The “Freedom of the Will” and the “Nature of Grace”

My dear family of Epworth UMC & Simpson UMC!

Our Lord said, “Where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” (Matthew 18:20). We are not alone; we are united with each other and with Jesus. Together, we are the United Methodist Community in this Highland/Oakpark Des Moines area neighborhood. Everyone is welcome to join us as we celebrate the presence of the Risen Jesus Christ!

Today I would like to share with you the Pelagian Controversy in the history of ancient Christianity. This story will be an opportunity to think about what our faith foundation should be.

As you know, the concept of salvation is a controversial issue. The usual arguments on salvation are about heaven, having fruit in the life, etc. Thus, understanding salvation in the Christian tradition has always been an issue.

Throughout the history of Christianity this debate has been handed down, especially through the Pelagian controversy. The Pelagian Controversy has four main points: (1) the understanding of the freedom of the will; (2) the understanding of sin; (3) the understanding of grace; (4) the understanding of justification. These main points of Pelagian Controversy delve into the detail of the question of salvation.

Pelagius was horrified by the low moral standards of Christians in Rome. He feared that Augustine justified all this spiritual laziness by telling how he had been unable to reform his life, radically unable to do anything about his sin until God seized him in the midst of his sins. Pelagius argued that it is possible not to sin, and some people have in fact lived without sin.

Augustine’s basic ideas on free will can be summarized as follows. First, natural human freedom is affirmed: we do not do things out of any necessity, but as a matter of freedom. Second, Augustine argues that human free will has been weakened and incapacitated – but not eliminated or destroyed – through sin. In order for that free will to be restored and healed, it requires the operation of divine grace. Free will really does exist. It is, however, distorted by sin.

For Pelagius and his followers, however, humanity possessed total freedom of the will, and was totally responsible for its own sins. Human nature was essentially free and well created, and was not compromised because imperfection in humans would reflect negatively upon the goodness... Continued from page 1
of God. For God to intervene in any direct way to influence human decisions was equivalent to compromising human integrity.

More seriously, Augustine felt that Pelagius’s emphasis on free will and human merit denied divine grace and the power of the cross of Christ. In fact Pelagius believed in grace, but he thought that it consisted of the gift of human reason and the provision of the law. He did not accept that God’s grace could work directly within the human heart, turning it toward what is right. That would be a denial of the human power to choose right or wrong freely.

For Augustine, we are totally dependent upon God for our salvation. God does not leave us where we are naturally, incapacitated by sin and unable to redeem ourselves, but gives us grace in order that we may be healed, forgiven and restored.

Eventually, my understanding of Pelagian controversy mostly agrees with Saint Augustine’s opinions because of my personal experience. Nevertheless, this controversy contributed to the development of Christian theology. Also, this controversy could be better understood if we tried to understand their context first.

Brothers and sisters, pursue high forms of thinking and high forms of speech during this hard time of COVID-19. Any problems cannot hinder a thankful heart from pursuing unity within the body the Christ.

Pastor Paul (ByungHwoon) Lee

SPIC and SPAN

Floors in Fellowship Hall and in the Lounge are shining brightly these days. Gary Cannon, Epworth’s Ad Council Chair, has been working diligently to scrub and wax Epworth’s floors. Among many other chores, Gary has cleaned and reorganized the Lounge storage area, cleaned and reorganized the janitor’s closet, planted and maintained flowers in the planters in front, and has kept the Sanctuary sanitized. Pictured above is a shiny Fellowship Hall and pictured at left is the sparkling Lounge.

NEW SURVEILLENCE CAMERAS INSTALLED

New cameras were installed and existing cameras adjusted to provide clearer and more expansive surveillance of Epworth’s south parking lot, the south entrance both inside and outside and Epworth’s handicap ramp. Lorie Morgan and Opal received Training for retrieval of images recorded by the cameras.
EPWORTH KEEPS BUSY FOR THE LORD!

COVID-19 may have shut down much of the world—but the Lord kept working in Epworth United Methodist Church. Organizing and planning continued for the Annual Basement Sale as many donations continued to come in. Although Tuesday evening Community Meals were curtailed, the SAI group decided to continue providing a lunch on Saturdays by preparing sack lunches that could be handed out the back door for whosoever would come. The Tuesday evening meal group and the SAI group put together bags of groceries to be handed out on Saturdays along with the sack lunches. Susan Trumbo continued connecting with the Brothers and Sisters in Christ who make up the Epworth congregation. Gary Cannon was cleaning nooks and crannies that hadn’t been touched for years. (No skeletons were found!) Jill Coons, Joe Coons, Linda Toth, Lori Morgan and Gary Cannon took advantage of the current lack of activity in the kitchen to repaint the walls. Enough money designated for kitchen refurbishment had accumulated in the Memorial Funds to allow replacement of the old, worn out kitchen flooring, so this work, too, was completed.

