



# Clerg-E



An E-Zine for Ministers – November 2007

## Combating the Negative by Focusing on the Positive

By Bass Mitchell

One of the lectionary readings for this month is from Haggai 1:15b-2:9. It addresses one of the important challenges we face as ministers—negativism. I think it gives some insights into how to deal with it.

Imagine this...

You are working your heart out on some project, say a new fellowship building for your church.

Standing behind you from time to time are persons who keep saying things like,

"Boy, this work is going slowly."

"Are you sure you want to do this? Shouldn't it be done this way, if at all?"

"The church down the street built one and this one pales in comparison to it."

"We don't need to be wasting time and money on this anyway."

They are the nay-sayers, the voices of negativism that you are bound to hear whenever you try to do anything in the church or in your job or just about anywhere. They are the discouragers, the

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grumblers who always see first and foremost the negative, why something will not work. Their motto is, "We have never done it that way before."

Haggai had them in his day. I think he gives us some good advice or a model for dealing with the negativism that often arises in the church and, the truth be told, in most of us from time to time.

Note that Haggai does not ignore them. He does not criticize them. He does not try to out negative them, because he knows he can't. They are just better at it than he is from long years of practice. Instead, he honestly admits their position, that there may, in fact, even be some merit in it (as often we can learn from our critics). He takes them seriously. I think that often puts them a bit off balance because they like to fight, to argue, to disagree, and when you show some argument with them, or at least that you value or respect their view, then you begin to change the ground rules and the whole debate to a more positive footing.

There is wisdom here for us. We need to listen to and respect those who sound negative. Chances are they do see things we do not see, that they have a perspective we need to consider. By taking their views seriously and with respect, we also help create an environment in which they are more willing to listen to and respect other views.

But Haggai does more than just accept their views. He really counters them with a vision, with a positive dream of God, of what God has done for them, was doing,

and would do. He would not let them just stay focused on what was or the limitations of the present, but on the possibilities always present when one truly believes in God and rolls up their sleeves and gets to work.

When we stay focused on God and not us, we combat negativism. Our eyes set only on ourselves, what we have, what we think we can do, on funds, etc. is to nurture a fertile field for negativism. Paul would say it this way, "We can do all things through Christ who strengthen us." Haggai, in other words, did not succumb to negativism. He was filled with a vision, with faith. That came through in his actions and words. He was always encouraging, cheering, keeping them aware that God was with them and that God had done and would still do great things for them and through them. Only such a positive, faith-filled vision can combat the power of negativism. When the negatives are seen, are acknowledged, they are done so always in light of the more powerful positives, so that they are not debilitating but taken and used in positive ways to make the vision a reality.

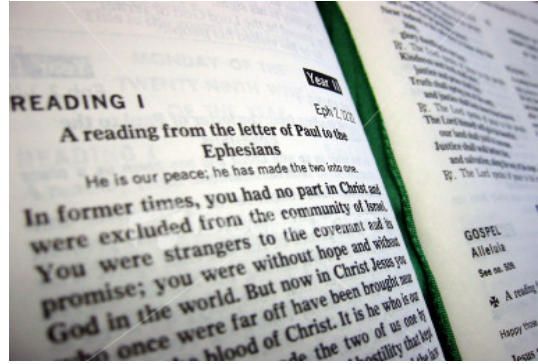
### **Lectionary Resources**

Homiliesbyemail.com offers numerous lectionary resources. The basic one provides an exegesis, homilies, sermon starters, illustrations, children's sermons, and worship aids – all for only \$69.95 a year. For a free sample, email [debbie@homiliesbyemail.com](mailto:debbie@homiliesbyemail.com)

**Complete Power Point Worship Services** This new resource from Homilies by Email provides complete worship services – liturgy, children's sermon, and homily – and all illustrated with power point slides. Each service comes in two parts – a complete script for the worship service in WORD and the power point slides. They save time for busy clergy, as they are easily edited and adapted. Go to <http://www.homiliesbyemail.com> for more information and a free sample.

