



Jacob's Ladder



A NEWSLETTER OF BURNS UNITED METHODIST AND HAMMITT HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES

Rev. Christopher C. Diggs, Pastor

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In The Presence of God

by Rev. Christopher C. Diggs

I was truly blessed to be part of a Pilgrimage to The Holy Land sponsored by Rev. James E. Swanson, Sr., Bishop of the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church, from February 9th through the 20th for clergy and lay people of the conference. I

really didn't know what to expect on my first trip to the Holy Land. As our plane pierced the clouds and I was able to zoom in on the beautiful greenish blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea, I knew the trip would be different from any other encounter I have ever experienced. Being 6,300 miles from home should have caused some anxiety, but knowing we would be in a place surrounded



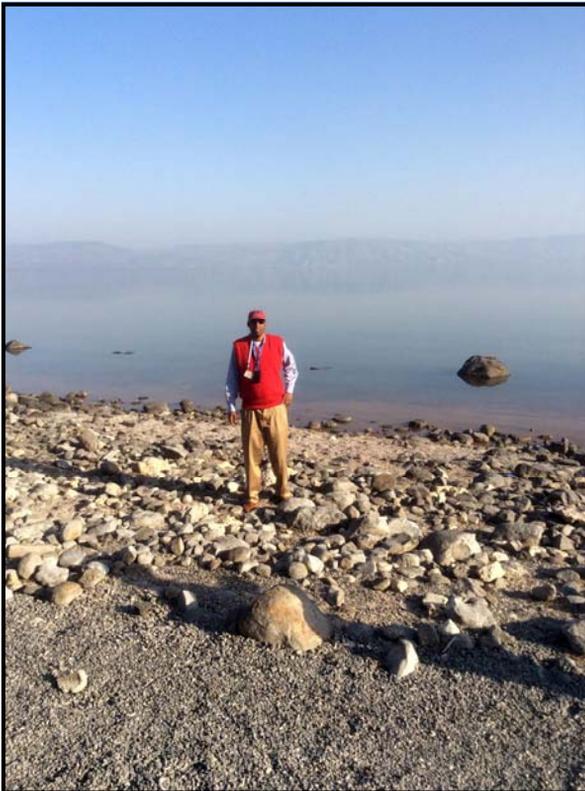
Bishop Swanson and Rev. Diggs on the Sea of Galilee

by the early history of Christianity calmed my nerves and fears.

As we loaded our bags on the big maroon bus which would serve as our primary mode of transportation, my mind recalled all the days when I was forced to go to Sunday School against my will and how discouraging it was to me as a boy to be forced to learn stories of the Bible and how Jesus was born in Bethlehem in a manger. As reality set in, I could not believe that God had Blessed me to be in this place.

There were several experiences on this trip which had me in a place spiritually where I had never traveled, however our worship experience on the Sea of Galilee is worth telling. The Sun was shining bright as our

group of 32 people got into our little boat. The winds were rather contrary which made it easy for me to ascertain how the winds could change so suddenly during the time Jesus was on and near this famous body of water. As the captain silenced the motor on the boat, I notice the beautiful mountains to our North and wondered to myself in what place Jesus went to the other side to get rest. After a couple of songs, Bishop James Swanson preached from MATTHEW 14:26. I could hardly contain my emotion sitting in the middle of Sea of Galilee, knowing this is the place where Peter walked on water, and before I knew it, tears began to trickle down my face as I acknowledged that surely the Lord was in this place. This was by far the most spiritual place I had ever been in in my life.



The Sea of Galilee



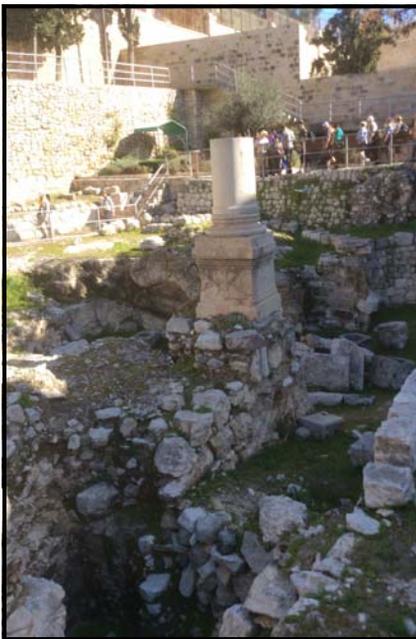
Jerusalem in the background



At the Jordan River

On several occasions on this trip I was able to witness the presence of God, being in a place that was so familiar in my Biblical

teachings and applications. In MATTHEW 5:1 we read about Jesus and The Beatitudes. My heart was overjoyed being in the place where



The Pool of Bethesda



The Wailing Wall



Jesus preached this sermon, but also in the same place where Jesus fed over 5,000 people with 2 fish and five loaves of bread. Sitting in this very place now is a church called the Church of The Beatitudes.

