

Earl Clement Davis
Church Announcements¹
Pittsfield, MA
August-December, 1908²

Paragraph Pulpit No. 1
Sept. 26, 08

Many people, especially young people, find themselves in an attitude of doubt and perplexity concerning the problems connected with the religious life. They often think, and are encouraged in the thought, that these doubts are wrong. Indeed many are much more disturbed by the thoughts that their doubts are wrong than they are by the problems presented in the doubts themselves. It is especially unfortunate that any young person should feel that it is wrong to have these doubts. As a matter of fact doubts are not an evidence of religious decay, but are the evidence of religious activity and health. Jesus was one of the most thorough-going doubters. Only as he had been a great doubter could he have done the work that he did. Through your doubts you come to a vital faith. If you have religious doubts, do not stifle them, but follow them and you will find a religious faith that is worthwhile.

If you wish to hear this question discussed come to the Unity Church on Sunday morning. I shall preach upon the subject, "Doubts of the Growing Mind."

¹ Among the manuscripts left by Earl Davis were a collection of sheets announcing services. These included several with the title, "Unity Church Paragraph Pulpit," which gave a kind of abstract of the sermon. It seems almost certain that these sheets were used for announcements made in the local newspaper about upcoming services.

² Only a few of these sheets had dates on them. But the titles of the sermons coordinate with sermon manuscripts that are dated. In a few cases I have extrapolated dates.

Unity Church Paragraph Pulpit.
II. Oct. 3, 08³

It is not always easy to distinguish between the passing forms of religious expression and the permanent force in life which is forever producing those forms. Religion is the natural impulse of the human soul. Man is essentially and inevitably religious. It matters not whether it be the Hindu, or the American Indian and his Great Spirit, or Moses and Jehovah, or Christ and the Father in Heaven, in each case we have the individual human soul facing the mystery of life and the universe. In the face of this mystery each feels the presence of the tremendous power of the universe, and each interprets that presence according to the light afforded by the moral, mental and spiritual development of his personality. Christianity is not religion itself, it is one interpretation of the experiences of the religious function of the soul. We accept the interpretation that Jesus made of the religious experiences of life, because, in comparison with all other interpretations of religion, his interpretation seems the truest to life. Some evening when all is quiet, sit down alone and read the Sermon on the Mount. When you have let the grandeur of the thing sink down into your soul, ask yourself if we understand Jesus' interpretation of the religious life.

Earl C. Davis

[This paragraph was repeated twice on signed second and third pages.]

³ This date would be for the Saturday—October 3, 1908—for the sermon on Sunday October 4, 1908.

Unity Church Paragraph Pulpit.

[October 11, 1908]⁴

"What is the church for anyway?" is a question that men are asking themselves with a great deal of seriousness. Does it serve any real vital use in the life of the individual or in society? If it does not, then those who do not concern themselves with the affairs of the churches, are rendering us a great service by ignoring them. If churches are useless ornaments in our human economy, then the sooner they are forgotten, the better for all concerned. But are you sure that in your feelings of dissatisfaction, you are not condemning an institution of value, just because some accidental thing connected with it is wrong? If I plant a field of potatoes this year, and the rust and dry rot happen to strike them, is that any reason why I should refuse to plant potatoes next year? Supposing the church is affected with dry rot, is not that an accident? Are you who see the dry rot, doing the sensible thing in staying away from all churches?

At least come to Unity Church on Sunday evening and hear what I have to say upon the subject, "What is the Church for?"

⁴ I have extrapolated Sunday October 11, 1908 as the likely date for this sermon, "What is Church for Anyway?"

Unity Church Evening Services.⁵
[October 18, 1908]

These services are to be conducted for the purpose of trying to meet a great need of the city. I do not know that it will be possible to accomplish what I have in mind.

