

Thanks for turning into this edition of our monthly newsletter.

SERVE is one of our mission measures which is how we measure whether or not we're living out our mission mandate which is 'Growing Christ Centered Community in a Distracting World'. We have four of those mission measures - worship, navigate, serve and engage. Serve is the way our lives intersect with the world.

I was thinking about that this week. About 16 years ago my wife and I went to Europe. When we were in Paris, we climbed to the top of the Arc de Triomphe which is a monument at the end of the Champs-Élysées, the Avenue in Paris. What's fascinating about the Arc de Triomphe is that there are twelve avenues that come together at that monument in a huge roundabout. After we climbed to the top we could look down and we saw this amazing mass of traffic all coming from every direction of the city and meeting in that one roundabout with all the cars trying to find their way to navigate to where they wanted to go. It was one of the most amazing scenes I've ever looked at in my life!

I was thinking about how the perspective of those avenues represents my life as I try to serve in the world. Let me say a little more about that. Imagine standing on top of that monument and seeing all of those inputs. I have all kinds of inputs - my family, my faith, my vocation, my extended family, my social networks, what it means for me to be a Christian in this United States, my understanding of Social justice, my Christian ethics, my neighborhood - all of these and more are inputs like these twelve avenues that meet at the roundabout near the Arc de Triomphe. And as I looked down upon them it's a mess sometime.

I've been really struggling over the last few weeks about some of the issues that are coming out of our nation in politics - immigration and the sense that this issue is something that causes fear, the threats that are being called into the Jewish Community Center here in town. I've been struggling with that in relation to my faith and what it means to be a citizen.

That's one of the reasons I'm so grateful for being a United Methodist. John Wesley from his Anglican experience knew that there was scripture and tradition and experience and reason that can help us navigate our lives, with scripture being the primary one. In our congregation I know of Bible studies and groups that get together who are made up of very different people and yet they study and they sing and they gather and they work out their faith. I noticed that last week in the choir when there were people who are very different from each other standing together singing Amazing Grace. You and I are probably different on any number of social issues and political issues and yet we are all trying to grow ourselves in Jesus Christ and to serve another. The inputs, those avenues that all come into the roundabout, demand our attention. As for me, my faith is the one I try to keep my attention on the most. But sometime one of those other avenues really gets my attention and I get worked up. That's why I remember Jesus' message to His disciples when He was going to send out on His behalf and He said, "I send you out and I want you to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves".

Maybe that's what we all need to remember- that when we serve, when we engage the world, when we're at the intersection of our faith and our lives; we have to be smart, we have to be compassionate, we have to be faithful, we have to follow Jesus. Jesus tended to be on the side of the poor, the oppressed, and the ones that didn't have a spot at the table. That's one of those avenues that challenges me to stay on focus more and more.

We're about ready for the Season of Lent and that's a time of prayer and reflection. I hope you'll take these words today and find other people to be in prayer and reflection with, to work with in your faith and your salvation. I pray that our Lent will be a time when we really struggle to find where Christ is for us, knowing that Christ's grace is enough,

Thank you so much for being a part of Central United Methodist Church. I believe that it's in the intersection of our faith and our family and politics and being citizens and ethics that's Central to Life.

God bless you.