

RELIGION

Luke and John offer testament

Sunday School Lesson

In the New Testament, writing was crucial to the preservation of the life and message of Jesus. The Gospel writer, Luke and John, offer personal testimony as to the process and purpose of their efforts (Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30, 31). Luke continued his "treatise" of the life of Christ with the book of Acts (Act 1:1, 2). The New Testament epistles gave encouragement and instruction to both congregations and individuals, and were meant to be distributed for the benefit of others (Colossians 4:16). As we will see in today's lesson, it was vital that John write what Jesus wanted to be conveyed to the seven churches in Asia.

The commonly used phrase, "It is written," reflects the consistent concern of God throughout Scripture that His revelation be carefully copied and preserved. Let us never take for granted our precious privilege of being able to read and to know the word of God.

God's people are no stranger to difficulty. They have frequently endured physical persecution, exile and the demand that they renounce their God or swear allegiance to lesser deities, including the human rulers of lesser kingdoms. Apocalyptic (that is, highly figurative and symbolic) literature has often appeared as a kind of "code" writing during times of severe persecution. By this means, the faithful have been encouraged and instructed in terms that made no sense at all to their oppressors. The Old Testament books of Daniel and Zechariah abound in such language.

The earliest persecutions of the church came from Jewish sources that were familiar with the Old Testament apocalyptic material. Thus, for a time, plain language served best in strengthening the church. However, when the Roman Empire sought to require all its subjects to worship the emperor, and intensified its subjects to worship the emperor, and intensified its persecution of the church, apocalyptic symbolism again became the style in which God's Word was communicated to God's people. This is the style that is found throughout most of the book of Revelation.

Most scholars believe that Revelation was written during the persecution mounted by Domitian, the Roman emperor from A.D. 81 to 96. The writer of Revelation identifies himself as John (most likely the apostle John, son of the Zebedee). The style of writing differs considerably from that of his Gospel and his three brief epistles; however, one must keep in mind that the circumstances behind the writing of Revelation differed considerably. John was already separated from his friends by exile because of his preaching. How would he communicate to them a written message of ultimate triumph over their Roman oppressors without getting himself and them into greater difficulties? The Holy Spirit was wise to provide John with visions of the victory of Christ in words and symbols familiar to those who know the scripture, but meaningless to the literal Roman mind.

John, who had served for years among the churches around Ephesus (the principal city of Asia), was known well enough among them to require no further introduction. As part of the Roman Empire Asia and its people came under the imperial edict that anyone who accepted the protection of Rome must participate in the forms of worship to the Roman emperor.



PHOTO/SUE ANN JOHNSON

People hold hands during a recent prayer service. General Gregory hopes Unity Day will help Charlotteans build bridges. Organizers have won the support of the City Council and the Board of County Commission for the event which will feature local speakers and musical groups.

Day of unity, prayer planned

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

General Gregory is a believer. She believes faith and the power of prayer will change things.

Gregory believes things will get better for the races in Charlotte. In order for that to happen, she says the faith community must take a giant step forward.

A 22-year veteran of the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services, Gregory has seen a lot of suffering.

"I've seen lots of pain," she says. "I know it doesn't have a color. My faith has brought me through."

When Gregory says she knows 24,000 people will gather to pray April 13 for the Unity Day of Prayer, she believes it.

Gregory believes so strongly that she has spent the last three months making phone calls, sending letters to pastors and faith leaders - 876 to be exact - as well as talking to everyone she knows and quite a few people she didn't. She wants them to attend.

Gregory wants them to buy into her goal - to get as many people as she can into Memorial Stadium to pray for peace and tolerance.

She also wants people to understand that prayer can change things.

"This is going to be a huge event," she says. "The stands are going to be packed. You hear a lot of the negatives, but rarely do you hear of anything positive going on. This is positive."

Gregory thinks one event can make a difference.

She's convinced Mecklenburg County commissioners. They are opening the stadium free of charge and adopted a resolution unanimously at a February meeting. Gregory also convinced Charlotte City Council. That board unanimously passed the proposal and agreed to provide police officers to help control traffic around the stadium.

And she's convinced quite a few Charlotteans that prayer will change things.

"Geneal called to ask me about doing this," says County Commissioner Darrel Williams. "When someone wants to do something - what with all the problems we have in the community - I had to help."

Williams believed enough to put the proposal before the commissioners. He also helped raise funds for it.

For Williams and Gregory, the logic is simple common

sense. "Someone pray for me," she says. "I have to pray for others."

Unity Day of Prayer, an ecumenical, multi-racial and multi-ethnic worship service will be held at 3 p.m. in Memorial Stadium.