The Lord does not sleep nor does He slumber (nor do the people of Epworth)!

At left, Linda Toth was found organizing merchandise for the Annual Basement Sale! Pictured below are bags of groceries ready to be given out by SAI group on Saturdays.

Below, Gary Cannon was caught vacuuming the back stair-wells to the sanctuary.

Left, the long overdue kitchen flooring is being replaced.

TA - DAAAA! At right the beautiful new kitchen floor!
YWLDNTU?

Wow, this year has been a time of changes in everything that we do. Worrying about viruses, to flying bugs with bad intentions and it’s just now June! Six more months to go!

We need to help each other out, lift one another up. We have the resources to do wonderful things in this place. So c’mon YWLDNTU?

#Make a treat for the return of our famous community dinner
#Stand up straight and tall and say “I am a United Methodist “
#Read for the blind
#Pray for those that you disagree with
#Give blood

So YWLDNTU?
It’s not always easy but, it’s always worthwhile!

These last few months have reminded me of the movie “Groundhog Day”. I write the same thing each month and then the next month I write it all once again.

And this month is the same, maybe more so. With everything else that has happened, we now have to deal with the changes of appointments and a change in our leadership at Mitchellville. We still do not have a new friend to work with.

Please pray for the people on the team and the women that are looking for the help that we can provide.

HUNGER HIKE

Oh, wow! It was really great to see so many of you return to church these last few Sundays, and to see how many of you were happy to drop the coins into me. Thanks to all of you for your wonderful donations to the Hunger Hike.

P.S. See the neat certificate you received below!

GONE FISHIN’

Pictured at left are Joe and Jill Coons. They were enjoying a much deserved get-a-way for a little fishing (they caught lots of fish!!!) and camping with family at Decorah, Iowa. Joining them was daughter, Joelle Thomas, and her family. Joelle, husband Clint and sons, Isaac and Aiden, live in Minnesota.

Photo is courtesy of Joelle.
We lift in prayer the home-bound

Edward Chesnut is at Prairie Vista Retirement in Altoona; Mildred Harmon is at Iowa Jewish Home; Jim and Gwen Hall are at Mill Pond; Ferne Michael is at 9901-272nd Pl. NW, Stanwood, WA 98292; Jane Magers is at The Rose; Virginia Crouse is at Valley View Village—2571 Guthrie Room 301.

We also lift in prayer those who remain both in self-imposed and mandate-imposed quarantine because of COVID-19

Finance Notes
It’s been great getting back into the sanctuary for worship. Being able to sing the hymns with our brothers and sisters is wonderful and to hear the inflection of Pastor Paul as he stresses the importance of a particular point of the sermon is helpful in the understanding of the message he’s brought to us. And it also means that we are not falling behind the curve of our financial needs.

Thanks to all of you for remaining steadfast givers to Epworth.

Bob Carl, Finance

LITTLE LENDING LIBRARY

Has anyone noticed that the books in the library box are always changing?

The movement of books is subtle but, it happens again and again. And not just books for kids! It looks like our neighborhood adults are stopping by as well!

We may never see the good that our little box does but, we will have planted seeds in the ground of the Parks area.

Bob Carl

MISSIONS

“Therefore go and make disciples...”

As of this date, we have not made a decision of “how” and “when” we will be having Epworth’s Basement Sale. There has been discussion about combining our spring and autumn sales. If this would come about, we thought that a two-day sale (on a Friday and Saturday) would be a good idea.

Our blessing of many donations spurs us on to share with our neighborhood and congregational families.

As we monitor the conditions of the pandemic, we will trust that the Lord will guide us to make wise and safe decisions.

Hopefully, by next month, we will be able to make a firm decision and we will share that information with our church family (and begin advertising.)

As always, your donations have been greatly appreciated and we have been working hard to organize and sort these gifts.

Respectfully, Linda Toth

Change a Child’s Story

Now may not seem to be the time to be talking about books and kids, but it’s a time of change and we can make a huge change in our neighborhood by getting the kids of this neighborhood to read more and then we will see the change that our world needs.

Thanks for the generous way that you have responded to this mission!

Bob Carl
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In-person worship 10:45 a.m.

FREE LUNCH

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epworthumc-desmoines.org

Visit us on Facebook
Every Week Epworth Serves

TUESDAY FREE SUPPER 5:30 – 6:30

SATURDAY FREE LUNCH 11:00am-12:30pm

Epworth United Methodist Church
412 Euclid Ave
Des Moines, Iowa 50313

9:15—Sunday School
10:15—Fellowship
10:45—traditional Worship

Phone 515-243-3817  Pastor Paul (ByungHwoon) Lee

July, 2020