# PREACHING THEMES FROM THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY

Each edition of *Clerg-E* will preview upcoming passages from the Revised Common Lectionary, giving some commentary on them and some possible preaching themes. These are from [www.homiliesbyemail.com](http://www.homiliesbyemail.com)



## November 2007

<b><u>Proper 26 (31)</u></b>	Habakkuk 1:1-4;	Psalm		
November 4, 2007	2:1-4	119:137-144	II Thess. 1:1-	Luke
(If All Saints not observed on this day)	<b>or</b>	<b>or</b>	4, 11-12	19:1-10
	<i>Isaiah 1:10-18</i>	<i>Psalm 32:1-7</i>		

### **St. Zacchaeus?**

Text: Luke 19:1-10

Here's an idea to tie in today's reading with All Saints' Day if you did not observe it on Nov 1. Look at Zacchaeus as a saint. Make this St. Zacchaeus Day. "Patron Saint of who?" you might well ask. How about the IRS? Or those who are vertically challenged? Or of Arborists? It would be fun looking at his life as a saint, for saints are not persons with halos, they are real people like Zacchaeus who allow God to change their lives and who God uses to touch and change the lives of others.

<b><u>Proper 27 (32)</u></b>	Haggai 1:15b-	Psalm 145:1-5,		
November 11,	2:9	17-21		
2007	<b>or</b>	<b>or</b>	II Thess. 2:1-5,	Luke 20:27-
	<i>Job 19:23-27a</i>	<i>Psalm 98</i>	13-17	38
		<b>or</b>		
		<i>Psalm 17:1-9</i>		

### **One Bride for Seven Brothers**

Text: Luke 20:27-28

I confess to loving musicals. One of my favorites is this one (hold up a video) or even show an excerpt from it if you wish: "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers." It's a great movie.

I found myself thinking about it when I read today's Gospel lesson. If I had to make a movie based on it, it might be called, "One Bride for Seven Brothers." Not sure yet if it would be a comedy, tragedy, drama, or action!

It could be all of these and more. Let's look at the script for this movie that I seriously doubt you'll ever see made in Hollywood or anywhere else.

**Proper 28 (33)** Isaiah 65:17-25 Isaiah 12  
 November 18, 2007 **or or** II Thessalonians 3:6-13 Luke 21:5-19  
*Malachi 4:1-2a Psalm 98*

### **"God Loves Them, Too!"**

Text: Isaiah 65:17-25

When I read the Bible, I am always looking for those words and phrases that really speak to me, that challenge me, that get some truth to me that I especially need. As I read this passage from Isaiah today, I especially found myself drawn to the images of the whole of nature being renewed and restored by God, not just the human community. It made me ask questions like, "Do you think God loves the world? Why or why not? Does God love the world as much as God loves us? If so, what does that mean in our attitudes and treatment of the created order?"

When my little girl was about 5 years old, we went for a walk. On the trail we were on, we came across lots of ants. I just kept walking as if nothing was there. But she began to tiptoe. "Must not step on any ants," she instructed me. "God loves them too."

She was right. The longer I live the more I realize how intimately connected we are with the world and all its creatures. For too long we have lived as if the world is simply here for our convenience, to be used however and whenever we wish without any thought of the rights of our fellow creatures. But God loves them too. Though we may be made in the image of God, that does not mean we can mistreat or ignore creation. Indeed, what it means is that we should love and care for it as the Creator does. Even Jesus said that every little bird that falls to the ground is known and loved by God. So it should be with us, don't you think?

**Thanksgiving Day** Deuteronomy 26:1-11 Psalm 100 Philippians 4:4-9 John 6:25-35  
 November 22, 2007

Thanksgiving resources:

<http://www.homiliesbyemail.com/Special/Thanksgiving/thanksgiving.html>

**Reian of Christ** Jeremiah 23:1-6 Luke 1:68-79 Colossians 1:11-20 Luke 23:33-43

November 25, 2007

or  
Psalm 46

### **Who's Number One?**

Text: Colossians 1:11-20

I was recently surfing the net when I came across a web site that said, "Who's Number One?" I pressed enter and a list of who was number one that week in hockey, football, basketball, on the music charts, racing, writers, stocks, fashion and so on came to the screen. I looked at it for weeks and saw how what was number one this week might not be the next week. Number one's seemed to come and go quickly.