As we traveled from Galilee to Jericho, we stopped at the Jordan River. Many great Biblical events happened at the Jordan River. This river, according to JOSHUA 3:1, is where the Children of Israel crossed over into the Promised Land. Elijah in 2ND KINGS 2:11 never experienced death, but instead went straight to heaven on Horses and a Chariot of Fire. Just as important is the fact that John

the Baptist baptized Jesus in this same river (MATTHEW 3:13-17). Words are not adequate to describe the feeling of standing in the Jordan River as Bishop Swanson prayed for us during a baptismal ritual. I personally felt the presence of The Holy Spirit, and I thanked God for allowing me to be in this place of Biblical importance.

Jerusalem, The City of David was the final stop on our tour. It never really dawned on me that Galilee is approximately 62 miles away from Jerusalem. And during the time of Christ, it was a two and a half day walk, and Jews made this pilgrimage at least 3 times of

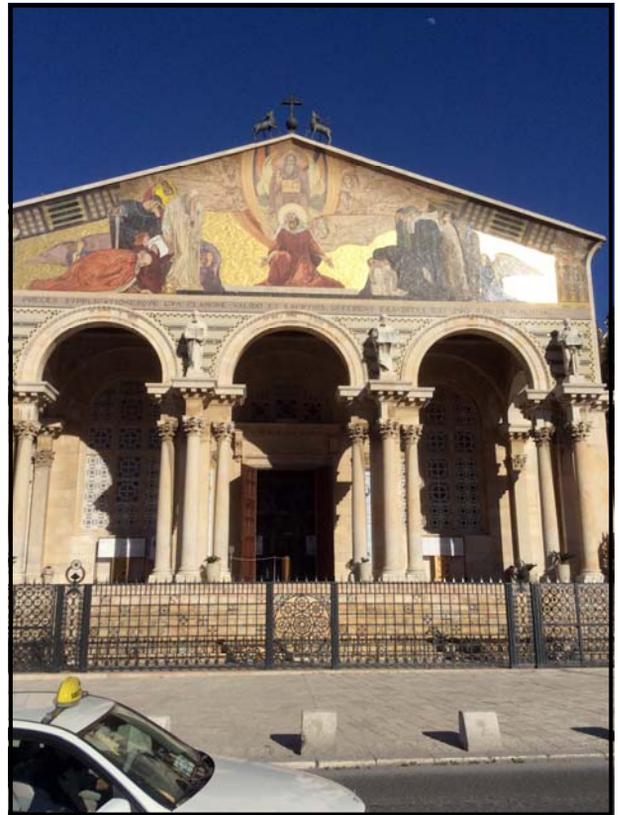
year. Jesus was an outsider and in my opinion it took a great deal of courage to speak out against corruption, and how manipulative the High Priests and Scribes conducted their daily rituals. During my career I have preached on many occasions from JOHN 5:1 about the man who was lame for 38 years. Standing at this very site seemed surreal; we visited so many places until it was totally mind boggling. However, standing at this very spot made chills go up and down my spine. I could only imagine the joy and satisfaction the lame man felt when he was healed.

The Mount of Olives was a very special place to visit. Here in the Garden of Gethsemane according to LUKE 22:44 Jesus

prayed, and sweat fell like drops of blood. The garden is not very large, and I witnessed how the caretakers meticulously cared for the beautiful olive trees which still remain in the garden. Next to the garden is a massive church called The Church of All Nations. Inside the church is the very rock Jesus prayed on before he was taken into custody by the Roman soldiers. In front of the altar, the massive rock sits on the floor just in front of the pulpit, and you can go the rock and bow down to pray. As I bent down to pray, I realized how blessed I was to be praying in the place Jesus prayed and before I knew it, I was overcome with emotion and I could not stop the tears from falling from my eyes. I can honestly say the Lord was in this place.



The Garden of Gethsemane



Church of All Nations at Mount of Olives

The Glory Train

by Betty Young



The Glory Train was acted out by members of the “Church” portraying women in churches on Sunday, February 14, 2016. Even if you wear the finest of clothing, have lots of money and had all kind of positions in the church, it does not get you in the kingdom.

