

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • OCTOBER 7, 2018**  
**THE CONGREGATION'S 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**

**The Scripture**

Ephesians 4:1-7;11-16

*I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*

**The Message**

***Journeying as Christ's Church***

**William S. Ryan**

**- *Fist Minister of Broadway Christian Church* -**

**Greetings**

It is such a joy for Narka and me to be here with you for the 60th anniversary of Broadway Christian Church. I am so very grateful to those, who presented me the opportunity and privilege of being the first minister of this remarkable congregation. Narka and I, along with our children, have been enriched by your friendship and love that began in 1958 and has continued throughout these subsequent 60 years.

When I think of our first ten years together, a treasure trove of memories floods my mind, but time limitations require recalling only a few.

We made our plain sanctuary, with its folding-chair-filled space, as worshipful as possible and followed a rather formal Disciples liturgy, with communion coming after the sermon.

We organized ourselves into eight functional departments, intentionally retaining Outreach, and Church in Society to insure “others” beyond our congregational concerns were included.

We emphasized commitment giving in an effort to develop strong personal stewardship practices and provide more accurate assumptions, regarding anticipated income.

We named our church paper “Broadway Life,” and I, reminiscent of my seminary years at Union, located on Broadway in New York City, and New York’s famed theatre district, titled my column, “Off Broadway, in the Minister’s Study.”

Our first annual budget was the grand total of \$14,000, (\$5,500 plus parsonage of that designated as minister’s salary), leaving little for the rest of our ministries.

Not having enough for a custodian, we organized our members into weekly “Clean-up Teams,” that found us novices tackling driving a used farm tractor equipped for mowing grass, and manhandling a large, industrial floor-buffing machine.

Connected with our July-June fiscal and program years were annual meetings featuring Glenn Geiger’s famous, barbecued chicken cooked over large charcoal pits.

Those first ten years were joyous ones for us, filled with accomplishments and enjoying our close relationships with one another. Contrastingly, two great sad events occurred in the untimely deaths of Ollie House from a heart attack at age 40, and, of beautiful 8-year-old Debbie Buckler in a car accident.

Capping this brief portrait from 60-years ago, I recall our Charter Day membership was about 102, tripling to 360 after ten years. Age-wise, Mrs. Yeager was our only senior citizen, a few in their 60s, some others in their 40s or 50s. But the vast majority of us were in our 20s and 30s, along with lots of young children. Broadway’s young minister was within three weeks of his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, making this old man standing before you 60 years later, fewer than 3 weeks from being – well, you do the math!

## **Introduction**

When Tim issued me the invitation to deliver today's sermon, he asked me to consider basing my message on the Scripture that I used 60-years ago on October 5, 1958. The Scripture used and non-sermon format of my message were not of my choosing. They were Dr. Lemmon's wise choices.

The text 60-years-ago was our Scripture reading for today. The brief message Dr. Lemmon asked me to deliver was listed in the Charter Day bulletin as "Acceptance and Promise," which was in response to Dr. Lemmon's "Charge and Commission."

Our text from Ephesians today begins with the Ephesians' author (who may or may not have been Paul,) begging the church there "to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called." It asserts this "worthy" life is displayed in the Church that is, "Speaking the truth in love..." growing up "into the head, into Christ..." and up building "itself in love."

These reflections on some of my earliest words (to our then-forming community) reveal a message about the centrality of Christ in determining who we, the church, should be and what we should do. The two dominating words from today's Ephesians text that define this Christ-like way of life are "truth" and love. They are the foundational qualities present in us when we are "Journeying as Christ's Church."

### **Journeying**

"Journeying as Christ's Church" is challenging. While perfection is illusive, "journeying," suggests our having accepted the goal of living in a spirit of love.

For us Christians, this way of Love begins within our congregational life as we are. In today's Ephesians text, "bearing with," that is, to be supportive of "one another." Whether we, within our congregation, are seeing in concert, or, are conflicted on whatever issue is at hand, our calling in Christ is to respond and deal with one another with compassion and love.

