

EPISTLE

August, 2019



Bradford Congregational Church – UCC
An Open & Affirming Congregation!
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Word From The Pastor

I've been thinking a lot about marriage. My eldest son is to be Married the beginning of August. That has made me think about what makes marriage special. What sets it apart from two adults living together? So I turned to one of my favorite theologians, Joseph Sittler. He wrote a short piece about marriage that I use whenever a couple wants me to officiate at their wedding. I share it with you because he says it better than I ever could. The essay is entitled *Marriage and Snow on the Mountain*.

The heart of marriage is a promise. On the face of it, it's a crazy promise: two people who have only a partial understanding of each other stand up and make this bizarre statement that they are going to cherish and care for each other for a lifetime. They say, "I take this one and this one takes me as long as we both shall live," not "as long as we both shall love." To many persons this seems like a mad and risky thing to do. Yet I would suggest that the madness is the romance. Without the risk there is no beauty, or strength, or goodness.

It's not a very courageous thing for two people who have found themselves to be mutually delectable to say, "We shall shack up as long as

the mutual delectability continues.” That’s neither broadly human nor is it particularly commendable. It has no gallantry. It’s a mutual opportunism. So that if people want to create all kinds of lovely music about what is simply one of the higher forms of self-satisfaction, I find nothing admirable about this at all. I find it completely understandable. I find it even momentarily delightful. But I don’t think it has much to do with marriage. Certainly nothing to do with a promise. I’m really challenged toward fulfillment only when I understand marriage as the mutual acceptance of a challenge to fulfill the seemingly impossible. Then there is something that is really worth the effort.

Bach produced greatness within the strict musical limits of his time; indeed, the severity of the limits called forth the magnificence of the accomplishment. Just as Bach accepted limitations and discipline in musical composition, so marriage means limits. Without limitation there is no expansion. Without the risk of a promise there is no true joy. There is only a kind of serial, episodic history of partial joys with interchangeable parts.

The problem with the temporary, ad hoc relationships which many people enter into today is that when there is a way out, the couple deprive themselves of the deepening effect of going all the way in. When there’s an exit, they can split. This is not to say that all marriages should survive. Sometimes the damage done staying together is so great that the only answer is a dissolution; we all know marriages like that.

It does not fit today’s popular mood, but we all need fidelity: the intention to do what we say, to accept discipline in order to solidify the good. Fidelity means more than not sleeping around the neighborhood. It means that we have made a promise, a commitment, and that we have accepted the limitations that are a part of that promise. There are great satisfactions in saying, “I have done what I undertook to do.”

In marriage people may have differences and periods of weariness and boredom, but they have also built up an axis of relationships that constitutes a steady center. And if you take that away, life becomes intolerable. I may have such difficulty with my wife that I don’t want to talk to her, but if she isn’t home when she ought to be, I’m troubled. As a friend said, “At least there is someone around whom I don’t want to talk to.”

There is a story by Flannery O’Connor in which she tells about an old couple who had lived in the Appalachians all their lives in a little cabin overlooking the opposite mountain. They were sitting there—both very aged people—in their rocking chairs on a spring day. The man said, “Well, Sarah, I see there’s still some snow up there on the mountain.” Now he knew there was snow on the mountain every year. She knew there was snow

every year. So why does he have to say it? Because to perceive that, to know that at times there is snow and at times there is not snow—that was part of the observation of an eternal rhythm which made their life together. In marriage you say the same things over and over, you inquire about the same people: and this is ho-hum in one way. But it is breathtaking in another.¹

Faithfully,
Pastor Jeff

From your Diaconate

A reminder: every Communion Sunday the small “Diaconate Fund” envelopes are placed in the pews. It is through your generosity that the Fund is available for helping those in need, be it heating oil, electricity, shelter, food, or medicine. Every donation, no matter its size, is graciously accepted!

If you know of someone in our area who is in need, please contact any Deacon, Pastor Jeff, or our church's Care Coordinator Carole Taylor.

Mark your calendars!

August 11th will be Communion Sunday

Our Covenant, and our Statement of Faith: we will renew unison reading of these on Communion Sundays.

August 4th our guest in the pulpit will be Brenda Egbert

September 15th our guest in the pulpit will be Cass Poulos

September 8th is our annual Rally Sundaes Sunday

Do you have a spiritual concern? We urge you to contact Pastor Jeff or any one of us on the Diaconate to listen to you, pray with you and for you in confidence.

Blessings to you all, from your Board of Deacons.

¹Joseph Sittler, *Grace Notes and other Fragments*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 17-19.

Lectionary Readings AUGUST (Year C)



August 4

Hosea 11:1-11 (But how can I give up on you, God asks)

Colossians 3:1-11 (set your mind and heart on Christ)

Luke 12:13-21 (the future is in God's hands, not ours)

Psalm 107:1-9,43

theme hymn: O for a World

August 11

Isaiah 1:1,10-20 (enough of your false offerings, already)

Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16 (faith is belief in God's promises)

Luke 12:32-40 (giving to those in need pleases God)

Psalm 50:1-8,22-23

theme hymn: The God of Abraham Praise

August 18

Isaiah 5:1-7 (how long will God abandon his beloved vineyard?)