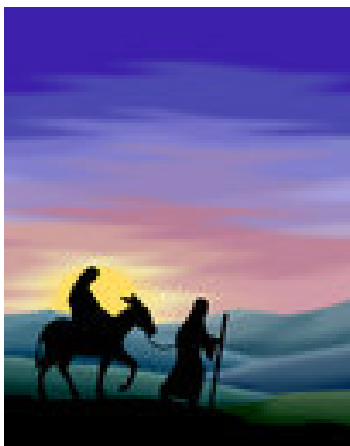
"Who's Number One?" That seems to me to be the question Christ the King Sunday (the last Sunday in the church year) asks us. It comes to remind us of just who really should be Number One for us this week and every week. It's a celebration of the Kingship of Christ. We proclaim him today as Lord and King of our lives. That means, as Paul says in the epistle lesson, that Jesus has "first place in everything..."

No book of the Bible emphasizes the kingship of Jesus more than the Letter to the Colossians. Its whole theme is the unmatched kingship of Christ. The church at Colossae was in trouble. All kinds of false teachings were tearing it apart. Apparently one of them was that Jesus was not really Number One, that he was just one of the many divine beings or angels that they should believe in and worship in order to assure salvation. Paul writes to convince them that Jesus is Number One and gives the reasons why.

Verse 15a "Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God..."

Jesus is Number One because in him we see God. You have heard of artists who make a self-portrait? Jesus is God's self-portrait. If you want to know who God is, what God is like, look at Jesus. What other king can claim this?

Etc...



#### **Two Sermon Series for Advent**

***This Way to Bethlehem***  
(Skits, Stories & Sermons)

***Journey to Bethlehem***  
(4 sermons on the Wise Men)

#### **Bible Studies for Advent**

***For Unto You a Savior Is Born*** (5 sessions from Luke))

***Messiah Is Born*** (5 sessions from Matthew)

#### ***Light from the Lectionary for Advent***

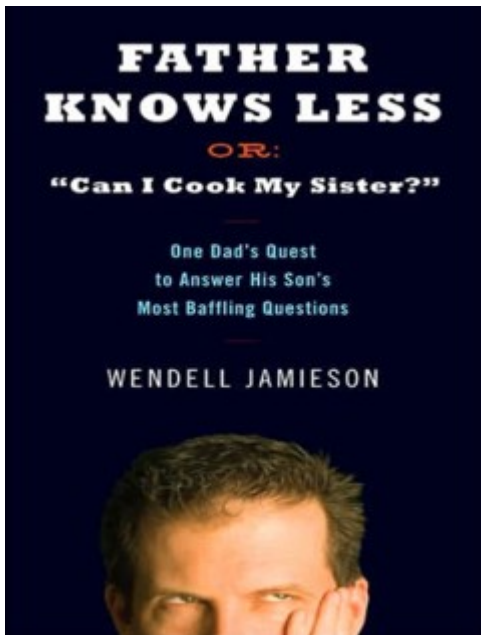
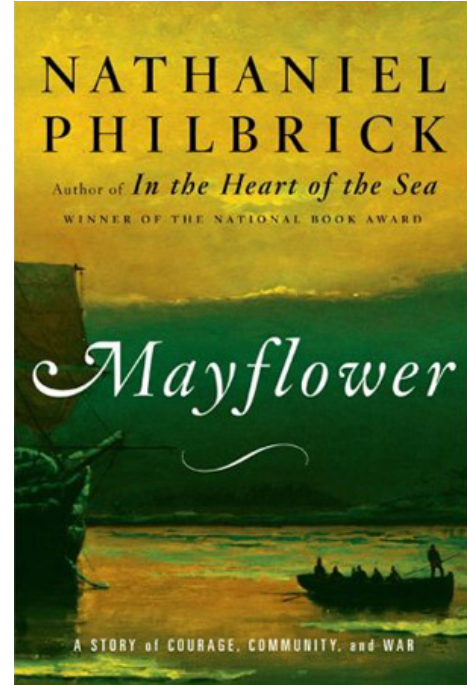
For more information, go to:

<http://www.homiliesbyemail.com>

or email [Debbie@homiliesbyemail.com](mailto:Debbie@homiliesbyemail.com)

## BOOK REVIEWS

In light of the fact that this month we celebrate Thanksgiving in the United States, I found myself reading the latest book on how it all got started—not just some meal but the beginning of America. This book by Philbrick is about just that—how things got started (or at least the beginning of English America). I especially liked three things about the book: One, I think this is probably the most accurate and complete account that we have. Two, how the author delves into the faith of these people. Three, the complicated relationship between the Pilgrims and the Native Americans. The book does not just cover the first Thanksgiving but a 55-70 year period. It deals with issues like race, violence, and religion, and I think we can get a good historical perspective to shine some light on these issues today. The true story of the Pilgrims is much more than the well-known tale of piety and sacrifice; it is a fifty-five-year epic that is at once tragic, heroic, exhilarating, and profound.