The event will feature music, speakers and of course, prayer. Musicians from around the city will perform, from the high stepping bands of the House of Prayer to the choirs of Johnson C. Smith University and West Charlotte High School.



Gregory

"It can't miss," Gregory says with a laugh. "It's the best deal going. You can hear some of the greatest gospel groups in Charlotte. Parking is only \$2 and admission is free. You can't miss."

That doesn't include the best part, Gregory says. The program will end with a circle of prayer on the field, featuring representatives of several faiths.

"That's the greatest attraction," Gregory says. "It's important because someone

prayed for me. We sent out 876 pieces of mail - we expect everyone to be there."

"The faith community hadn't come up to bat to help with the problem. It was just time to do something."

Gregory says she got the idea after reading the prayers of St. Francis of Assisi.

"He said, 'Lord make me an instrument of thy peace,' she says. 'I decided I needed to be an instrument. Someone had to do something.'"

Along the way, Gregory learned some valuable lessons about tolerance and the openness of many people in the community.

She says the most difficult part of the journey was not organizing the day of prayer, but making sure that all the faiths are recognized and that no one's sabbath is interrupted.

"I originally wanted to hold the event on Saturday, but that's the sabbath for some," Gregory said. "We talked with a few people and decided on a Sunday afternoon. I knew there were a lot of different faiths, I just didn't know how many."

Unity Day of Prayer will be held April 13 at 3 p.m. at Memorial Stadium. The event is free.

Leaders ponder KKK

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PITTSBURGH - If a Klansman marches in the city and no one notices him, does he make a sound?

Community activists and religious leaders are grappling with different approaches to the Ku Klux Klan's upcoming rally in downtown Pittsburgh, scheduled for Saturday.

Callers to the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette have suggested laughing the Klan out of town - literally, by chuckling at them as they go past, while others say ignore the group, which claims to have 3,000 members in Pennsylvania.

Ann Van Dyke, an assistant director of the state Human Relations Commission, urges communities to ignore Klan activities. If no one notices the Klan members, then the Klan has failed, she said.

"They are attention vampires," she said.

Responses to the Klan have varied over the years.

In Lancaster in 1987, Louis Butcher agonized and then decided that directly confronting a Klan rally could cause trouble. Butcher, who is black, was executive director of the county's Human Relations Commission.

"I felt angry. I really had to examine my own feelings," Butcher said.

Butcher organized a coalition of government, religious and black community organizations that attracted 300 people to a candlelight vigil about 1 mile from the Klan's rally.

Leaders in Punxsutawney drew 500 residents to a protest picnic when the Klan gathered at a junior high school in June.

"To turn a blind eye to it would not be doing a service to the community," said Rev. Kent Holmes of the Presbyterian Church of Punxsutawney. "The sad thing would have been if nobody showed up (to the picnic). Then I would've said we had a crisis on our hands."

Some suggest that Klan meetings can actually be used for racial harmony.

"The presence of organized hate ends up being a vehicle for racial harmony," said Van Dyke, who nonetheless believes that ignoring Klan demonstrations is the best strategy.

The City Paper, a weekly publication, last week published an anti-Klan poster and suggested that its readers ask coffee shop owners merchants to put it in their windows.

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Chavis suspended by Church of Christ

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Leaders of a Charlotte branch of the United Church of Christ have temporarily suspended Benjamin Chavis Muhammad's standing as an ordained minister, pending an April 24 appearance before a committee reviewing the matter.

The action was taken by the Board of Directors of the Eastern North Carolina Association, a grouping of UCC congregations that ordained the former Benjamin F. Chavis in 1980. His UCC standing is under review by the denomination's Church and Ministry Commission.

Muhammad, who announced Feb. 23 that he was becoming a Muslim and joining the Nation of Islam, has accepted an invitation to appear at the next regular meeting of the Church and Ministry Commission on April

24, said the Rev. Rollina Russell, conference minister of the UCC's Southern Conference, which includes the Eastern North Carolina Association.

Meeting at a church in Durham, the commission will hold a conversation with Muhammad, review his standing and decide what to recommend to the association's Board of Directors, which will make a final decision at a later date.

The Board of Directors, consisting of minister and lay people from among the association's 135 local churches took the vote to suspend Muhammad March 21. Russell told Muhammad of the board's decision by phone and letter.



Muhammad

World Day of Prayer



Members of Saint Paul Baptist Church mark last month's World Day of Prayer. Charlotteans met at several local churches to mark the event which is sponsored by women of different denominations annually.