There are many people who are in the same state of mind that I was some few years ago. I was dissatisfied with the religious atmosphere of the churches. While I doubted and lay awake nights trying to think out for myself some of the problems, both moral and theological, there was one thing that I had decided as a result of my experience. I decided that there must be some vital principle of more than temporary value behind the imposing structure of organized religion. I set about the task of find that principle. It took some time to get down to a foundation that did not melt away beneath my steps. When I found that foundation I remembered the countless conversations that I had had with men both older than myself and men of my own age, and I resolved to do what I could towards giving the experiences of the religious and moral life a more sensible, simple and honest interpretation than I had been able to find.

I have come across no less than a hundred men, young and middle-aged, in this city who are going through the same kind of experiences that I have been through. I know that there are not one hundred but many hundreds of them in Pittsfield. Now I am in hopes that enough of these men and also women, together with others will come to these services to make them successful, and of benefit to all concerned.

But let me state a little more clearly those whom I would like to see come. I mean those who have read much of modern science, and feel sure that science has no place for religion. I also mean those who have read the writings of Robert Ingersoll⁶, and feel the truth of many of his just criticisms and statements. Also I mean those who have rad

⁵ In October 1908, Earl Davis added an evening service, different from the morning service. This paragraph Pulpit spells out the reasons for adding the evening service and the focus of these services.

⁶ Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899) American lawyer, writer and orator, campaigned in defense of agnosticism and was nicknamed "The Great Agnostic."

the writings of Tom Paine⁷ and many more like him. I would like to have such come to these Sunday evening services. If you think you are an infidel, come; if you think you are an agnostic, come; if you are just in doubt, come; if you have not been to church in ten years or twenty years or in one year, come; come anyway.

Perhaps you have stayed away from church because you have felt that the church is "brought up" to use a common; you have stayed away because you have felt that you might not be welcomed. I wish that you would forget all this and come into Unity church on Sunday evening for our short service. I feel sure that I have something to say to all who might come. If you find that I have not, then I will cease to talk.

Earl C. Davis

⁷ Thomas Paine (1737-1809) English born American revolutionary activist, famous for his 1774 pamphlet "Common Sense." Pain also wrote a widely read treatise, *The Age of Reason* (1793-94) that, while deistic, argued against institutionalized religions. Earl Davis wrote a history manuscript devoted to Thomas Paine; see <https://wordpress.clarku.edu/dbaird/lecture-ix-thomas-paine-and-theology-without-the-church/>.

Notices

Unity Church.

[October 18, 1908]⁸

At the Sunday morning service at 10:45, Mr. Davis will preach. His subject will be, "The Religion of Humanity"

All seats in Unity church are free, and you are welcome.

At the evening service, which comes at 7:30, Mr. Davis will speak. The subject of the talk will be, "For whom are the Churches working?" I would be especially glad to have those who have turned away from the churches for one reason or another to come to this evening service.

After the evening service we would be pleased to have any who wish to go into the Study for conversation.

⁸ These sermons can be dated by an existing dated sermon manuscript that has the same title, "The Religion of Humanity."

Unity Church Paragraph Pulpit.
Sat. Oct. 17⁹

For whom is the church doing its work? Is it doing it that it may bring glory upon some God? Is it doing it that it may honor Christ? Is it doing it that it may serve a few individual souls either here or hereafter?

I have too deep a faith in the nature of the Living God to think that we are to pay him a formal tribute of heaping glory upon Him. I have too much respect for Jesus of Nazareth to imagine for one moment that he would care to have the work of the Church doing "for Christ's sake." I have too much faith in human nature to think that down at the bottom, there are very many people who strive to save themselves at whatever cost to others. The reason why the common people heard Jesus gladly was because he appealed to their deeper sense of complete devotion to the coming of the Kingdom. He did not promise rewards, but he asked of them service.

If the church is true to its original purpose it is working to the end that justice may exist right here in this glorious world, that people may have the opportunity of living clean free noble lives. In so far as all forces in the churches work to this end of making a social order wherein the claims of higher interests of all shall replace our worship of wealth and property, in so far as the churches are really serving man, is God Glorified.

At the Sunday evening service at 7:30 I shall speak upon the subject, "For whom are the Churches working?"

