



July 12, 2020

Ordinary Time, Proper 10

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

Minister Rev. Dr. Tom Millay

Church Telephone/Fax: (919) 735-3092 Minister's Cell: (919) 273-7030

Church email: [fccgb1609@gmail.com](mailto:fccgb1609@gmail.com) Minister's email [tom.millay54@gmail.com](mailto:tom.millay54@gmail.com)

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**.



### Book Study

Join us as we continue to discuss Gabriel Bunge's *Dragon's Wine and Angel's Bread*. This last week, we talked the connection between boredom and anger and the ways we can use Scripture to steer ourselves out of melancholy. Our discussion will follow our usual Wednesday church check-in, around 7:15pm. A video will be posted to the church's Facebook on Monday. This week we will be reflecting together on Chapters 6-8, with special focus on Chapter 8.

## **Administration**

We will be having our Administration Meeting on **Tuesday, July 14<sup>th</sup>** at 6:45 PM over conference call.

## **Music**

More piano music from Tom Casey has been posted this Sunday on our church Facebook page. Be sure to check it out, and feel free to share it with your friends!



**CWS Hygiene Kits**

## **Church World Service needs your help!**

Because of the Coronavirus quarantine, Church World Service suspended its kit ministry program in early March. CWS is restarting this program in July. As we enter the hurricane season, CWS is concerned that inventory is dangerously low and that we will not be able to respond to those in need when the storms strike. CWS is asking for partner congregations to resupply its inventory. Hygiene kits are an especially effective ministry in these times when many church buildings are still closed. Once kits have been assembled, Hillyer Memorial Christian Church will serve as a drop off depot. They will be accepting kits from August 3-14. If you would like to help, here is what is needed:

### **SUPPLIES NEEDED FOR EACH HYGIENE KIT:**

- One hand towel measuring approximately 15" x 28" to 16" x 32" (no fingertip, bath, dish towel, or micro-fiber)
- One washcloth
- One wide-tooth comb removed from the package (found at discount dealers like [sallybeauty.com](http://sallybeauty.com))
- One fingernail or toenail clipper removed from the package (either one is acceptable)
- One bath size bar of soap in the original package
- One toothbrush in the original package
- Ten standard size Band-Aids

All items need to fit inside a one-gallon Ziploc type bag. Remove the excess air from the bag and seal before boxing.

In lieu of making a kit, if you prefer to make a financial contribution, the estimated cost of the kit is \$15. Contributions should be made out to First Christian and marked for CWS Hygiene Kits.

### **Youth**

Virtual Camp Caroline started Monday June 22 and continues this Monday July 6th, and will be active each Monday following until July 20. The camp activities will be available at <https://ncdisciples.org/vitual-camp/>. No registration or fee is required. To get further details, you can get in touch with Tom.

### **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 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112; Romans 8:1-11; and Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23.

### **Sermon**

#### **"The Gift of the Law"**

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Ps 119:105). What a beautiful phrase. It is a phrase immortalized in a song by Amy Grant (I hope y'all know what I'm talking about, so I don't have to sing it!). If you find yourself in a moment where you are feeling a kind of gratitude for Scripture, for being able to turn to God's word, for having these words be a part of your life, able to be relied on—if you are feeling thankful for that, and you are looking for words that express how you feel, then these words of Psalm 119 might come to mind: "Thy word": "a lamp unto my feet," "a light unto my path."

Yet it is not just any words of Scripture that the psalmist is talking about here when he says "Thy word." Along with "word," he mentions "ordinances" (vv. 106, 108), "precepts" (v. 110), "decrees" (v. 111), and "statutes" (v. 112). The psalmist is talking about God's "law" (v. 109). The psalmist is grateful for God's law; he is thankful for the light that it sheds on how we should act in the world, for the

illumination it gives to the right path, how it shines forth and keeps us from harm and temptation, reminding us of God's purposes for our life. For the psalmist, God's law is a gift, a gracious gift from God to human beings in general and to the Israelites in particular.

Now this may seem strange to us as Christians. Many of us have been taught that we don't have a religion of the law. Isn't it true that it is "by grace [we] have been saved through faith, and this is not [our] own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9)? So why is the psalmist praising God for the law? Why does he think the law is a gift?

If you look at the other cultures surrounding the ancient Israelites—the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians—it's actually pretty easy to see why the Israelites thought of the law as a gift. For these other cultures did not have, and did not even claim to have, a law or precepts or statutes or instructions given to them by the gods. All these cultures were pious: they were trying to please the gods, but the gods had not revealed to them what should be done to make them happy. So these peoples just had to guess and try different things out, and if something like an earthquake or a drought happened, it probably meant that they had gotten something wrong (John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*).

The law is a gift to the Israelites because it lets them know what they should do. Because of the law, they become people who know what to do, and that is quite a gift.

