



August 16, 2020

Ordinary Time, Proper 15

First Christian Church 1609 East Ash St. Goldsboro, NC 27530

Minister Rev. Dr. Tom Millay

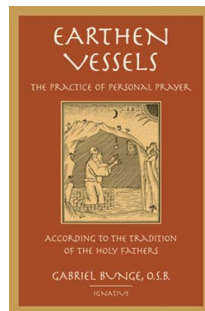
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Weekly Conference Calls every Wednesday at 6:45 PM. Here is all you do:  
Dial 712-770-5505 and then wait for instructions to enter access code, which is  
300904#.

### Church Re-gathering

If we were ever tempted to take gathering at church for granted, I am sure we do not do so anymore! Praise God: We will continue to have outdoor services this Sunday. Church will begin at **9:30am** and last about 30 minutes. Masks will be encouraged, and we ask that you bring your own lawn chair. For those not able to attend, our worship services will still be available online. We will still have our **Sunday conference call at 10:45am**.



### Pastor's Library No. 5

The pastor's library video series continues this week with a reflection on Gabriel Bunge's *Earthen Vessels: The Practice of Personal Prayer according to the Patristic Tradition*. This book discusses the role of the body in prayer, paying attention to standing, kneeling, prostrating, speaking aloud, and more. You can look for the video to be posted Monday afternoon, on the church's Facebook and website.



### Music

"Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing" (Ps. 100:1-2). We will be worshiping the Lord on Sunday. We will be entering the Lord's gates with gladness and the Lord's courts with praise. **Tom Casey** will continue playing LIVE music during the Sunday service, and will accompany **Brantley Watkins** in song. More piano music from Tom Casey will also be posted this Sunday on our church Facebook page. Be sure to check out the online music, and feel free to share it with your friends!

### United Church Ministries Special Offering

Each year in August we receive a special mission offering for United Church Ministries of Wayne County. United Church Ministries is a community outreach program serving the emergency needs of people here in Wayne County. Assistance is provided for rent, food, utilities, medicine, and transportation. United Church Ministries is primarily supported by member churches. First Christian has been a member since the beginning. By supporting this special mission offering, **we answer Jesus' command to love thy neighbor and feed his sheep.** The Missions Task Force invites and seeks your generous participation in this special mission offering. In addition, if you would like to volunteer with UCM, you may contact Mary or Ronnie Thompson and they will put you in touch with the UCM Director.

### Racial Equity Orientation Workshop

Update: I attended our region's first Racial Equity Orientation Workshop on Saturday, August 15. It was a very good conversation, especially on what differences there are between prejudice and racism. The spirit of Christian love was undoubtedly present amongst us, for which I give thanks to God. The second Racial Equity Orientation Workshop will take place **Thursday, August 27, 7-8:30pm**. Registration is required but will be accepted up until the event begins. The registration link is as follows: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSftPHaIN76X\\_jqS1kvpJh\\_EIAiOZIIIszOR9yRO3k02Sfa7p8Q/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSftPHaIN76X_jqS1kvpJh_EIAiOZIIIszOR9yRO3k02Sfa7p8Q/viewform). Racial inequity is not something a Christian should accept, and thank God the Holy Spirit empowers us to work against forces of oppression. I will be at the workshop, and I hope to see you too!

## **Christmas Cards: Special Request**

**Tanner Bjork** is currently in Room 201 of the residential side of Kitty Askins. Sisters Jenny Bjork Moore and Heather Bjork Hill ask that you keep him and, if you like, to send Tanner a Christmas card. He loves Christmas and his room is decorated with a tree, wreath, cards, and other special decorations. Write to Tanner at: Kitty Askins Hospice Center, 107 Handley Park Ct., Room 201, Goldsboro, NC, 27534.

### **Worship**

Welcome to worship, whether in person or online! Visit us in person at 1609 E. Ash St. in Goldsboro, or online at [www.firstchristiangoldsboro.org](http://www.firstchristiangoldsboro.org) for several videos posted by 9:00 AM each Sunday: our Sermon, our Old Testament and Epistle Readings by Elders. Our lectionary readings this Sunday are: Genesis 45:1-15; Psalm 133; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; and Matthew 15:21-28.

### **Sermon**

#### **"Loud Cries and Tears"**

It starts with the muscles in your face. The middle of your mouth turns upward; your eyebrows turn down. Then your shoulders heave back and forth, and maybe your stomach heaves, too. At a certain point, you can't control yourself anymore—even if you wanted to stop, you can't. It has a momentum, and you may even at some point find yourself raising your voice in a kind of wail. You are weeping. You are crying. Tears are running down your cheeks, and in this moment you feel completely overwhelmed.