Earl C. Davis

⁹ This text, for a sermon on Sunday October 18, 1908, went to the newspaper on Saturday October 17th.

[Afternoon Service]
[Methodist Church]
[October 18, 1908]
["Child Labor and Legislation"]

At the meeting of the Sunday afternoon Social Study Class in the parlors of the Methodist Church Sunday afternoon, Oct. 18, the topic for study was Child Labor and Legislation. There was a large attendance and very interesting and at times animated discussion upon the various facts connected with the subject.

This class is becoming very popular and the enrollment of members is constantly increasing. Next Sunday it is proposed to consider the whole question of Child Labor. The conditions, causes and remedies will be discussed freely and openly. This meeting will be of especial interest, and a most cordial invitation is extended to all interested in this most vital question to be present.

It should be said in connection with this general invitation that this class is not in any way connected with the Methodist Church, except that through the courtesy of the Governing Board, the meetings are held in the Church Parlors.

Unity Church.
[October 25, 1908]¹⁰

At the Sunday morning service at 10:45, Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "The need of extending rational methods in dealing with small offenders against the social order."

The last Sunday in October is coming to be widely known as Prison Sunday. On that day questions concerning the problems of crime are considered, and money is solicited for the extension of Prison Reform.

All seats in Unity church are free. We extend a cordial invitation to any who wish to come to our services.

At the evening service at 7:30, Mr. Davis will speak upon the subject, "What did Jesus mean by, 'The Kingdom of Heaven?' Has it any significance today?"

See Paragraph Pulpit.

¹⁰ These sermons can be dated by an existing dated sermon manuscript that has the same title, "The Need of Extending More Rational Methods in Dealing with the Small Offenders Against the Social Order."

Unity Church Paragraph Pulpit.
[October 25, 1908]

What strange ideas people have about "The Kingdom of God?" Some picture to themselves a great white throne in a far off place where the pious departed spend their time singing songs of praise and adoration to the great Choirmaster. Of course that is not so bad if people get any comfort out of it. But it is hardly necessary to say that such a notion has nothing to do with the teaching of Jesus, nor with essential Christianity. What Jesus was talking about was the rule of righteousness in a person's life and in society. The teaching of Jesus deals primarily with this life and this world. This is the place where the "Rule of God" is to be established. That habit of condemning this world and this life, and spending one's time in glorifying another world and another life is not only sickening but it is positively blasphemous. This life is a thing of dignity and divinity.

On Sunday evening I shall speak upon the subject, "What did Jesus mean by, "the Kingdom of Heaven? Has it any significance today?"

We are pleased to welcome you to all our services.

Unity Church.
[November 1, 1908]¹¹

At the morning service at 10:45, Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "Practical Politics and Civic Righteousness." This will be a plain blunt talk on the relation of personal integrity to public service.

At the evening service, which comes at 7:30, Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "The Principles at stake in the Campaign."

All seats are free and all persons are most cordially invitation to attend the services at Unity Church.

See the Paragraph Pulpit on another page of this paper.

¹¹ These sermons can be dated by an existing dated sermon manuscript that has the same title, "Practical Politics and Civic Righteousness."

Unity Church Paragraph Pulpit.
[November 1, 1908]

The other day I went into a local office to pay a bill. I noticed hanging up back of the desk the following noble passage from the great president whose name we often speak, but whose principles we have forgotten.

I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to what light I have. I must stand with anybody who stands right, stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong.¹²

That strikes me as a good political motto not only for the candidate for office, but for the voter. For whatever party a man votes, his motive should be just what is stated in that passage from "the President with a principle."

At the evening service at 7:30 I shall speak upon the subject, "The principles at stake in the campaign."

All seats are free and all are extended a most cordial invitation to attend.

¹² Abraham Lincoln has been widely attributed to saying these words or very similar. Most recently President Obama attributed such words to Lincoln. However, the evidence for Lincoln saying these words is missing. See, John Pitney, "Honest, Mr. President [Obama]: Abe Never Said It," <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=125169095>, March 25, 2010.