Here's a book I am enjoying reading. It has all kinds of questions that kids ask. The author got the idea from the kinds of questions his own children (son) asked him, many of which he often found he could not adequately answer. So, he went to experts on all the topics covered. It's often a funny book, but it deals with the real life questions and issues on the hearts of kids. Since we clergy work with children all the time, it might give us some greater insight into what they are thinking and how to go about addressing their fears, joys, doubts, and questions. The topics and questions covered range from science to sex. The one fault of the book, to me, is that it really does not deal much at all with religion or faith. I found myself thinking I wish there was a book that just addressed the faith-related questions children ask. Maybe I or you will write it.

If you have a book you would like to review for Clerg-E, send it to [clerg-e@homiliesbyemail.com](mailto:clerg-e@homiliesbyemail.com)

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# *Sermon of the Month*

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**Clerg-E** accepts submissions for consideration for Sermons of the Month. Send them to [clerg-e@homiliesbyemail.com](mailto:clerg-e@homiliesbyemail.com) and include if possible a digital photo and brief bio information.

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## **Say the Magic Words!**

Thanksgiving/Christ the King Sunday  
Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

By Donald Hoffman  
crestnch@TELEVAR.COM

“Say the magic word and win \$100,” is what Groucho Marx would tell his guests. And so today I’m interested in the magic words. It’s time to learn another new word. Today the new word is “cosmos,” from which we get “cosmic” and “cosmology” and “cosmologists.”

Gotta be careful here: There is a difference between cosme-tology and cos-mology. Cosmetologists are concerned with the makeup on your face. Cosmologists are concerned with the makeup of the universe. The word “cosmos” used to mean the whole world, everything there is. Of course now it means the whole universe, everything there is. A number of years ago, when Carl Sagan was still alive, he had a television program called Cosmos, and it was about the universe.

Now cosmologists think they have figured out almost everything there is to know about how the cosmos was created. They can explain everything that happened by ordinary scientific laws. Well almost everything. It turns out that everything makes sense that happened after the first thousandth of a second after the Big Bang, the creation of the universe. In fact they actually believe they understand everything that happened after the first millionth of a second of cosmic time.

Well, big deal! A millionth of a second isn’t much. So what if they can’t figure out what happened during that first millionth of a second?

So what?

Well, it is a big deal! It turns out that a lot must have been happening during that first millionth of a second, but we can’t understand it by scientific laws, because those laws didn’t exist yet! That’s just when all those laws were unformed—up for grabs.

This lack of knowledge has led some cosmologists to speculate. And what they speculate sounds a lot like a religion. They stopped asking “how” questions, which is what scientists usually do, and they started asking “why” questions, which is what philosophers and theologians usually do.

You see, there isn’t any scientific law that explains how our scientific laws came into being.

They might have been different. What would our universe be like if those scientific laws were just the tiniest bit different? And what they discovered was that the tiniest difference in some of the rules for how sub atomic particles interact makes an incredible difference in the kind of universe we get.

More specifically, most of these other universes are incredibly boring. Hydrogen atoms. Helium atoms. ... Nothing else.

No raindrops on roses or whiskers on kittens, because raindrops need oxygen, which wouldn't exist. Roses and kittens and whiskers need oxygen and carbon and nitrogen and lots of other things that wouldn't exist. No bright copper kettles because copper wouldn't exist. No warm woolen mittens because you can't make wool out of just hydrogen and helium. No planet earth. No life. And no you and no me.

So these cosmologists asked, Why? Why do we have a universe that makes planets? Why do we have a universe with so many elements? Why do we have a universe that's friendly to life? Why do we have half a dozen or more scientific laws that, if they had only been very slightly different, would make it impossible for life to exist? It didn't have to be like this. Was the universe made deliberately, by some intelligence?

