



August 2, 2020

Ordinary Time, Proper 13

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

Minister Rev. Dr. Tom Millay

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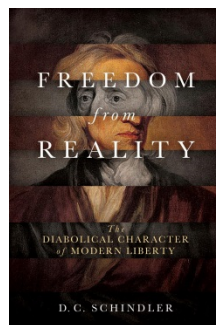
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Weekly Conference Calls every Wednesday at 6:45 PM. Here is all you do:

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. 3

The pastor's library video series continues this week with a reflection on the meaning of freedom, and **how wearing a mask can actually make us more free**. Check it out on our Facebook; there is also a link on the church website.



Music

More piano music from Tom Casey has been posted this Sunday on our church Facebook page. He will also be playing LIVE during the Sunday service, with Bunkie Parker accompanying. Be sure to check out the online music, and feel free to share it with your friends!



CWS Hygiene Kits

A huge thanks to Ronnie and Mary Thompson for their work in putting together hygiene kits for Church World Service. These kits are used by our displaced and homeless brothers and sisters who are staying in shelters in the United States and all over the globe. Thanks to your generosity, First Christian Goldsboro was able to assemble **over 50** CWS hygiene kits.

Racial Equity Orientation Workshop

Update: The Racial Equity Orientation Workshop has been rescheduled. It will now take place online Saturday, August 15th, from 10-11:30am and Thursday, August 27, 7-8:30pm. Registration is required but will be accepted up until the event begins. (I will notify the church when the registration link goes live.) The workshop will focus on learning key concepts such as anti-racism and the difference between equity and equality. I will be there, and I hope to see you too!

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 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 32:22-31; Psalm 17:1-7, 15; Romans 9:1-5; and Matthew 14:13-21.

Sermon

"Israel"

"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened" (Mt 7:7-8).

It happened at night. The sun had set over an hour ago, and the sky was a deep blue. You could still see a hand in front of your face, but not much more. Everyone else was on the other side of the river. Jacob was alone. He had wandered away from the group so he could have a moment of rest and thoughtfulness during his long journey.

It was then the stranger appeared. Immediately, Jacob and the stranger fought with one another. It was close, intimate combat, grasping and pushing and gritting teeth as he wrestled with this person who was too close even to see.

Eventually, light threatens to come over the horizon. The stranger asks to be let go, but Jacob refuses. He says: "'I will not let you go, unless you bless me'." Jacob demands a blessing, holding on to the stranger until he gets what he wants. So the stranger asks him "'What is your name?'" And he replies "'Jacob'." Then the stranger says to him, "'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed'" (Genesis 32:26-28).

It is from this moment—this moment of strife, contention, even violence and wounding—that we get the name 'Israel'. Israel: the one who strives with God. Or perhaps even better: Israel, the one who fights with God. The one who fights with God and with men, and who keeps on fighting till he prevails.

In this story, we see that God seems to respect feisty people. God respects those who make demands. Those who are a part of the kingdom don't just stand at the door, hoping God will take notice and let them in. No, they stand at the door and *knock*. Maybe sometimes they even have to knock hard!

There is much to learn about faith through this story. One insight it opens is about the Psalms. It shows the Psalms are not just the prayer book of the Bible, as we talked about a few weeks ago; the Psalms are also a book that shows what faith looks like. Take our psalm for the day, Psalm 17, which starts with "Hear a just cause, O LORD, attend to my cry" (Ps. 17:1), and goes on to command "incline your ear to me, hear my words" (Ps. 17:6). The psalmist is saying: look at *me*! Pay attention to *me*! Hear *me*! It's as if the psalmist wants to grab God, to wrestle God and hold on until the promise is fulfilled and the psalmist receives his vindication.

We sometimes think of faith as a kind of passive acceptance, in effect saying to life, 'It is what it is.' But the very name of Israel suggests otherwise. The very name of Israel, the name of the people of faith, suggests that wrestling, fighting, striving with God and with men is at the heart of faith.