Unity Church.
[November 8, 1908]¹³

At the morning service at 10:45, Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "Our Growing Hunger for an Absorbing Service."

All churches in Unity Church are free. We give a most cordial invitation to attend them. Come in and find a seat to suit yourself.

At the evening service, which comes at 7:30, Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "The relation of wealth to the rule of Righteousness."

This is one of two or three talks to be given on the practical considerations of the relation of the doctrine of The Kingdom of God as held by Jesus to the possibility of making that ideal an actual fact in everyday life.

See the Paragraph Pulpit in this paper touching on this point.

We shall be glad to have you attend these services.

¹³ These sermons can be dated by an existing dated sermon manuscript that has the same title, "Our Growing Hunger for an Absorbing Service."

Unity Church.
[November 13, 1908]¹⁴

At the morning service at 10:45, Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "Clear Thinking and Right Living in the Individual."

At the evening service, which comes at 7:30, Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "How may we overcome the evils involved in the unfair distribution of wealth?"

The talk is the second of [the] talks dealing with the problem of applying the moral principles of the teaching of Jesus to the life of today.

All seats in Unity Church are free, and you are cordially invited to come to either or both of the services.

See the Paragraph Pulpit on another page.

¹⁴ These sermons can be dated by an existing dated sermon manuscript that has the same title, "Clear Thinking and Right Living in the Individual."

Unity Church Paragraph Pulpit.
[November 13, 1908]

Jesus had a keen sense of humor, and more than once it saved him from a very embarrassing predicament. He brings it to bear upon this question of the relation of wealth to the kingdom of God. "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for the rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."¹⁵ This question which has caused so much discussion of late, Jesus dismisses with one of his keen bits of wisdom. To him the kingdom of God was that state of mind in which a person placed supreme emphasis upon the common welfare of men for the best possible human life. Evidently the man who placed a greater importance upon wealth than upon property, could not enter into the kingdom of God, and that was the end of it. It didn't bother Jesus much. He knew the facts. Anyone who has taken the trouble to think about it, knows that the man who measures his life by the wealth he can amass is killing his whole life. If we could condense into a maxim our observations concerning the happiness of those who are so burdened with wealth that they have forgotten how to live, we would say in deepest sympathy and pity, "Cursed are the rich in things; for theirs is a living hell."

At the Sunday evening service, I shall speak upon this subject. You are cordially invited.

¹⁵ Matthew 19:24.

At the morning.
[December 6, 1908]¹⁶

At Unity Church next Sunday morning, Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "The Evolution of Religion and its Bearing on our Personal Problems."

The service is at 10:45. All are cordially welcomed.

At the evening service, Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "The relation of Churches to Wealth." This talk is one of a series on the general question of the relation of wealth to righteousness.

See paragraph pulpit bearing on this subject.

¹⁶ I have extrapolated Sunday December 6, 1908 as the likely date for these two sermons, "The Evolution of Religion and its Bearing on our Personal Problems" and "The Relation of Churches to Wealth."

Unity Church Paragraph Pulpit.
[December 6, 1908, morning service]

It is often said that the religious principles of Jesus never have had a fair trial. That is very largely true. It is especially true also that they are not in operation on a very large scale at the present time. This is apparent to the man who stops to think of the way in which we sacrifice human life and moral integrity for the sake of commercial and industrial advantages. The general tone of business ethics today does not square with the great thought of Jesus, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."¹⁷ We are much more inclined to seek all these other things first and if there is any cash or time or energy left, and we happen to feel like it, we devote it to what we call the Kingdom of God. Our religious endeavors are inclined to be on the order of the nine-cent sale, where we display the remnants of our stock of talents at a great sacrifice for the benefit of the public.

At the evening service I shall speak on the subject, "How may we overcome the evils involved in the unfair distribution of wealth?"

¹⁷ Matthew 6:33.