Sister Mack De Mack (Janice Brown) was a very high class woman trying to glamorize her way into the kingdom because she’s on the hospitality and pastor aide clubs.

Sister Chance (Cassandra Johnson), loud and talkative, but always paying her tithes, couldn’t even talk her way in.

While, Sister Cash (Niler Franklin), sophisticated, tried to buy her way in by trying to pay off the conductor.

Even, the towns’ nose and gossip, Sister

Newsy (Sherrita Campbell), not having any good news to spread, couldn’t gossip her way in.

Then, you have Sister Goody Good (Tressie Johnson), self-righteous, with all the good she had done, fell short of the glory.

It didn’t stop there, Sister Parson (Minnie Milliner), being sanctimonious, Holy Ghost filled and the preacher’s wife, didn’t make it in.

Sister Slip Around (Barbara Wortham), sneaky, with shifty eyes thought her slipping around (while attending church every Sunday) wouldn’t get in.

To top it all, Sister Taint So (Terry Vaughn), always negative, loud and wrong, telling all she heard and that she didn’t hear, talked herself right out of the Kingdom.

Last but not least, Sister Living Right (Betty Young), meek and humble, wound up with the front seat of the Glory Train.

After being pushed and seated all the way to the back of the train by women of glamour, money, high-society, holy-ghost filled and self-righteous because she didn't fit in with their society.

Sister Living Right was put on the front seat

by the Conductor (Chris Bush) because after looking over the life that these women lived, they lost their seats to the Kingdom and was put off the train by the Conductor. The life style that these women portrayed are not the actual life they live, but merely trying to show you what can happen in the event of not living a Christ-like life. If you're living the life that God wants you to, and have the faith about the size of a mustard seed, you to, can make it into God's Kingdom. Amen.

The Nature of Sin

by Christopher Cross

There is an old Aesop fable that recalls the story of a viper and a farmer. The farmer finds the viper on the roadside nearly frozen to death. The farmer decides to take the viper in and nourish the viper back to health. Once the viper is healthy, the viper fatally bites the farmer. Right before the farmer's death he asks the viper, "Why did you bite me after all I have done for you?" The viper, with a grin responds, "You knew very well, I was a viper before you took me in."

There is another Aesop fable concerning a scorpion and a frog. A scorpion comes across a frog who plans to go across the stream. The scorpion asks the frog can he ride across the stream on the frog's back. In response, the frog asks, "How do I know that you won't sting me?" The scorpion replies, "Because if I do, I will die too." Halfway through the stream, the scorpion stings the frog in the back. Right before paralysis drowns the frog, the frog asks, "Why did you sting me?" The scorpion replies to the frog, "It's my nature."

The nature of sin is nothing to take lightly. How often are we like the farmer in the first tale and the frog in the latter? When we allow spiritual scorpions and vipers to come into our lives why are we surprised by the destruction and damage they cause? These spiritual vipers and scorpions manifest when we excuse sin or fall prey to the lies of

Satan. For instance, when we commit adultery, fornication, and other sorts of sinful behavior, why are we surprised when our relationships, marriages, and families are in shambles and metaphorically dead? Why be surprised when we knew from the very beginning just like the farmer and the frog that no good can come from sin and temptation whether we excuse it or not? Does not the Scriptures tell us in ROMANS 6:32 that the wages of sin are death? Or do we not believe what the Scriptures say in JOHN 10:10 and 1ST PETER 5:8, that Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour?

Luckily for us, there is hope through the nature of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. When we have faith and obey him, He blesses us, because that is His nature. At the very essence of God's nature is love, and He never fails! The 23RD PSALMS tells us that He guides us in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Why does He do this? Because His name, just like His nature, is righteousness. Furthermore, He does this because He knows in our own human nature, righteousness is not possible. So through the power of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, He ingrains His loving and righteous nature within us. Thus, believe and receive the nature of Christ and experience His nature heal your life and free you from the nature of sin!



Jacob's Ladder is a monthly publication of Burns United Methodist Church and Hammitt Hill United Methodist Church. EDITOR/PUBLISHER: Clarence H. Franklin. ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Niler P. Franklin. All rights reserved. Announcements or articles should be submitted to Rev. Christopher C. Diggs or submitted by e-mail directly to Franklin at chfrank@panola.com. Visit Burns website at www.BurnsUMC.org and click on the Monthly Newsletter link to view previous month's issues of *Jacob's Ladder*.

PICTURED ABOVE: The children and youth of Burns/Hammitt Hill United Methodist Church performed a Black History skit on Sunday, February 28, 2016 at the Hammitt Hill location.