



SHARING Our Faith

A Quarterly Publication of Middlesex UMC

Winter 2021

Worship with us this Winter!



Christmas is Over. Jesus is Born...Now What?

January 3rd - 17th, 2021

The presents have been opened, the food has been eaten, and Christmas movies have been watched. The tree is slowly making it's way back to the basement or to the curb outside. Christmas day has come and gone. Now what? What do we do now?

Join us this January as we continue to watch Jesus and find the ways we are called to *Boldly Follow, Be Loved, and Find Rest* in a Savior who doesn't just come to us on Christmas, but throughout the year.

Telling Your Story

January 24th - February 14th, 2021

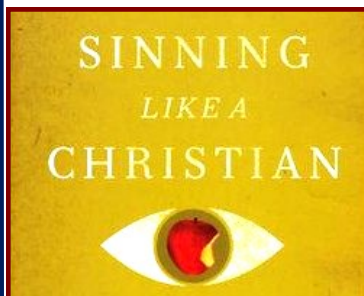
There are stories you never forget. There are others that you want to forget. From Netflix, to social media, stories fill our imagination and time. The problem is, we often compare our stories to others and feel unimportant. You are invited to journey with us as we look deeper into the stories of our faith and find how each of us is connected to the greatest story ever told!



Sinning Like a Christian: A Closer Look at the 7 Deadly Sins

February 17th - April 4th, 2021

Retired Bishop William Willimon writes, "For Christians, sin is not so much inherent in the human condition, though it is that; rather, sin is the problem we have between us and God. It is rebellion against our true Sovereign, an offense against the way the Creator has created us to be." Join us this Lent for a provocative and intriguing series as we take a closer look at the Seven Deadly Sins of Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Greed, Gluttony, and Lust. You'll be invited each week to examine yourself and find redemption in God's great love.





The Light of Jesus

By Carol Lawton, Director of Children's Ministries

One of my favorite holidays is Groundhog Day. The anticipation of whether or not the groundhog, Phil, will see his shadow is fascinating to me. We can learn a lot from this groundhog.

Phil gives us his prediction based on whether or not he sees his shadow. What do you need to be able to make a shadow? You need **LIGHT!** We need to let our light shine and tell everyone about Jesus!

Jesus died for us. He did this for us because He loves us so much! Sharing this GOOD news with others is a gift that everyone needs to hear.

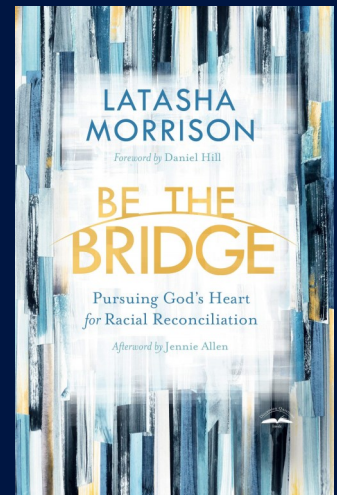
Sometimes to share this GOOD news, we have to go outside our comfort zone. Just like the groundhog has to leave his comfortable house to make his prediction, we have to leave our comfort zone to tell people about Jesus.

Remember, groundhogs share their news with the world . . . and we need to do the same.

Reflections on "Be the Bridge"

By Ann Carney, Finance Administrator and
Facilitator of Women's Bible Study

This fall, in the midst of the racial tensions in our country, the women's Bible study felt compelled to study and discuss this issue and the ways we, as Christians and as a church, are called to action. We were surprised by the many things we learned as we explored the book, "Be the Bridge" by Latasha Morrison. The book, which was tied into scripture and God's desires for human kind to love everyone as your brother, focused on the trials of the African American community since the time of slavery through the current date. We learned so many things about the history of slavery and the time afterward that we didn't know and further explained why it was important to know these facts. We discussed what it must be like (understanding that we cannot really know) to be in a minority, especially one that has been mis-treated, dehumanized and demoralized over the years. And this is not to say we are responsible for history, but that we are called to be a voice for change; we can be part of the solution. It also prompted many discussions surrounding racial prejudices and even prejudices in general that we and others might hold. So no matter the color of our skin, the country we are from, our income level, our education, our hair color or even something as seamless as our accent, we all stereotype and sometimes hold prejudices, often simply because of how we ourselves were raised or from our life experiences. What was so wonderful about this study was the ways that we, as a group, were able to learn together and have open and honest conversations about our own experiences. And being able to share in this safe space brought about opportunities for awareness and growth for each of us. But what we all knew for sure as we studied, and what the book reminded us of throughout its chapters, was that we are all beloved children of one true God and when we approach others with that in mind, it will bring about kindness, compassion, love, and as a result, change.



