



FIRST VISIONS

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The Pastor Ponders



"ONE SHOT SAM"

I first met "one shot Sam" at the first congregation to which I was assigned as pastor, now thirty years ago. I was going over the membership roll of that church and Sam was on the inactive list. I called him and asked if he'd like me to visit. He said, "Sure, why not?" so I scheduled a time to visit his home.

Sam was a decent enough fellow but he warned me, up front, that he had a problem with preachers. "Every preacher I've ever known has disappointed me," said Sam. At the time I was young, naive, and idealistic. I responded, "Well, Sam, I won't disappoint you. Why don't you come on back to church?"

I was pleased to see Sam in church the following Sunday. In fact, he became a regular in worship -- every Sunday for just about six months. Then I noticed his absence one Sunday, then a second. So I called him on the phone. "I've

been missing you in worship, Sam. Are you OK?" His response, "You disappointed me, preacher, just like I said you would. I won't be coming back." "How did I disappoint you, Sam?" With that invitation, he quoted a single sentence contained in a sermon I'd preached several weeks previous -- a statement with which he disagreed. It didn't fit his personal theology. Though I tried to talk him past it, Sam wouldn't budge. I followed up with letters, calls, and personal visits over the next year or so - it made no difference. To Sam, I'd made a mistake -- and that was one mistake too many for him.

Several of the long-term members of that church told me that I'd done very well, indeed, with Sam. "You lasted six months with him - that's a new record," they told me. "Every new pastor tries to get Sam active, and he lasts about three months with most of them."

With time and experience as a pastor I've learned that there are a number of "one shot Sam's" and "one shot Sally's" in every congregation. They'll give you a chance -- one chance. But that's all. I praise God that He's not a "one shot Sam." Jesus was once asked, "If my brother sins against me, how many times must I give him another chance? As many as seven?" And Jesus responded, "No -- you need to give him seventy times seven chances." That's how God is -- and that's how Christians need to be, too!

Always and ever, praise the Lord!

Dave Ring



Sermon of Note reprinted here as requested by members

LOS ALAMOS 1ST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SUNDAY MORNING, JANUARY 20, 2008
"ARK SUNDAY"

"WHILE THEY'RE YOUNG"

OLD TESTAMENT TEXT: DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9
A SERMON MESSAGE BY PASTOR DAVE RING

SCRIPTURE TEXT: ⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. - Deut. 6:4-9 (NIV)

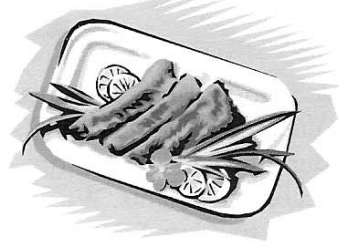
MESSAGE: "Impress them - these commandments - on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." To the Jewish people, both in ancient times and today, there was no more important parental duty than to teach the Word of God to one's children. Both fathers and mothers were and still are involved in virtually continuous recitation of the salient points of Old Testament scripture to their children. Many Jewish children in larger cities, in addition to their regular secular schooling, attend Hebrew school in the late afternoons for 2 to 3 hours daily - from kindergarten through sixth grade. Observant Jews are extremely serious about teaching their children the fundamentals of their faith. For if a child attains the age of 14 and does not

complete the rite of "bar mitzvah" for boys or "bat mitzvah" for girls, then that child is considered lost to the Jewish people. He or she no longer shares in God's covenant to the Hebrews.

Some years ago I became aware, as a pastor, of a worldwide Christian organization called "Child Evangelism Fellowship." Child Evangelism Fellowship exists to encourage the diligent and systematic teaching of the Christian faith to children -- and the younger the better. Child Evangelism Fellowship contends that many children at four years of age are capable of making genuine decisions of faith in Jesus Christ. While I don't personally agree with Child Evangelism Fellowship on everything, I do believe that they are correct in this assertion: Worldwide, 90% of all religious faith adherents - be they to Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, the Muslim faith, Zoroastrianism, or whatever religion you choose to name - 90% of all religious decisions are made by or before the age of 14 years. Most Christians make their personal decision for Christ as children. Most Muslims choose their faith as children. Most atheists reject the concept of God as children. Whatever one's faith - or the lack thereof -- may be, it's largely determined during childhood.