Unity Church Paragraph Pulpit.
[December 6, 1908, evening service]

The Christian Church had its origin in the noble purpose of working to establish righteousness among men, that the kingdom should come on earth as it is [in] heaven. Now if it is true that the conditions of wealth in this country are working to the disadvantage of decent and righteous living, it is the duty of the churches to point that out in no uncertain terms. Also it is the duty of the Churches in the fulfillment of their duty to see to it that there are no embarrassing alliances. Standing upon the platform of disinterested service for just lives and just conditions, it must throw its whole strength and power into the work of bridging the chasm between Christian Idealism and our present life.

Come to our morning service at 10:45, and the evening service at 7:30.

Unity Church.

[December 13, 1908]¹⁸

At the morning service, which comes at 10:45, Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "The deeper meaning of practical religion."

All seats in Unity Church are free, and we most cordially invite you to come to the services.

On account of the No License Rally to be held in the Methodist Church on Sunday evening, the usual Sunday evening service at Unity Church will be omitted.

Unity Church Paragraph Pulpit.

In late years there has been an ever-increasing tendency to place emphasis upon what we have been pleased to call practical religion. It is indeed true that there was great need of this movement, and the results have been refreshing and vitalizing to our religious life. Every great popular movement like this one has a deeper and more far-reaching significance than at first appears. So has this movement toward practical religion. In order that practical religion may not lose itself in a dead formalism, we must keep its deeper meaning in sight. That deeper meaning is this,-- All life is sacred, and the religious feelings which often appear only on Sunday must be made to permeate every act and association of human life.

¹⁸ I have extrapolated Sunday December 13, 1908 as the likely date for this sermon, "The Deeper Meaning of Practical Religion."

Unity Church.
[December 20, 1908]¹⁹

Sunday morning service at 10:45. Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "A Reasonable Service."

At the evening service, which comes at 7:30, Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "The moral demand for more reliable conditions of labor."

All seats in Unity Church are free, and we most cordially invite you to come to the services.

Unity Church Paragraph Pulpit.

One of the most demoralizing influences in the life of the average man is the uncertainty of employment. It is a constant source of fear, and worry, and makes it impossible to have any sense of permanence in the home or the community. All of this tends to destroy strength and vigor of personality, and paves the way for all kinds of demoralizing influences. We can never make much headway in lifting the moral tone of the community, and making the city life what it should be until we have done away with this constant fear which hangs like a shadow over our life. When the sunshine of life is shut out by the cloud of poverty and the possibility of unemployment, and man does not know when the rain will fall, it is useless to talk to him about the love of God, or any love. If we do not love our fellow men whom we can see, how can we love God whom we do not see?

¹⁹ I have extrapolated Sunday December 20, 1908 as the likely date for these two sermons, "A Reasonable Service" and "The Moral Demand for More Reliable Conditions of Labor."

Unity Church.
[December 27, 1908]²⁰

At the morning service, which comes at 10:45, Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "Making Life Valuable."

At the evening service, at 7:30, Mr. Davis will speak on the subject, "What is an honest living?"

This talk will be concerned with the question of the limits of the rights to accumulate wealth, and the moral problem involved in the amassing of fortunes.

All seats in Unity Church are free, and we most cordially invite you to come to the services.

Unity Church Paragraph Pulpit.

Wealth is that accumulated experience of mankind which affords him a certain amount of freedom from the dependence upon uncontrolled natural resources, and enables him to develop in moral and spiritual culture. Through the accumulated wisdom of mankind, and the accumulated mechanisms we are able to make natural forces much more our servants in life than were our more primitive ancestors. The question of our times is, so far as this question of wealth is concerned, to what extent, if any, has the individual man the right to appropriate for his own use, this wealth which is a common heritage from the past? Has he any right to any of it? Has he a right only to such as he can make useful in everyday living? What is the moral relation of what we call the right of private property, and vested interests?

I shall discuss this question at the evening service. It is important that you should know something of this question, come and talk it over.

Earl C. Davis

²⁰ I have extrapolated Sunday December 27, 1908 as the likely date for these two sermons, "Making Life Valuable" and "The Limits of the Rights to Accumulate Wealth."