,  
YOU ARE WELCOME HERE!**

## The Nightly News Did Not Report This:

Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright the recently retired Senior Pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago has recently made the news. As Presidential Candidate Barack Obama is a member of Trinity, Wright and his comments have been a major news item.

I wasn't sure what, exactly, to say about this. Trinity is a part of the United Church of Christ and Jeremiah Wright is a minister within the United Church of Christ and I do have thoughts/reflections on this. I also do not want St. Marks to be a place of political intrigue or conflict. You may like or not like Barack Obama. You may have strong opinions in different directions about Jeremiah Wright.

These are simply my thoughts. I am not thrilled with many of the things Wright said, and I am very perturbed on how the story has been covered. (Or maybe NOT covered.) In any case, please accept these as my thoughts, nothing more, or nothing less:

Several years ago I heard a sermon. The theme of the sermon was that 'different is not deficient.' The preacher used a myriad of examples showing how people might be different from one another. They might have different theological world views. They might have different political world views. They might be of different races. They might have different sexual orientations. They might have preferences about many issues in life that are different. He went on to say that different is not deficient. In a generous world, different simply means different and differing people can learn so much from one another and grow together.

The preacher was Jeremiah Wright and I haven't seen any excerpts from it on You Tube. And we won't.

Jeremiah Wright has been preaching at Trinity United Church of Christ for over 30 years and his entire ministry is being summarized and caricatured by three minutes of video people have watched on You Tube and the nightly news. Much of what he has preached is available on recordings and video and we have seen all of around three minutes of what he had to say. An entire career in the ministry has been summarized into a small, not very nice, not so neat, package.

Jeremiah Wright is a colleague. He is a United Church of Christ minister, as am I. I've met him and have heard him speak on several occasions. He recently retired as the Senior Pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in

Chicago and I recently heard his successor, Rev. Otis Moss III speak----in Louisville, just last week.

This is a painful time. Like so many others, I found the words we have all seen Jeremiah Wright speak to be painful and, frankly, mean spirited. I do not know the context of the rest of the sermon and perhaps it doesn't matter. Most of us preachers, however, can live in fear that a 30 second excerpt from one sermon can end up on You Tube. Most of us, if we are profoundly honest, can attest to times when we were angry or dumb or half crazed when we spoke----at least in short blocks of time. But, yes, did I dislike what he had to say, absolutely? Do I disavow myself from those particular comments? Yes, of course.

Here is what the nightly news is not going to tell you.

Trinity United Church of Christ does tremendous outreach in south Chicago. In a portion of the city where poverty is at its strongest, Trinity feeds, clothes, educates, and empowers the poorest of the poor. It is mostly an African American part of the city where they are located and most of the people that Trinity serves are African American. But no one is turned away. Jeremiah Wright is angry and has expressed great anger at the poverty in his neighborhoods. He lives with the belief that our nation's government has turned away from doing a war on poverty to making war on the impoverished. It makes him angry. Sadly, I don't think enough people share that anger.

Jeremiah Wright has preached, loudly and longly to the people in his church and neighborhoods to stop waiting for hand outs and stop blaming others for their plight in life, but to lift themselves out of poverty, and to make something of themselves. Again, we won't be seeing this on the nightly news.

Every group at every gathering at Trinity United Church of Christ does Bible study. If you belong to the choir, you did Bible study? If you come late to choir to miss Bible study, you aren't going to succeed. If you plan on leaving early from choir to miss Bible study, you aren't going to succeed. Jeremiah Wright does not want to have more Biblically illiterate people in this world, so Bible study is always held in the middle of everything so people can't avoid it. We won't be seeing this on the nightly news.

Children, at Trinity, do not go to Sunday School. Sunday School means getting dressed up and walking to church. Lots of kids hate getting dressed up. Trinity's Sunday School is on Saturday morning. The place is packed with kids learning about Jesus. We won't be seeing this on the nightly news.

I am not trying to defend or justify anything that Jeremiah Wright said that might be offensive. What I am trying to say is that there is much more to this man than people are seeing. It is tragic, sad, and even disgraceful that so many people are judging this person on so very little information about him.

Jeremiah Wright is not, and never has been a politician. He is a preacher. He never has looked for popularity or acceptance. He simply has tried to preach and teach the truth as he saw it. Jeremiah Wright is not Biblically illiterate and never has been---but he is being observed by a largely Biblically illiterate society.

Biblical literacy in our day and age is coming to a position and finding Bible verses to 'prove' ourselves right. You take small nuggets of Scripture and apply them as you desire and, wham, you are Biblical.

It doesn't quite work like that. The Bible is written in whole books and the whole books are a lot earthier than people often give them credit for being.

Read the Book of Amos. Amos was one mad guy who made Jeremiah Wright's comments seem mild.

Hosea. Angry prophet.

Jeremiah. Angry and depressed prophet who called God a liar.

Isaiah. First Isaiah was hated by the people of Israel because life was good and he kept telling them that life wasn't nearly as good as they thought. He was decreed to be anti-God and anti-Israel.

Then there was Jesus. I often hear Jesus portrayed as 'nice.' The word 'nice' isn't in the Bible. Actually, Jesus was often not nice at all and had the ability to insult virtually everyone with whom he was speaking.

Preachers in 2008 have learned tact and diplomacy but Christianity is not always reflective of a history of tact and diplomacy from pulpits. Jonathan Edwards, the most famous of the Puritan preachers once referred to people being as 'rats' dangling open a fire, saved only by the grace of God holding them by their tails.

Again, I'm not saying that Jeremiah Wright should have said what he said, but he was not the first one to do this in the history of Christianity.

I have found this whole story to be incredibly sad. Jeremiah Wright was and is a fine man who ought to be retiring with a great legacy. Because a member of his church is running for the Presidency some of Wright's worst comments have been presented to the world as the sum total of who he, Wright is, and he is cast as the devil because of it.

I'd like to say that most people are intelligent enough to recognize this for what it is.

I'd like to say that most people have enough charity in their hearts to overlook one thing to see the vast array of that which is good.

I'd like to say all of these things, but my optimism in the wisdom of society and the goodness of society is something greatly lacking in me right now.

As for me, I am pretty different from Jeremiah Wright. Or I might say that Jeremiah Wright is different from me.

I live, however, with words spoken by a great preacher. Different is not deficient.



“Humility & fear  
of the Lord bring  
wealth and  
honor and life.”  
Proverbs 22:4