As I assert that, I'm pretty sure there are those among you who question its validity. We

Sermon con't. on Page 5



First United Methodist Church Public Safety Appreciation Dinner

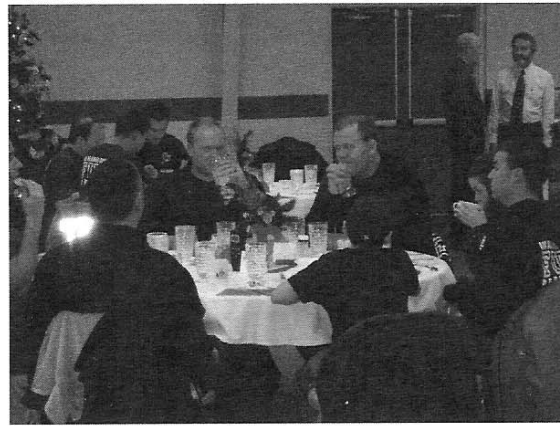
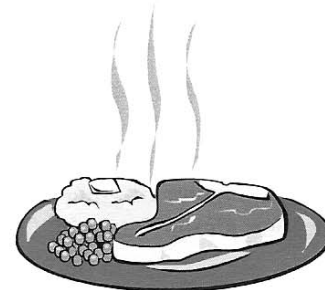
By Battalion Chief Mark Sandoval

On December 8th, Fire and Police members were invited to an appreciation dinner at the First United Methodist Church. Personnel were asked to arrive anytime between 5 and 8 p.m. for dinner. The folks at the Church really put on a great venue. When our firefighters walked into the auditorium, there were people greeting us graciously, a guitar player strumming Christmas carols, and servers and cooks working hard serving our crews. It was a great treat for all the firefighter personnel who attended. All five stations from B-Shift participated and were really spoiled by the church members.

The firefighters were treated to 5 star service. They were brought drinks, salads, bread, and servers took our orders. It was hard to decide between the salmon or prime rib considering how delicious they both looked and smelled. They said if you can't decide, then have both! There were a few takers for the dual meal, and not one person left the event with an empty stomach, or empty handed. Some crew members won raffle prizes, and all were offered bags of cookies to take home.

The church members really did an outstanding job of preparing and treating us to a wonderful evening. It is a great feeling to know that there are people out there who really appreciate our services, and that we are a valuable asset to the community. I think I can speak for all who were able to attend, a great time was had by all.

Thanks again to everyone who represented our department and especially to our friends at the First United Methodist Church.



Taken from the Los Alamos Firemen's Newsletter

**Plan on taking part in 2008's appreciation dinner
for the Policemen and Firemen of Los Alamos
Tentatively planned for December 6, 2008!**

Sermon con't. from Page 1

Americans like to think that we're each and all quintessentially independent - that we make our own decisions when and how we want. But I've already asked many of you to tell me your faith histories. So I know that a significant majority of you were raised in the church of Jesus Christ. Slightly more than half of you have been Methodists all your lives. And 90% to 95% of you made your personal decision to follow Christ before the age of 14. So what Child Evangelism Fellowship says on a global scale fits Los Alamos First United Methodist Church. Actually, I'm one of the "10% minority" regarding religious faith. I was raised in a secular home. I didn't accept Christ until I was 20.

Despite my own personal experience, it really is more generally true that faith, if it is to form at all, is best and most readily formed among children. And that means that most Christian churches which consist, in our nation at least, of those well beyond 14 years of age, need to re-order our ministry priorities. If we are to have a future as the Church of Jesus Christ in America, we need to focus on those fields where the potential harvest is plentiful, rather than major in gleaning the corners of acreage that has already largely been cleared.

Let me be bold enough to suggest three things that our church needs to do less of - and, at one and the same time, three things it should do more of. I warn you, you may find your toes tin-

gling after I step on them.

This church, in particular, needs fewer activities designed around the likes and wants of senior citizens. Remember, as I say that, I'm 60 years old. I therefore know that there's a perfectly good senior center in Los Alamos, and it's a great place to enjoy a multiplicity of those sorts of things. What this church, and this town, really needs is more opportunities for young adult Christian fellowship. But I've already tried, twice, to promote such here. And well-meaning older adults have thrown up so many roadblocks - financial, physical, and personnel-wise - that I realize the support needed to sustain such isn't to be found at present. But it needs to develop - lest this church become Los Alamos' next museum.

This church, in particular, needs fewer religiously irresponsible parents. I've been in many of your homes; I've talked one-on-one with many of you. And I know that many of you are far more concerned about your child's class standing in school than you are about your child's standing with God. You encourage your children to learn how to play soccer on Sunday mornings over and above coming to Sunday School to learn the Word of the Living God. And then you wonder why, at 15, your daughter turns up pregnant. You're devastated that your 17 year old son received an MIP citation. What this church needs is more religiously zealous parents - who daily teach

the Bible to their kids at home and bring them to church on Sundays for Christian nurture with and among others of like mind and heart. And when your kid says, as they inevitably will, "I don't want to go to church today," you simply respond, "It's not a choice." Responsible parents don't give six year olds the choice of whether or not they're going to brush their teeth, and they don't give ten-year olds the choice as to whether or not they're going to church.

