



August 9, 2020

Ordinary Time, Proper 14

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

Minister Rev. Dr. Tom Millay

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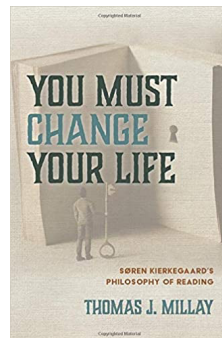
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Weekly Conference Calls every Wednesday at 6:45 PM. Here is all you do:

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. 4

The pastor's library video series continues this week with a reflection on my own book, *You Must Change Your Life*, which came out last month. In the book, I reflect on the spiritual purpose of reading with the Danish philosopher-theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). 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. That's right: **Tom Casey** will continue playing LIVE music during the Sunday service, and accompanying our special guest musician **Becky Kerns** from Casey's Chapel as she brings God's Word in flute and 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: The Racial Equity Orientation Workshop has been rescheduled. It will now take place online **Saturday, August 15<sup>th</sup>, from 10-11:30am** and **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\\_EIAiOZIIISzoR9yRO3k02Sfa7pBQ/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSftPhaIN76X_jqS1kvpJh_EIAiOZIIISzoR9yRO3k02Sfa7pBQ/viewform). The workshop will focus on learning key concepts and building a common vocabulary. From the clergy training session on August 4<sup>th</sup>, I learned a good deal about the difference between prejudice and racism (there is a difference!). 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 workshops, 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](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 37:1-4, 12-28; Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b; Romans 10:5-15; and Matthew 14:22-33.

## Sermon

### "Generous"

I begin today with a story about Paul Farmer. Paul Farmer is a doctor in Haiti, and I have been thinking about him this week because our Scripture is about generosity. He is a model of what abundant generosity can look like in our time. So let's hear his story.

Dr. Paul—as he is known in Haiti—has been recognized for his generous giving of his time and energy. He has been known to hike for four hours on foot over mountain and hill and valley to see one patient—just one patient—who missed a check-up at the area hospital. Dr. Paul would go to visit the patient both to see how they were doing and to see what obstacles had kept them from attending their scheduled appointment. He would then walk the four hours back to his own hospital, while also attending to anyone he met along the way who needed medical attention.

Dr. Farmer, as he's known in his public role, is also one of the co-founders of a group called Partners-in-Health. They are a model of what it looks like to be a *generous* health care non-profit. I'll give you an example. People who try to prevent the global spread of infectious diseases often operate on the paradigm of cost-effectiveness. The idea is: we only have so much money, so this is what we can do. We can do this, we can't do that. This general idea is applied to specific diseases like tuberculosis. The thought with tuberculosis is: we can afford to provide, at a large scale, two drugs that can help treat tuberculosis. But if a patient develops resistance to those two drugs, giving them the third and fourth drug that can also help is simply too expensive. The patient must then be left to die.

Paul Farmer and Partners-in-Health refused to accept this understanding of the situation. They committed themselves to giving as many drugs as were necessary to treat patients, and also paying community health workers to make sure pills were taken on time, *and also* providing money to patients for missed work time (when they could have been making money), *and also* travel expenses so they could get to the hospital, which in rural Haiti is often enough providing them with a 'donkey rental fee'.

The funny thing about being this generous is that it actually *saved* money. And I'll tell you why: when you treat people for tuberculosis, it helps to lessen the spread of the disease, so even though you're giving more money per patient, there end up being less patients, because fewer people are catching the disease.

There is a lesson here we can take from Dr. Farmer and Partners-in-Health. We already know not being generous is morally wrong and that "God loves a cheerful giver"—but this teaches us something more. Not only is not being generous morally wrong, it also doesn't work. Look at helping to cure tuberculosis: people ended up paying more because of their efforts to pay less. This effort to limit love, to limit giving—it simply doesn't work. It undercuts the whole aim of what you were trying to do.

That makes me think of our Old Testament lesson for the day, about Jacob and Joseph and his brothers. Jacob "loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age" (Genesis 37:3). What does that mean but that Jacob wasn't generous with his love? Jacob wanted to limit his love and his giving, in order to make Joseph special. He wanted Joseph to be treated well, and to be safe and secure, and to be well-attired. And did it work? No! Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. The favorite son was lost. Jacob's efforts to limit his love and make his youngest son special failed.

Compare Jacob to the Father in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. This Father gives to all who ask. He gives his son his inheritance, and it may look like his generosity has failed when his son goes off and squanders it all. But no. The son comes back. Love wins out. And what about that other son, the elder son, that son

who was the good son? He hears the words "'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours'" (Luke 15:31). And what child doesn't want to hear that, those words of welcome and trust and sharing and partnership? The Father gets to keep the sons he loves—which is, after all, what He wanted. Generosity works.

When we are generous, we are imitating God in God's dealings with human beings. What does Paul say in Romans? "[T]he same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved'" (Romans 10:12-13). God "has riches enough for all who call on him" (πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους αὐτόν, Romans 10:12, Pastor Tom's trans.).

You may be tempted to think—well, that's fine for God, but I am just an ordinary human, a normal person. I'm not God. But that's ignoring where this passage we are reading goes. We just quoted from Romans 10:12-13. Right in verse 14 Paul starts pressing us to be just as generous as God. Share with everyone, he says: Get out there and share. Jesus says the same thing. He says that the Father "sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Mt 5:45)—in other words, the Father gives to everybody. Then Jesus says, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). That may sound like a tall task. But remember this: God has shared these immeasurable riches *with us*. Having faith means believing that we will always have something to give. So I say to you and to me, to everyone of us today: "Give it all. Give it now" (Annie Dillard). And, remembering Dr. Farmer and the Father of the prodigal son, may we be assured today of this truth about generosity: It works. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that triune and eternal gift of shared love from which we were created: Amen.

**Prayers of the Parish:** What would it look like if we made a multi-colored robe for every person in our life, and not just one? Lord, pour your agape into our hearts, to love and serve our neighbors, and to pray for them, to always be filled with prayers for them, especially that the good work our neighbors are doing might be prospered.

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, and the families of Teenie Wilson, Mary Ellen Ham, and Betty Millay.*

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**

What so often prevents communion is favoritism. Jacob chooses to love Joseph, and thus sows dissension and strife in all the sons of Israel. So we also choose our friends and neglect our neighbors. Is it any wonder there is strife and violence in our communities? God's action in the world is the foundation of community, because "God shows no partiality" (Romans 2:11), "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him" (Romans 10:12). Let us care for each person we see, because we are already united with that person in Christ. May God expand our communion. Perfect us in generosity as you open our hearts, O Holy Spirit.

**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** - We are called to serve a generous God, and we are called to be like God—we are made to be like God, made in the image and likeness of God: That is why it feels good to give, why we feel fulfilled when we do so. May we thank God this week for the chance and the honor to contribute to the coming of the Kingdom, just as I am thankful and thank you for the generous hearts God has given you.

**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** There is a spiritual battle going on. May God's holy angels watch over us, to protect our hearts and keep them generous. Go now in peace, to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

#### **Announcements and Calendar**

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

Church Board Meeting, Tuesday, August 11<sup>th</sup>, at 6:45 PM via conference call