Such a loving, caring, and understanding community is both essential for us, who call ourselves Christ's people, and is just the beginning of the challenge before us on our "Journey as Church."

I use the word "beginning," because the overwhelming focus of the New Testament's good news is on "others!" Here are just a few New Testament examples to support this assertion.

At the start of Jesus' Galilean ministry, as recorded in Luke's Gospel (4:18), Jesus defined his ministry as one that was for the "others" of society when he "stood up" in the synagogue and read these words from Isaiah (61:1 &2):

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release for the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free...”*

Then there are the two familiar stories about Samaritans, who were among the hated “others” for Jesus’ contemporary Jews.

Luke’s story (10:29ff) is about the “good Samaritan,” who comes to the aid of a man lying “half-dead” by the roadside after having been “passed by” by the Jewish elite, a “priest” and a “Levite.”

In John’s story (4:7ff), Jesus is found doing the unthinkable, namely conversing with “a woman of Samaria” at Jacob’s Well, asking her to give him a “drink.”

In Matthew’s 25<sup>th</sup> chapter (37-40), Jesus calls his disciples to a ministry to “the least of these my brethren,” who include: a “stranger,” the “naked,” “sick” and those “in prison.”

In Matthew’s 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter (37,39), Jesus characterizes life at its “greatest” by referencing Deuteronomy (6:5) and Leviticus (19:18). Quoting these sources, Jesus’ two-fold message was, “You shall love the Lord your God” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

My brief sketch of these examples from the Gospel story told 2,000-years-ago is prologue for who we, as Christ’s Church, are called to be, as we relate to one another and to those who are the “others” among us.

### **Contemporary Others**

Skipping these two millennia to our contemporary era, who were those “others” when Broadway’s congregational life began? The obvious answer is that African- American black citizens were the “others.” They were the ones whose civil rights and human dignity had been trampled, throughout slavery, continuing into Reconstruction after the Civil War, and then all through Jim Crow. So, racial segregation was still “hale and hearty” when Broadway was birthed. Martin Luther King, Jr. had come on the scene, making the “Civil Rights Movement” a potent force for racial justice.

Members of Broadway, to their great credit, responded positively to the challenge by being supportive of their minister’s and lay leaders’ invitations to join the movement for racial justice.

The twin issues were equal access for Blacks and Whites to public accommodations, along with fair housing. You great souls of Broadway did not admonish or threaten your

minister for his support of racial justice when he wrote a letter to the *Columbia Tribune*, testified before the City Council, and participated in a downtown demonstration. You were patient with me when racial justice frequently made its way into my sermons. And accolades to our Church Board for being one of the three Columbia congregations that passed resolutions supporting Columbia's Fair Housing Ordinance.

Since those first ten years of Broadway's life, there have been additional "others" whose denied rights have been addressed throughout our nation and church.

There was gender equality that has promoted equal opportunity for women in employment and in leadership recognition. Although the current, national, political debate reveals women's equality is still an unrealized achievement, the goal for equality for women has been applied throughout our American society, including the church where in increasing numbers women have become lay elders and deacons, and congregational ministers. For our Disciples denomination, evidence of gender equality has reached our Disciples' highest position of General Minister and President. Not only has a woman held that office for the last two terms, but also her current successor is an African-American woman – the Reverend Teresa (Terri) Hord Owens.

Another group of "others" Christ's Church, in our time, has sought to show the love of Christ has been the LGBTQ Community. At a painfully slow pace, we have come to understand that "sexual orientation" determining whether we are gay, straight, or transgender, is not one's personal choice. Over the last five decades, gratefully, secular society and the Body of Christ have been moving toward an informed and compassionate understanding and treatment of family members and friends whose orientation has been so cruelly maligned.