Now it's pretty obvious that the apostle Paul, when he was writing a letter to the church at Colossae, wasn't up on the latest twenty-first century cosmology. Some scholars think he was dealing with first century cosmology, which was quite a bit different from ours. First century cosmology speculated that there was a God somewhere who had made a bunch of demigods called "thrones." The thrones had made dominions and the dominions had made rulers and the rulers had made powers, and finally one of the powers had made the cosmos. Paul is going to disagree with that cosmology, so he has to use their language in order to do it.

But isn't it interesting that he says, in Jesus Christ all things hold together? Jesus is the reason we have these basic scientific laws and not others. Jesus is the reason we have all these other interesting atoms: iron and gold and copper. Oxygen and carbon and nitrogen. Jesus is the reason we have a universe friendly to life.

So from Paul's perspective, to call Jesus King of kings and Lord of lords means that when he tells all those thrones, dominions, rulers, and powers, "Jump!" they all salute and ask, "How high?"

But from our perspective to call Jesus King of kings and Lord of lords means that he could say, "Make the Weak Force inside the atom just a tiny bit less or a tiny bit more!" and suddenly we've got a boring universe without planets and without life.

Wow! King of kings and Lord of lords! The image of the invisible God! The creator of the cosmos! Maker of everything: thrones, dominions, rulers, powers, visible things, invisible things, everything! The color white for dresses and the color blue for satin sashes and snow, those incredible hexagonal flakes, no two of them alike, melting on our eyelashes! That's the real King, the one who made all that, huh? Wow!

Oh, wait! That's not all. This incredible creator of the cosmos, everything that is, then becomes part of that cosmos. He takes on a body made from carbon and hydrogen and oxygen and nitrogen. He limits himself to one galaxy in that universe, to one little planet in the slums of that galaxy, to one primitive corner of one barbaric empire, with parents who live in poverty. He spends his adult life homeless, walking around with other lower class people, and gets in trouble with the government and ends up executed.

And we Christians have the nerve to say that being an executed criminal has every bit as much to do with his kingship as deciding that our universe needs lots of carbon atoms. Certainly any self-respecting, intelligent slime-mold from the planet Ploor in the galaxy M-33 has the right to say to us, "What makes you earthlings think you're so special that one of your number is the creator of the cosmos?"

Being king ought to be about power, not weakness. Being king ought to mean that the government executes your orders, not your body. Being king ought to mean that you don't mess with the dirty details on one mudball planet. Aren't there thrones, dominions, rulers, and powers you can set in charge of the small stuff?

Why would we ever imagine that the creator of the cosmos would lower himself to the point of dressing up in carbon and oxygen atoms? The one in whom all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell ... looks like us? Are we Christians weird, or what?

And yet, even if I don't know much about the "how" of the universe, I think I know something very important about the "why" of it all. Our universe has a meaning and a purpose. It came from somewhere. I mean, it came from Someone. And it's going to somewhere. I mean, it is going to Someone.

In Jesus Christ all things hold together. And through Jesus Christ God was pleased to reconcile the cosmos, turning chaos into harmony through the blood of the cross. I don't know the how of it. I don't know how six hours on the hill of Calvary relates to the microsecond at the beginning of the cosmos. But I think I know about the why.

Thursday is Thanksgiving Day. I think it once had a sort of Christian origin. But for most of this country, it will be mainly a day to get the family together and eat turkey. In fact lots of people won't even say the word "thanksgiving." They'll call it "Turkey Day."

And if anyone, just by chance, does think about being thankful, they'll do it by comparing themselves to someone else. "Thank you, God, that we're better off than those poor people in Darfur, or Iraq, or Afghanistan!" "Thank you, God, that you put us in this wonderful country, not like all those other awful countries out there!"

Now let me encourage you to turn "turkey day" back into Thanksgiving Day. And ease off on the thanks for how God has blessed you compared to some other poor unfortunates. Instead, go for the big picture:

Thank God for making a life-friendly universe. Thank God for making all those rules for turning a chaos into a cosmos, but also thank God for sweating the small details on one planet. Literally sweating. Thank God for holding the universe together by the blood of the

cross. Thank God for rescuing you from the power of darkness and transferring you to the Kingdom of God's own dear Son. Thank God that Jesus is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, and the one who has pre-eminence in your own life. Thank God that you are already, this very day, with Jesus in Paradise.

Now that's a thanksgiving that is a real Thanksgiving!