There was a man sitting on the ground by the road, his fingers pressed into the sandy dust of the earth. His head was bowed in thought, since there was no one nearby to beg from. All of a sudden, he heard the great commotion of a large crowd. He heard it passed from one person to another in the crowd: 'Jesus—Jesus—It is Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth.' It was at that time the man made a decision. He was not going to be silent. He shouted, at the top of his lungs, "'Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!'" Those around him told him in no uncertain terms to shut his mouth. This was an important man, Jesus—he wasn't to be bothered with a man who spent all day asking for things, whose all-too-familiar voice never stopped making request after request. But the blind beggar ignored the crowd's command. He would be heard. He shouted. He shouted even more loudly. He wouldn't stop making his request known. He didn't care if he made people uncomfortable or annoyed. So it was on that day that blind Bartimaeus received his sight. It was on that day, when he shouted and disturbed and annoyed, that he heard from the mouth of Jesus: "'Go; your faith has made you well'" (Mt 10:46-52).

Now we do have to have wisdom in what we ask of God. I remember as a child I loved Star Wars and I thought the Storm Trooper outfit was the coolest thing I had ever seen. I used to pray to God every day to somehow, someday arrange it so

that my parents would buy me a Storm Trooper costume. That would have been the fulfillment of my deepest wish, back then.

That's fine for a child. But as Paul says, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways" (1 Cor. 13:11).

Hopefully, I've grown past the Storm Trooper. Hopefully, what I want now is the kingdom of God on earth, and that's what I'm praying for. Hopefully I'm praying for food to find its way to the mouths of those who need it, for the healing of those who are in pain, for our society to give basic dignity to those whom our history has encouraged us to ignore, to write off as not significant, as not mattering.

And hopefully you're praying too, praying for the kingdom. I only ask that once you find what it is you're supposed to pray for, you don't let go. Are you striving with God? Are you fighting with your prayers, insisting that you get heard and that God take up your cause? As we see in Jacob, in the Psalms, in Bartimaeus: faith is a restless, a striving thing. And it is not afraid to ask God for what it wants.

God our Father, today I ask you to plant that faith in us, that we may struggle and fight and strive, knowing that because of the grace shared by your Son we may approach you with all boldness, insisting that Your will be done on earth as in heaven. Thus will all shattered things be put back together, all excluded people embraced, and loved, and brought in, and all broken hearts healed. Amen.

Prayers of the Parish: After driving through many states and seeing many without masks, I have been having my own struggle this last week to love those I don't want to love. I want to offer this special prayer for myself and for us all:

God, give us the intelligence and humility to wear masks and protect our neighbors. Give us also a measure of Your infinite mercy with those who refuse to care for their neighbors, that we might harbor forgiveness in our hearts and gentleness in our aspect. Help us to keep others' humanity constantly in sight. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

We also want to 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; childcare workers; 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. 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, and the families of Teenie Wilson and Mary Ellen Ham.

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

The witness of my grandma, Betty Millay, has been on my mind all week. Paul says that the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Gal 5:22, with the KJV's "gentleness"). Though we're called to embody all of these fruits, often we have one that is especially *our* fruit, especially the one that we bring to the world. For my grandma that was gentleness. Did she discipline her grandchildren as much as they deserved? No! (...But, then again, what grandparent does?) She showed us what gentleness looks like. No problem, no temper tantrum, was enough to rattle her. She remained kind, she remained gentle, no matter what. And that is a virtue we all need as we gather around this table. If we all got what we deserved, who would be here? Praise God, then, whose love is immeasurably more

than we ask for or deserve, and who plants that same love in our hearts, so that it shows up in our friends, our neighbors, and our grandparents.

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

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 Holy Spirit, I pray you fill our congregation with boldness this week as we make our prayers to You. Grant us wisdom in our requests and persistence in our faith. Strengthen our firm belief that when we ask, you will give, when we search, you will let us find, and when we knock, the door will be opened. May the God of immeasurable love bless you, keep you, and make his face to shine upon you this week. Amen.

Announcements and Calendar

Outdoor Church Service, Sunday, August 2nd, at 9:30 AM (see information above)