Tragically, racial bigotry toward those "others" who are non-white still survives in today's America. We saw it a year ago in Charlottesville, Virginia in the false equivalency claim that equated the immorality of the racist ugliness of Ku Klux Klansmen and White Supremacists with the morality of those there demonstrating for racial justice and equality.

In addition to such obvious racism, there is racial bigotry cloaked in the non-racist language of "Law and Order," "War on Drugs," unsubstantiated claims of excessive "voter fraud," and "gerrymandering" of voting districts. Each of these programs is seen by some as being "designed apparently" for the purpose of undermining the rights and power of poor, and black, and other citizens of color.

And there is the scare-mongering monologue from some in our nation that reaches to the highest level of government. They play off people's xenophobia, fears of outsider immigrants, who usually are non-Christian or non-white, or both. It has labeled most Mexicans among them as "murderers and rapists."

Thanks to the unselfish and generous spirit of Dr. Lemmon and the members of First Christian Church, Broadway was birthed in a love that extended beyond itself to include others. In that spirit, we began, and I am heartened to have observed, that in that spirit you have continued during the ministries of Don Lanier and associates Earl Johnson and Ken Watson; Rick Frost and associates Kim Ryan (our daughter-in-law, parenthetically) and Jacob Thorne; and Tim Carson and associates Nick Larson and Terry Overfelt. Over the last 60-years, Broadway's clergy and laity have continued to focus on living Christ's "truth" about extending love and compassion toward the whole human family.

We who claim to accept Jesus as "Lord," that is, Leader of our lives, find in Scripture a message about "The Way," that early name for the Jesus' followers, who eventually became the Church. We, who are Christ's Church today, are faithful followers of this Way when we lavish compassion and love on the "others" in our midst.

World renowned Swiss theologian, the late Karl Barth, was asked to respond to an essay by an atheist. Basically, Barth's response was that Christians don't need to prove themselves better than atheists. What is far more important is for Christians to live better. He went on to say there is a "practical atheism" within the Church too often where "practical atheists" affirm the existence of the God we know in Jesus, but go about their lives as though that God doesn't exist.

OUCH!

Now, that's an "inconvenient truth" for us to ponder. Barth is telling us that it's not enough to say we believe in this way of love that Jesus proposed is of God. Barth insists that the required goal for us Christians is to live like we believe it, to live as though God's Good News in Christ does exist and does impact the way we, in real time, treat the "others" about us, the names we call them, even the politicians we vote for.

It's not as we haven't been warned, enlightened, and by Jesus himself, according to Matthew's 7<sup>th</sup> chapter (21-22): where Jesus says:

*"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my father in heaven."*

There it is! Christian discipleship is quintessentially about what we do! Discipleship for us Christians is genuine when we do, when we are living, the Good News in Jesus, whom we claim is our Lord. Then, we are "Journeying as Christ's Church."

Last spring, a church near Washington, D.C. had seven break-ins by vandals, who did serious damage to the building and wrote racist slurs on the walls. It was attacked,

because it was a “Welcoming Church,” open to all. The pastor’s response was that they would deal with the “damage, pain, and...inconvenience.” “But,” he concluded, “...our identity remains.”

### **Conclusion**

In John’s sixth chapter (6:56-69) the author references a certain point in Jesus’ ministry when “many of his disciples” concluded that what Jesus was asking of them was too hard for them to continue, so that they “no longer went about with him.” After their departure, Jesus asked the remaining “Twelve” this heartrending question: “Do you also wish to go away?”

That is an appropriate question for us, who comprise Christ’s Church today. As we choose how we will react with one another in the Body of Christ, and, toward those “others” of our time, will we “wish to go away” from Christ’s call to respond with compassionate love? Will we desert “The Way” of Christ by becoming “practical atheists”? Or will our bold “identity” as Christ’s Church remain?

God’s Good News in Christ affords Broadway Christian Church, on this very special anniversary in its life, the grand opportunity to stay the course of “Journeying as Christ’s Church.”

May Christ’s “Way” of love empower you for the journey.

Amen.