"Say the magic word," said Groucho, "and win a hundred dollars." Boy was he ever wrong! It isn't just a hundred dollars we've won. It's freedom from the power of darkness. It isn't just a hundred dollars we've won. It's the Kingdom of God's Son. It isn't just a hundred dollars we've won. It's paradise.

And by the way, it isn't just one magic word. It isn't "cosmos." It's two magic words. The magic words your parents taught you when you were little. The magic words that help us make sense of the universe.

Two magic words.

Thank You!



I Love My Church is a 5-week program to help members renew their membership vows to the church: prayers, presence, gifts, and service. It concludes with a service of Thanksgiving for the church. It includes detailed instructions. POWER POINT slides for this resource also available.

**Order**

## We are the Ones We've Been Waiting For

Rev. Pamela J. Tinnin  
[pamelatinnin@earthlink.net](mailto:pamelatinnin@earthlink.net)



The last few days I've been reading "We're the Ones We Have Been Waiting For", a small book by acclaimed writer Alice Walker. I've been a fan of hers for many years. Not only is she a gifted,

eloquent writer, she uses her talent to write about love and redemption and grace, to ponder the "big" questions and to inspire and challenge her readers to ask those questions themselves. *Where is society headed? When did our country take the wrong path? Has humanity lost its way? With all that's gone wrong in the world, do we have what it takes to make things right?*

Years ago, when the Vietnam War was raging and we had lost first Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy, I had a fantasy that if things got too bad, a superior civilization from some far off galaxy would appear to save us. When things seemed so hopeless, I think I wasn't the only one who held on to some faint hope that somehow, someone would rescue us. Perhaps that's what many in our country were waiting for as the horror of those years went on and on and on.

But Alice Walker is right—we are the ones who can change things; we have the power to change the world. Now this may sound like the beginning of a political speech, but it's not. Changing the world will take nothing less than building Jesus' kin-dom—the world will change when

enough people of faith will live that faith instead of waiting for that yearned for rescue that may never come.

Zack and I have been watching the video series, "Saving Jesus." The series presents a group of Christian theologians discussing how members of the progressive faith community, such as the United Church of Christ, can "save" Jesus from the role he's been relegated to by the conservative Christian movement.

What caught my attention in the first few episodes was a comment by Bernard Brandon Scott who is a founding member of the Jesus Seminar and renowned author of *Hear Then the Parable* and *Re-Imagine the World*. According to Scott, until the time of Emperor Constantine, being a Christian was about "doing," about how you lived, how you treated others, how you operated in the world. Even after the crucifixion and resurrection, those who aligned themselves with Jesus were known as "followers of the way," not "believers of the way."

After Constantine, when Christianity became the state religion, being a Christian became a matter of "believing", about whether you believed the creeds and teachings of The Church. Scott goes on to say that when "church" becomes an arm of the state, religion more and more takes on the role of control, of keeping people in line. Once Christianity became the religion of the empire, various litmus tests were used to determine whether someone qualified to belong. Unfortunately, over the years, those who have failed those litmus tests have often

been shunned or harassed, even tortured and executed. We only have to look to the time of the Crusades or Inquisition or the abortion wars to see how Christians have abused others in the name of “right thinking.”

Perhaps it’s time, not for something new, but something old. Perhaps it’s time to go back to being “followers of the way,” to quit worrying so much about whether people think the same way we do, but whether they want to follow the same One we do.

A young woman approached me at the local jail when I was there visiting last week. She sat across from me and chatted about the weather, about her little tow-headed blue-eyed girl who was playing hide and seek among the chairs, her boyfriend who was in jail for methamphetamine possession after being clean for nearly two years.

She was quiet for a while, gazing out the window where other visitors sat in the sun waiting their turn. Finally, touching her own throat, she asked about my clergy

collar, about whether I was a nun. I told her I was a pastor, that I pastored a small church in Guerneville, a nearby town. Her voice was so soft, I had to ask her to repeat what she said next. “I don’t know what I believe about Jesus,” she said, “but I wish people were more like him.”

You know, Jesus came to let us know that we *can* become the ones we’ve been waiting for—that if each of us follows “the way”, if we were “more like him,” the kingdom would begin to take form around us, a place where there will be peace and justice and grace and blessings for all. Thanks be to God.

