

The Fuss
March 27, 2008

On of the pieces of our United Methodist Tradition that I have loved is the standard that as people of faith, we are to be active and engaged in making the world a better place through our actions. Our actions are to reflect our love for God and our commitment to live as faithful Christians within this world. Our history as a church is one of involvement and engagement in society.

However, in recent weeks I have found myself more than a bit intrigued by the words swirling over the airways about Rev. Jeremiah Wright.

The first time I heard his words on TV, my first thought was, WOW! It was such, not because the words were inflammatory (because they were). I was amazed because as a pastor, I have had my words taken out of context before. And these little snippets being used sure sounded like they were pulled out of something much, much longer.

I have been in this business long enough to know that sooner or later (and probably more often than I would care to admit); I will say something that is quite offensive to someone. As a pastor who preaches regularly it is never my intent to wake up and say, "How many people can I offend today?" I just know that it occasionally happens.

My goal as a pastor is to understand the community I am serving and listen carefully to the voice of God as it comes through prayer, scriptures and conversations, and offer words in the midst of sermons that challenge us to live more faithfully as followers of Jesus Christ. Sometimes this means my job is to comfort. Sometimes it means my role is to challenge us with words that may offend, but ultimately deepen our faith and commitment.

I had a professor in seminary who simply stated that the role of the preacher is "to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable." Those words are helpful to me. There are times when words of comfort are needed. There are also times when each of us needs to be moved to rethink our actions.

Ultimately there is only one person responsible for the words I speak. That is me. I would hate to think that any future presidential candidates from our church today will be held accountable for my words. They are not. I am responsible for my words, as I seek to be faithful to God. That is why I work so hard at living a life of faith.

It is so easy for us to jump to conclusions about other people. A long time ago Jesus said that we should be careful about trying to pull a stick out of someone else's eye, because we just might have a log in our own. He was warning us to be careful about jumping to conclusions, and inviting us to think carefully about whom we are and how we live.

In this political climate, I think those are important words for us to wrestle with. So, this incident with Rev. Wright challenges me to ask of myself (and of each other) what am I doing to connect with God? What am I doing to grow in faith and love for all people?

What I am doing to act for justice in this world? What am I doing that helps me look at others less with judgment and more with grace?

May God help us live well as followers of Jesus Christ.

In the hope that Jesus offers us,
Rev. Scott Carlson

PS: This weekend our sermon on Saturday is titled; *What Ever Happened to Hospitality*. You may want to read Mark 2:1-12 in preparation. Our Sunday services will celebrate our Chancel Choir's Cantata, called *Risen This Day*.

PS: This is intended to be a devotional e-mail sent to get you thinking about your relationship with God and what it means to live a life of faith. If you would prefer to be taken off of this listing, please e-mail me (scottcarlson@spwl.net) and let me know. It is sent to Laura Meixner, Our Church Secretary, with everyone else as a Blind Copy.

The Mission of Sun Prairie United Methodist Church is to invite and welcome people to be committed and compassionate followers of Jesus Christ through worship, through spiritual growth, through fellowship and through service to others.