And this church, in particular, needs fewer folks who are stuck in the past, culturally and religiously. Again I'm 60 - which means I'm a "baby boomer." But I truly hope my watch didn't stop in 1965. I know for sure that I'm not wedded to the church worship patterns of the 1950's or '60's, because I didn't grow up with them. But dozens of our regular members are still, chronologically, anchored back there. And that means the early, contemporary worship service always plays "second fiddle" to the later, so-called "traditional" worship service - traditional, that is, for 1955. Even though the growing edge of this church is the early service, I constantly have to remind folks who come to me to say, "I want to present this in worship" that we have two worship services. And nine-times-in-ten they respond with, "Oh well, I'm not interested in coming to the early service. I just want to do it at 11 o'clock." Let me be candid: If what you want to offer isn't important enough to inconvenience yourself by coming twice

on a given Sunday, then it's not important enough for me, as pastor, to alter one service but not the other. This church needs more folks who are future-directed. Frankly, I don't much care what was done here in 1955 - or 1985 - unless you're offering to do it anew in 2008 or 2009. For you see, I believe that this church's best years are yet to come.

Today is ARK Sunday. We're celebrating a significant ministry of this church with children. The word of God, specifically Proverbs 22:6, says, "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it." Whenever I get ready to do a "chapel time" with ARK children, I think they're awfully young to learn anything about Jesus. But then I realize I've got a very powerful co-teacher, the Holy Spirit. And so I try - and, amazingly, they learn a lot more than I ever anticipated!

I was just getting started in the ministry, serving as minister to youth for a large congregation in suburban Atlanta, Georgia. One weekend just a few weeks into my tenure there, the senior pastor went on vacation -- and I was asked to preach in his stead. The preaching went OK, and when it came time for the invitation to Christian discipleship, I asked if anyone would like to step forward and profess their faith in Jesus Christ. A little boy named Neal, seven years of age, ran down the aisle. For a moment I thought he was just being rowdy. But he ran right

up to me and said, "I want to accept Jesus as my Savior."

Even though I'd only been there a few weeks, I knew who little Neal was, as his older brother was in the church's youth group. Neal was always trying to tag along with him, even though he was far too young. Frankly I, at least initially, thought much the same thing about his expressed desire to profess his faith in Jesus. But he had come forward in response to the invitation, so I gave him the microphone. He offered a short and sincere testimony, repenting of his sins and accepting Christ as his personal Savior. The entire congregation clapped as he scampered back down the aisle to rejoin his parents in their pew.

Little Neal, thirty years later, became a close advisor to one of our U. S. presidents, Bill Clinton. I was pleased to know that a man of sincere Christian faith, from early childhood onward, was helping -- in at least a small way -- to steer the course of our great nation.

Children, while they're young, need to hear the Word of God. They need to experience the love of Jesus. And we, Jesus' more experienced disciples, need to diligently teach them. Amen.

POTLUCK FOR NAVAJO GUESTS JANUARY 27TH AFTER SECOND SERVICE



Potluck
**PLEASE BRING SOUP/CHILI,
TOPPINGS FOR BAKED POTATOES,
ICE CREAM
AND ICE CREAM TOPPINGS**

Missions Movie

January 28th

*6 pm in the Friendship
Center*

"Stars in My Crown"

*Join us to watch a movie about a pastor who builds a church with a Bible in one hand and six-shooter in the other in 1865 post-Civil War America.
Snacks provided*

Special February Days

Birthdays:

Doris Blackstock 02/01
 Bob Collom 02/05
 Aaron Goldman 02/08
 Stacey Eaton 02/12
 Francis Naffziger 02/15
 Sarah Kelly 02/18
 Lance Eaton 02/20

Anniversaries:

February 17
 Cathy & Darin Westley

Dear Friends in Ministry,

Actor Denzel Washington brings some star power to local United Methodist church services in a specially produced video available for downloading at www.umc.org/greatdebaters.

In the video, Washington tailors a greeting to United Methodist congregations and thanks them for a "legacy of support" on behalf of the 11 historically African-American colleges and universities long sustained by United Methodism's Black College Fund apportionment.

The five-minute video also features excerpts from Washington's new film, "The Great Debaters." Set in Marshall, Texas, the movie stars Washington as Melvin B. Tolson, a brilliant but volatile debate coach. In 1935 Tolson inspired Wiley College students to form the school's first debate team and challenge the University of Southern California (shown as Harvard in the film) in a national championship. Despite incredible odds, Wiley beat Southern California—and a score of other oratorical powerhouses.