Your sister follower, Pam

**Pamela J. Tinnin** is a freelance writer, performer, retreat and workshop leader, an editor for the University of California, Berkeley, and a sheep rancher on a mountain ranch in Sonoma County, California. She is ordained in the United Church of Christ and serves as pastor of the Guerneville Community Church-UCC, Guerneville, California. Her first book, “Bit Players in the Big Play,” a collaboration with Peter Perry and Bass Mitchell, was released in 2004 by CSS Publishing. She has three adult children and five grandsons aged 3 to 14.

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## Holy Humor

We are always looking for humor that can be used in preaching, teaching, bulletins, or church newsletters. If you have a joke or something funny that has happened to you, send it to [clerg-e@homiliesbyemail.com](mailto:clerg-e@homiliesbyemail.com)

### a Joyful Noise

While I was preaching in a church in Mississippi, the pastor announced that their prison quartet would be singing the following evening. I wasn't aware there was a prison in the vicinity and I looked forward to hearing them. The next evening, I was puzzled when four members of the church approached the stage. Then the pastor introduced them.

"This is our prison quartet," he said, "behind a few bars and always looking for the key."

### Gift Giving Can be Dangerous

Ed was in trouble. He forgot his wedding anniversary. His wife was really mad. She told him "Tomorrow morning, I expect to find a gift in the driveway that goes from 0

to 200 in 6 seconds, AND IT BETTER BE THERE." The next morning, Ed got up early and left for work. When his wife woke up, she looked out the window, and sure enough, there was a medium-sized gift-wrapped box in the middle of the driveway. Confused, the wife put on her robe, ran out to the driveway, and brought the box back into the house. She opened it and found a brand-new bathroom scale. Funeral services for Ed have been scheduled for Friday.

#### Another Kind of Gift

A visitor to a certain college paused to admire the new Hemingway Hall that had been built on campus. "It's a pleasure to see a building named for Ernest Hemingway," he said. "Actually," said his guide, "it's named for Joshua Hemingway. No relation." The visitor was astonished. "Was Joshua Hemingway a writer, also?" "Yes, indeed," said his guide. "He wrote a check."

#### Don't Give Up, Ladies

Two women archeologists are down in Mexico excavating an ancient Mayan burial ground looking for some remains to take back to their museum. Unfortunately, everything they run across is badly decomposed. Says one: "We don't seem to be having much luck." The other replies: "Keep on digging, honey, a good Mayan is hard to find!"

#### Pass It On?

My husband, Michael, and I were at a restaurant with his boss, a rather stern older man. When Michael began a tale, which I was sure he had told before, I gave him a kick under the table. There was no response, so I gave him another poke. Still the story went on. Suddenly he stopped, grinned and said, "Oh, but I've told you this one before, haven't I?" We all chuckled and changed

the subject. Later, on the dance floor, I asked my husband why it had taken him so long to get my message. "What do you mean?" he replied. "I cut the story off as soon as you kicked me." "But I kicked you twice and it still took you awhile to stop!" Suddenly we realized what had happened. Sheepishly we returned to our table. The boss smiled and said, "Don't worry. After the second one I figured it wasn't for me, so I passed it along!"

#### Takes A Lot to Scare Some Folks

My friend, an ex-Marine aviator, wanted to show off his new twin-engine plane. I was riding along as he put it through its paces. Suddenly, we were caught in a violent thunderstorm, with lightning crashing all around us. Next, we lost the radio and most of the instruments. As we were being tossed around in the sky, George said, "Uh-oh!" Fearing the worst, I asked, "What's wrong now?" George replied, "I got the hiccups. Do something to scare me."

#### What You Looking For?

I used to live in New Brunswick, New Jersey, the home of Rutgers University. The new flock of kids attending college always includes those who need a little help with everyday chores they themselves never did before, such as laundry or grocery-shopping. I was in the dairy aisle for some eggs. As usual, I opened the carton to check them over before putting them in my cart. Beside me, a young man did the same to his carton ... then leaned toward me and asked, "What are we looking for?"

#### Changes

I dialed a number and got the following recording: "I am not available right now, but thank you for caring enough to call. I am making some changes in my life. Please leave a message after the beep. If I do not return your call, you are one of the changes."