Surprises

By Pastor Jay McDermond, Associate Pastor

If you are remotely like me, you like life orderly and lacking surprises. I suspect most first-born children are like this. Therefore, each new year is something of a challenge. A new year is a pivotal time in the calendar, and it reminds us we don't know what the future holds for us. New Year's resolutions encourage us to plan for change or at least take control of some aspect of our lives. I wish I was better at this. However, the only control I have at this pivotal time is what I eat. I know the last meal of the year will be seafood, and the first meal of the year will be pork and sauerkraut. (Somehow breakfast doesn't count, despite its reputation as the "most important meal of the day.") I just don't like surprises, every year has them, and I don't have much control.

So, thank the Lord for the Twelve Days of Christmas which I have grown to appreciate recently.

We all know the song, which is rather heavy on the bird theme. (In fact, there are 22 birds in all in the song. It's like someone ran out of ideas for gifts — How about a different kind of bird for the seventh day?) Did you even know there are twelve days, not just one, to the official Christmas calendar? Technically, Christmas runs from December 25th through January 6th. The traditional Christmas holiday draws the old year to a close and ushers in the new year. Instead of being one day in December, Christmas is actually six days in December and six days in January.

How does that help me look at the new year more positively?

A central theme associated with Christmas is God's presence with humanity and all of Creation in Jesus' birth. That is seen in Matthew's telling of the nativity story. Jesus' birth was a fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah's vision: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us'" (Matthew 1:23). December 25th can be seen as a single reminder of God's presence, but so can all twelve days of Christmas. We end the last six days of one year reflecting on how God

has been with us in the past, and in the first six days of the new year we confidently look forward to God's presence with us in the yet unknown events in the coming year.

In short, each year will have its own twists and turns. The Twelve Days of Christmas remind us we don't face them alone.



The Power of Positivity

by Erin Rose, Youth Director

I recently heard the quote "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you deal with it." Now I'm not sure I agree completely with those numbers, as extreme hardships, grief and loss certainly play into our lives in very real ways; but the power of our reactions, thoughts and adaptability are infinitely powerful to influence our happiness. The apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8 "Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise."

With the easy access to a constant flow of negative and harmful information and more time alone, it can be even more of a struggle to fix our thoughts on the positive. When we fill our time and thoughts with the discord and negativity that faces our world in our personal lives, we become less able to enact positive change or keep our own lives headed in a direction that brings us joy. Because joy can exist - no matter what our circumstances.

When faced with challenging circumstances it may seem impossible to find joy. But our joy is in part our own responsibility. The small choices we make each day, make up who we are and our overall happiness. When faced with a challenging situation, do we unload our negativity on a friend and eat an entire family size bag of potato chips? Or do we take a walk, say a prayer for the person making our lives harder, and move on to call a loved one and check up on them. When facing a hardship, do we throw breakables in our living room and yell at our dog? Or do we cry a little, hug that dog, take a deep breath and watch a funny movie to lift our spirits?

Life is full of the little moments and small choices that make up our overall happiness. Paul continues in Philippians 4:11-13 "Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live with almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the

secret of living in every situation, whether it is a full stomach or empty, with plenty or with little. For I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength."

In every moment we have an opportunity to make a new choice. Many times we make the wrong choice in how to react to our circumstances, but God gives us the incredible opportunity to be forgiven and start again - over and over. And the more we practice and embody positivity, the more joy we find in our lives; because joy does not come from our circumstances but from inside ourselves with the power of the Holy Spirit.



Calvin and Hobbes by Bill Watterson