Hebrews 11:29 - 12:2 (scrap your sins and keep your eyes on Jesus)

Luke 12:49-56 (wait, wait, Jesus came to “cast fire upon the earth”?)

Psalm 80:1-2,8-19

theme hymn: O Love That Will Not Let Me Go

August 25

Jeremiah 1:4-10 (you want me to prophesize?)

Hebrews 12:18-29 (pay heed to what you hear)

Luke 13:10-17 (isn't the Sabbath best honored by doing God's work?)

Psalm 71:1-6

theme hymn: O Christ, the Healer

September 1

Jeremiah 2:4-13 (triggered by a leadership team who ignore God)

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 (imitate Jesus and you'll be on track)

Luke 14:1,7-14 (take a humble, not exalted, seat)

Psalm 81:1,10-16

theme hymn: Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life

September 8

Jeremiah 18:1-11 (repent: turn around away from evil ways)

Philemon 1 - 21 (receive the slave as you would Paul)

Luke 14:25-33 (be willing to bear your own cross)

Psalm 139: 1-6,13-18

theme hymn: Our God, Our Help in Ages Past

September 15

Jeremiah 4:11-12,22-28 (the stupid and foolish can still do evil)

1 Timothy 1:12-17 (God gives strength for His work)

Luke 15:1-10 (joy is in finding a single lost sinner)

Psalm 14

theme hymn: Amazing Grace

ADULT STUDY

A class will be offered by Pastor Jeff on **Monday nights beginning September 23 from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. in the church's vestry (the downstairs).**



Here's how it will work. You may already know that each Sunday there are assigned lectionary readings. They are usually comprised of an Old Testament lesson, a Psalm, a reading from one of the Epistles and a Gospel lesson. That's a lot

of scripture and it would be impossible to explore them all in an hour.

So we will be looking at a Sunday that is four weeks away and explore the readings that are assigned for that future Sunday. This means that on September 23rd, our first meeting, we will be looking at the scripture lessons assigned for

Sunday, October 20th. If you want to prepare in advance, here is a listing of the readings we will be exploring:

Jeremiah 31:27-34 [Alternate: Genesis 32:22-31]

Psalm 119:97-104 [Alternate: Psalm 121]

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Luke 18:1-8

After we have explored the readings and gained some understanding of their meaning, we'll ask what common theme, if any, they share, what import they may have for our lives and then explore what shape the sermon for October 20th should take. Please let Pastor Jeff (pastorjeffucebradford@gmail.com) know of your interest.

6 weeks of Lectionary readings are listed in each edition of the Epistle. See page 4 in this edition for the August-mid September readings, and on our website at [EPISTLE](#) for previous lists. Each Sunday the week's lectionary are listed in the worship bulletin.

We are currently in the final months of Year C (which contains all of the synoptic Gospel of Luke), the last of the 3-year cycle. Year A (which contains all of the synoptic Gospel of Matthew) will begin the first Sunday of Advent 2019, repeating the readings we began in December 2016. Year B (which contains all of the synoptic Gospel of Mark) will come again in December 2020, repeating the readings we began in 2017. The Gospel of John is spread through all three years.

Coming in the next issue: an update by the Trustees on the Katrina Munn Steinway being restored in the company headquarters in New Jersey.

**Prayer requests may be emailed to
our prayer group Or [here](#)**



It is our privilege to pray for you and those you care about.

**We pray for each other,
without ceasing
and your prayer requests
are held in strict confidence.**



LOOKING AHEAD

This years church bazaar will be held on October 19, 2019
9am-2pm with lunch being served from 11am - 1 pm.

When donating to the yard sale we often save things for this event. If you have items that you think should go in the bazaar instead of the yard sale, just put them in a box and mark them “for the bazaar” and we will save them for later.

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR DONATIONS AND FOR SUPPORTING THESE TWO FUNDRAISING EVENTS.

Christian Ed

Did you notice the photo on the Epistle masthead this month? (see page 1, top)

Recently in Sunday School, we read the beginning of Psalm 18.

I love you, O LORD, my strength.

The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

We talked about the phrase, “the Lord is my rock”. It turns out that in the region where King David lived, rocks were important when fighting or escaping your enemies. They could be used strategically for a high viewpoint, or as a place to hide and shelter. So when King David said "the Lord is my rock" he was using a metaphor that was very meaningful in that time and place, as a symbol of protection and strength. The kids used stones and shells to make plaques to bring home. I love the variety of creative ways in which the kids approached the project!

Bridget Peters

Sometimes events and/or changes come up after the Epistle has been uploaded. It's always good to check the Weekly Email for last minute updates.

To be added to the **Weekly Email** list, [click here](#). If you have an area event to list in the weekly Email's "Around Town" section, please let us know!

This Epistle is a monthly publication of the Bradford Congregational Church. It is uploaded just before the 1st of each month. Anyone wishing to receive the email delivery of it may request it by emailing the church email below.

Some helpful links:

- our website is <http://bradforducc.org/>
- our church's email is bradfordvtucc@gmail.com
- Click on [EPISTLE](#) to read back issue of this newsletter
- our Sunday School, Music and Missions are at [Programs](#)
- Past Sermons can be accessed at [News & Sermons](#).
- our congregation's activities are listed on our [online calendar](#)
- our Facebook page link is [Bradford Congregational Church](#)