**Sand and Stone: Your Choice**  
A devotional by R. Franklin Gillis Jr.  
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Two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey, they had an argument; and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying a word, he wrote in the sand: "Today my best friend slapped me in the face."

They kept on walking until they found an oasis where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started to drown, but the friend saved him. Afterwards, he wrote on a stone: "Today my best friend saved my life."

The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend's life asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand, and now you write on a stone. Why?"

The friend replied: "When someone hurts us we should write it down in sand, where the winds of forgiveness can erase it. But when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

We need to learn to write our hurts in the sand and carve our blessings in stone...better yet, on our hearts.

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# The Bass **BLOG**

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## Values Voters?

The so-called “values voters” (members of the religious right) had a meeting up here in D.C. last week, inviting Republican candidates for president to speak to them or rather to try to convince them they had shared values. I suppose only Republicans and those present are considered to have values since no Democrats were invited that I know of. Of course, their values are anti-abortion, anti-gay, and anti-stem cell research. That’s a kind of holy trinity for them.

“Values voters?” Isn’t that a bit of a misnomer? It seems to me that everyone who votes does so because they have certain values that help direct them. I know I do. Bet you do as well. So why is that we let them or the media assign the title of “Values Voters” solely to one such group?

I do not like abortion. I think in this day and time, at least in our society, it should be a rare thing. When it’s used as a “quick fix” for sexual irresponsibility it is even worse. But I also value that this is a decision that must be left to the heart and conscience of women and their families. The government is already too much in our business and on our backs. Who knows – it probably has us all under surveillance. Big Brother is reading this as I type. This may be my last edition.

It would also be nice if those who are so vehemently opposed to abortion were as passionate in their support of programs for children. Our President toes the values voters line on abortion, but asks for billions and billions on a war we never should have been in, and then vetoes a bill that provides health benefits for needy children. Where was his veto all those years when the Republican dominated congress was spending money like crazy on their pet projects that I doubt went to help needy children?

Is it not a fundamental American value to treat everyone fairly, no matter their sex, color, or even sexual orientation? Love, respect, tolerance are all values. Sorry. I do not share the value that God hates fags. I believe gay people should have all the rights we all enjoy in this country.

Though I might have some qualms about how it is done, I think stem cell research, from what I have read, holds great potential to alleviate suffering for millions of people. Is that not a great value?

Something that was not mentioned at the summit was anything about creation care. Surely that is a value that we all need to embrace. If we do not, all others may one day sooner than we think be meaningless because we are going to destroy ourselves, kill our planet.

I think most everyone who votes does so because they have values, principals, concerns that are important to them. Every voter is a “values voter” to some degree. Maybe the rest of us need to hold a summit to let that be known, or better yet just go out and work and vote as our values direct us.

### **Signs of Peace?**

It seems that the media have always loved the violence, the bad news. But once in a long while they report on some good news, some signs of peace, even if the stories are buried on the back pages. I recently excavated two such stories.

First, this Jewish congregation for years has been trying to build a temple in the hills of Arkansas, running into all kinds of hindrances (lots of them from residents of the area apparently). So they bought a new piece of land and a man named Fadil Bayyari, a Muslim immigrant from the West Bank, got involved. You would think he would try to do all he could to stop them. You would be wrong. He offered his services as a contractor to the congregation – free of charge (saved them about a quarter of a million dollars). Why did he do this? Listen to his words: “Abraham is our forefather. We’re first cousins. How we got to hate each other is beyond me.”

Don’t you think that deserves to be on the front page?

Second, wonder of wonders, those most deeply involved in the age old conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, who are now working together on a fledgling government there, are having a series of meetings with Iraqis! Yes. They are helping Shiites, Sunnis and other members of Iraq’s troubled, tragic country come together, using what they learned in their experiences. They are also planning on doing the same for Palestinians and Israelis. These folks have been there and this gives them “standing” with other groups in conflict.

Again, should have been on the front page.

Seems to me that all of us could be peacemakers, more so than we are. What a wondrous, grace-filled thing to take the wounds we have experienced and received some healing from and help others move toward healing. It challenges me to be on the lookout for ways I can do this for others or even ways that I can bring persons together who can help one another in similar ways. That’s something pastors should do more of.

(By the way, the first lectionary readings for this coming cycle deal with peace, so you might want to keep the above stories in mind. God is alive and working in our world for peace in the most unusual and wondrous ways).

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