We're talking about crying today, and the first thing that might come to many of our minds today is embarrassment and shame. It might be embarrassing to you, these moments when you're overwhelmed, when you've lost your self-control, and can't help but cry. I know I'm embarrassed especially at movies; when a movie really tugs at the heart strings, I find myself trying not to cry. In general I try to save my tears for a private moment. Many of us have an aversion to being so 'emotional' in public.

In our Old Testament lesson for today, Joseph weeps. He weeps so loudly that he is heard not just by his brothers in front of him, but also by those standing outside the door of the room, and even more than that, Joseph is crying out with

such force that he is heard by those in a completely different building, the palace of the Pharaoh (Gen 45:2). In this moment of loud weeping, Joseph has just revealed himself to his brothers. After many long years of separation, they are at this moment reunited. Joseph's expression of emotion is uninhibited. He cries out with a loud cry, and he hugs and then weeps upon the neck of his brother Benjamin, and then he kisses all his brothers, one-by-one, all the while continuing to cry and weep as he is kissing them.

It makes one wonder: are Joseph's actions here a loss of the "self-control" that is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22)? Is he culpable for being too emotional—should someone take him aside and try to calm him down? I don't think so, because if we condemned Joseph here, we would be in danger of condemning Jesus as well, who wept at the loss of his friend, Lazarus (John 11:35).

One of the things these stories of Joseph and of Jesus have to teach us is that it is okay to cry in front of one another. We should be honest with people, and honesty about grief is often expressed through tears.

But these stories of Joseph and of Jesus have something else to teach us as well. They can point us to a distinct lack of tears in our lives. Not necessarily in relation to our friends and family, who we may occasionally cry in front of. No, a distinct lack of tears in relation to God.

I was astonished to learn recently how fundamental weeping before God was in the early church. For our brothers and sisters who lived closer to the time of Christ, it would have been very strange to pray to God and not to weep. Most every prayer time for them would begin with tears, because it is at the start of one's time of prayer that one makes a confession to God of all one's sins and faults. Our early church fathers and mothers would have thought our usual prayers very strange. They would think: do they really believe what they are saying, when they confess their guilt before God? If they do believe it, why are they so calm?

And it wasn't only during times of confession that the early church wept. They also shed tears when they were making petitions and intercessions before God—

when they were asking for something, when they deeply wanted something for their friends, for their neighbors, or for themselves. Psalm 6 says: "Turn, O LORD, save my life; deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love... I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with weeping. My eyes waste away because of grief; they grow weak because of all my foes" (Ps. 6: 4, 6-7). Just like the psalmist who is here reaching out and demanding to be heard, so early Christians wept and cried when they made their supplications before the Father. In this, they were just following the example of Jesus, who—according to Hebrews 5:7—"offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death," referring here to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. We see here in Jesus and in the early church, when they make their intercessory prayers, that kind of wrestling faith we saw earlier in Jacob, that faith that is not willing to let go until it receives its blessing. What prayer looks like when it is that kind of wrestling, striving prayer, is prayer "with loud cries and tears."

So why does our prayer often not look like that? Why is it so Stoic, so anemic, so drained of emotion? I ask that question for myself, for if I am being honest I cannot remember the last time I cried before God.

I don't think we can or should force ourselves to have these strong emotions. Even worse than no emotion at all is emotion that is merely performative. Still, we should let our lack of tears be a sign for us. We should question ourselves. Do we really believe we have offended God through our sin? Do we really pray for our neighbor to be saved from harm and from temptation—do our neighbors' physical and spiritual lives really matter to us? Do we really pray for our neighbor to be healed and not stop praying until that is accomplished? The fathers and mothers of the church would tell us that if we can really answer these questions affirmatively—if we can say 'yes' we feel the weight of our sin and 'yes' we truly, really care for our neighbor—if the answer to these questions is yes, then we should be weeping, frequently, before God.

As for myself, I don't know what to say. I can only do as one of the early church fathers, Evagrius Ponticus, suggested, and pray for "the gift of tears" (*On Prayer*, Chapter 5).

May God grant us all this day a truly honest prayer—one truly honest prayer before God. Lay us bare, Lord, so that we may weep when it is a time for weeping. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Prayers of the Parish:** "Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen" (Book of Common Prayer, 823).

