

Dear Friends,

Let me share with you here some thoughts from a retiring pastor which speak for a lot of us about what we do on Sundays, and, more importantly, in-between Sundays. I have elided some of the text for brevity. Have a blessed week.

12 things I have learned in the ministry By Steve Montgomery Published: May 05, 2019 4:00 AM CT

After nearly 20 years as senior pastor of Idlewild Presbyterian Church, Memphis, TN, the Rev. Dr. Steve Montgomery led his last service before retiring on Sunday, May 5. Here is his list of "12 things I have learned in the ministry."

1. Jesus never used the word "tolerate." Tolerate one another? Tolerate your neighbor? Tolerate your enemy? Nope. "Love one another." "Love your neighbor." "Love your enemy." There is all the difference in the world.
2. I have always grown the most spiritually, intellectually and emotionally from those who are different from me: women, members of the LGBTQ community, Central Americans, Jews, Muslims, African-Americans, and yes, evangelicals.
3. Though I have had good days and bad days, hard days and exhilarating days, I can say that I have never had a boring day in 39 years of ministry.
4. Children are not the future of the church. Enough of that nonsense. They are the church now. And they need the church's nurture and advocacy.
5. The phrase "Jesus is Lord" is a political statement. To shy away from the hard realities of the political implications of the Gospel is to offer a watered-down gospel.
6. The Apostle Paul gets a bad press. Anyone who wrote "love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" can't be all bad.
7. The prophets did not proclaim, "Let charity roll down like waters." Rather, they proclaimed, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream." Charity is needed... But to show concern for an individual without showing concern for the structures of society that make that person an object of compassion is to be sentimental rather than loving. Justice takes the next step.
8. Being Presbyterian, I am all for doctrines and creeds, but it is bad religion to deify them. They are only to be used as signposts and not hitching posts... Love alone is the hitching post. Faith can divide, but compassion can unite.
9. Whenever you engage with the Bible, make sure others are a part of the conversation, or else we ended up baptizing our own prejudices. My friendship with Rabbi Micah Greenstein and my reading of Amy-Jill Levine, a Jewish professor of New Testament at Vanderbilt, have helped me understand the times and religion of Jesus...
10. Jesus gets a bad press from... no, not the media, or atheists... but from my brothers and sisters in the fundamentalist wing of Christianity whose faith in

Jesus leads to a rigid exclusivism. For me, Jesus is both a mirror to our humanity and a window to divinity...

11. I continue to be inspired by those who struggle to make it to worship with their walkers, who find a way back to church after losing a loved one, who move here without friends and enter a church for the first time, who juggle two, three and four children's activities and still make church a priority. But those who have provided the most inspiration for me are those in the LGBTQ community who have had the courage and steadfastness to stay with the church even when the church did not have the courage and steadfastness to stay with them... To those who find these words difficult, please see numbers 1-10 above.

12. Joy - it really is a joy to be with irrepressible people who are so precisely because they follow the One who said, "I have come that your joy might be full." Or to be with people of any faith who decide not to be members of the Bystanders Association, but rather embrace life fully. As Bishop Iraneus said early on: "The glory of God is a human being fully alive!"

Thanks be to God for one who would share these inspiring thoughts with us!

Pastor Leigh

*"...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words." Romans 8:26*