Although church crowds may seem an odd audience for a Hollywood movie appeal, Washington notes that "The Great Debaters" is a "David and Goliath story" tackling issues that leave many audiences feeling as if they've had a spiritual experience.

"My faith," said Washington, "has made me realize there are things much more important than just making movies. It's important for me to tell stories that people will benefit from: stories about life, about actions and about consequences."

United Methodist pastors and leaders are encouraged to download the video at www.umc.org/greatdebaters and show it to church school classes, during discussion groups, in worship services or at youth gatherings. In addition, we ask you to forward the video to persons who would benefit from its message and to those who could share the word about the good work of historically Black colleges and universities.

First United Methodist Church
 called to:

Seek God,
 Share Christ's Word,
 Serve His World

**The next edition of Visions will be dated February 8.
 The deadline for articles is Wednesday, January 30.**

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 (505) 662-4822

United Skates

First Session:
 3rd graders & younger
 5:30 pm - 6:45 pm
 Admission \$2.00
 Second Session:
 4th graders & older
 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm
 Admission \$2.50

Sunday Services & Activities
 8:30 a.m. Contemporary Worship
 9:45 a.m. Sunday School
 11 a.m. Traditional Worship

Wednesday Activities
 Chancel Choir 7 p.m.

A Thank You to All United Methodists

From Cheryl Hicks at the New Mexico Annual Conference:

Brothers and Sisters of the NM Conference: I have attached a link with this email to a greeting from Denzel Washington related to the Black College Fund. The movie "The Great Debaters" is presently showing in movie theaters across the country. It features Wiley College from Marshall, TX, one of our Historic Black Colleges supported by the Black College Fund. (One of our shared ministries!) I hope that you will use this video clip in Sunday School, Worship, Youth etc. It is a moving message about how our church has helped shape our country.

James E. Large, Director of Mission and Administration

See letter to the left on this page.



Starts February 6th

Upcoming Events Highlights

Sermon Titles

January 27 30 young
 Navajos from Four Corners
 Native American
 Ministry coming - Navajo
 songs. Handbell choir;
 Benson Ndolo preaching

February 3 Holy
 Communion will be
 observed. Pastor Ring's
 Meditation: "God's Strength
 - and Weakness" Old
 Testament Lesson: Psalm
 18:1-15

February 6 Ash Wednesday
 Traditional Ash Wednesday
 Service at 6:16 pm

February 10 First Sunday in
 Lent Presentation by
 "Freedom in Jesus
 Ministries" -Bob
 GarnettPastor Ring's Short
 Sermon: "Christian
 Freedom, Christian
 Responsibility" - Romans
 7:1-6

Staff Meeting

January 25, 9 am in the
 Library

Navajo Weekend

January 26-27
 Jan. 26th MYF meet with
 Navajo youth at swimming
 center from 3 to 5 pm;
 pizza follows at the church

at 5:30 pm; host families
 will meet their guests at the
 pizza party

Jan. 27th Navajo youth will
 share handbell music at
 both service and singing for
 youth Sunday School classes;
 potluck follows second
 service--see ad on Page 5 of
 this edition of First Visions

UMW Palestine Study

January 28, 12 noon in the
 Friendship Center and con-
 tinues Feb. 4, 11, and 25.
 Bring a bag lunch, drinks
 will be provided

Mission Movie

January 28, 6 pm in the
 Friendship Center--see ad
 on Page 5 of this edition of
 First Visions

Disciple I

January 28, 6:30 pm in the
 Mid-High Room

Worship Committee

January 29, 7 pm in the
 Friendship Center

Newspaper Articles Due

January 30

Wesley Class begins

January 31, 6:30 pm in the
 Friendship Center continu-
 ing on following Thursdays

Church Council

February 3, 7 pm in the
 Friendship Center

Emmaus Community

February 3, 6 pm, potluck
 dinner in Fellowship Hall
 followed by business meet-
 ing and worship in the
 Friendship Center

MYF

February 3, 4 pm in the
 Senior High Room; MYF
 will continue to meet each
 Sunday at 4 pm

Disciple I

February 5, 6:30 pm in the
 Friendship Center

Trustees

February 5, 6 pm at the par-
 sonage

Ash Wednesday Service

February 6, 6:30 pm in the
 sanctuary

Staff Meeting

February 8, 9 am in the
 Library

LAF Crafts

February 10, 4 pm in the
 Friendship Center