Let us lift up our weekly requests. We ask especially and continue to ask that you protect also all those who in danger today because of the pandemic, for those who provide essential services of all kinds. Visit especially: doctors, nurses, and all those working in health care; those who are in nursing homes, hospices, and long-term care facilities who are feeling isolated in these long weeks of distancing; schoolchildren, teachers, and administrators in a time of great uncertainty, and especially those students, teachers, and administrators who are now or are soon going back to school; we pray for childcare workers; for those who process food and those who stock and sell in grocery stores; visit delivery drivers and visit all Your churches, their pastors, their deacons, their elders, and their congregations. Visit all those who cannot find safe work in these moments and who are feeling more threatened than ever this week. Mourn with those who mourn. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Grant us Your peace.

Please hear our prayers for:

*Grace Price, Eloise Kleinert, Mary Ethel Lewis, Kathy and G. A. Spain, June Anderson, Willie and Faye Rogers, Rick Rogers (Faye & Willie Rogers' son), John and Becky Selzer, Rebecca Daniels, Lorraine Loch, Val Watkins (Brantley's sister-in-law), the Spain's great granddaughter Katie, Molly McEldowney (Sharon Jones' daughter) and her brother, David Reynolds, Robert Strader (June Anderson's son-in-law), Jodie Hudson, Eddie Stewart, Linda Hilburn, Lee Summerlin, Gary Bartlett, Bill Smith, Gordon Aycock (friend of June Anderson), Chuck Allen, the Kleinert Family, Family of Dennis Horne in the death of his Aunt Linda Sides and Family of Ruby Santee in the death of her sister, Margaret Medlin, Melissa Acres, Mary Anne Cowley, Ruby Santee, Linda McCoy, Ken McCoy and family, Jay and Kelley Pittmann, Dennis Isenhower and his son Dennis, Ray Price, Tanner Bjork and family.*

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

**Communion** You may pick up individual communion packs at the entry table at the parking lot entrance Mondays from 10 to 12 or Tuesdays from 10 to 12 or use your own bread and juice at home. You may also drop off your offerings at that time.

### **A Moment for Meditation**

Our communion meditation this week comes to us from Psalm 133: "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the LORD ordained his blessing, life forevermore." I'd like today to focus in on just one word of this little psalm: "good"—in Hebrew, "tov." This is the same word used to describe the original creation, before the Fall, in Genesis 1: "God saw all that He had made and, look, it was very *good*" (Gen 1:31). What this means is that when we are truly dwelling together in fellowship, we are recovering just a little bit, for just those moments in time, what creation was supposed to be like—what this world is supposed to feel like. Praise God for those moments: they are a foretaste of what is to come. Hallelujah and amen.

**Preparing the Lord's Table with Our Offerings** - Let us prepare the Lord's Table with our Offerings. Thank you for your faithfulness in sharing your offerings during this time. You may drop them *by the church office from 10 to 12 on Monday or Tuesday of each week, by calling Wanda for another time, or by mailing in.*

**Offering Prayer** - The God from whom all blessings flow continues to give, and thus we continue to give as well. God's generosity is unending, and so you are following in the way set out for us, the pattern given to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave everything out of his love for the world. As St. Paul might say, I thank God always in my prayers for you, my church family, and our faithful, giving congregation that continues to gather at First Christian Goldsboro. May our gifts continue to work to bring about God's kingdom in this world.

**Confession** - As Christians, we recognize we are not perfect. Join me in a moment of silent confession, for things done and for things left undone.

Let us rejoice: our sins are forgiven through the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. May the power of the Holy Spirit draw us all more closely to God in the week to come. Amen.

**Words of Institution** - On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "This is my Body broken for you. Eat this in remembrance of me." In the same manner after supper, Jesus took the Cup and when he had blessed it, he gave it to his disciples, saying, "This is my blood of a new covenant, poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sin. Drink it in remembrance of him."

The Gifts of God for the People of God.      *Thanks be to God!*

**The Lord's Prayer** Let us now pray together the prayer our Lord taught us, saying:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

**Benediction Prayer** The Lord bless us and keep us, the Lord make his face to shine upon us, and give us peace. Give us this week the gift of tears, so that what is sown with tears may be harvested with rejoicing. Amen and Amen.

**Announcements and Calendar**

Outdoor Church Service, Sunday, August 16<sup>th</sup>, at 9:30 AM (see information above)