Even if, as Paul puts it, we don't always do what we know we should do (Rom 7:14-25), at least we know what the right actions are. This is the sense of the law as a gift that has remained for Christians even after the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the law Paul is talking about in Romans 8 when he writes about "the law of the Spirit" (Rom 8:2) and the law Jesus is talking about when he says "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17). I quoted a famous verse from Ephesians earlier, about being saved by grace through faith. But let's not forget the very next verse, which says: "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life" (Eph 2:10). So

we like the psalmist should praise God for the law. Just like the ancient Israelites, we Christians have been given the gift of knowing what to do.

This is an especially important gift during the time of the coronavirus. We may not know the ultimate reasons why all this is happening. But as Christians we do know something: we know what to do, we know those actions which can cause hope to grow, and that can give us a really important focus during this time when it's easy to get lost and start wondering 'why? why? why?'

It's true that our actions right now are limited in new ways. Yet even if it is having to take on new forms during this time, that doesn't change the fact that we know what to do, and it's what we've always done: give food to the hungry, care for the sick, clothe those in need, welcome the stranger, and visit the imprisoned (Mt 25:35-36). These are, and always have been, the touchpoints of Christian life. They are where we meet Jesus.

In talking about Christian action during a time of crisis, I am reminded of the book of Acts, Chapter 11. There a group of believers who are in Antioch are informed by a prophet from Jerusalem named Agabus that there is about to be "a severe famine over all the world" (Acts 11:28). The Christians gathered in Antioch don't speculate as to why this famine is happening. Instead, they ask, in the words of New Testament scholar N.T. Wright, "three simple questions: Who is going to be at special risk when this happens? What can we do to help? And who shall we send?" (*God and the Pandemic*, p. 32). In other words, these Christians get right to action. Acts says: "The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea; this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabus and Saul" (Acts 11:29-30).

During this time, maybe these three questions should guide our action as well. As we Christians are continually involved in the doing of works of love, we should ask as we are doing them: "Who is going to be at special risk? What can we do to help? And who shall we send?"

We as a church are already involved in works of love for those who are especially at risk right now. We are, for example, caring for those who are isolated in our church community. We are making the continual effort to stay in touch and build each other up, to lift each other's spirits. We are heeding Paul's words in Galatians

where he says: "whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith" (Gal 6:10).

We as a church are also continuing to work in mission. We are coordinating with the Church World Service to put together hygiene kits for those in need, which will be sent out in August; and I know the CWF (Christian Women's Fellowship) has made a special effort here. We are also helping out on the front lines of the pandemic especially by supporting those in our congregation who are medical professionals working on those front lines. And there's much else that our church continues to do, as we work to meet our missional purpose by meeting the needs of the world.

There are also areas where we as a church can continue to grow, where our actions can take new directions as we further our knowledge of who is at risk, what can be done, and who can be sent. I am thinking especially of the disproportionate impact the coronavirus has had on people of color. We live in a country of racial inequity, and all the prior inequality that was already here is now showing up in who gets infected and who dies from coronavirus. According to the CDC, "Latino and [Black] [Americans]... have been three times as likely to become infected as their white neighbors... and they have been nearly twice as likely to die" (*New York Times*, July 5, data sourced from the CDC).

As our regional Disciples begin a process of discussion around issues of anti-racism and racial healing, this is something we as a church should be thinking about. How might we address this inequality and live in solidarity with those who are being disproportionately affected? And as we ask that question, we know we must listen to our sister Disciples churches, who often know better than we do how this question might be answered—just as the church in Jerusalem instructed the church in Antioch in Acts Chapter 11.

As Christians, we know what to do. But we also know the Spirit continues to guide us and give our actions new shapes in new times. We know we must respond with works of love and acts of giving; that these, as Micah puts it, are what are required of us (Micah 6:8) and what make God well-pleased with our service (Mt 25:23). May we pray together that God grant us insight into how our love and our service should meet the specific needs of our moment.

My prayer for us in the time of the pandemic is the same prayer Paul had for the Galatians: that we not grow weary of doing good (Gal 6:9)—that we not give in to the temptation of indifference. In this time of uncertainty and doubt, may our actions continue to ground us and give us meaning as followers of the law of Christ (Gal 6:2). Guide us, Holy Spirit. Be a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path. Amen.

**Prayers of the Parish:** Christianity came into the world as a community of brothers and sisters united not in the old ties of kinship, but in the new bond of love. We don't just pray we will be united, we are united because we pray for one another. It is true that they will know we are Christians by our love, and that without love we simply are not Christians. May our hearts then be united with one another, joined in intercession for our brothers, for our sisters, for our world.

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 those who are in nursing homes, hospices, and long-term care facilities who are feeling isolated in these long weeks of distancing. 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**

Our Gospel reading for this week is the parable of the sower. It is a parable that asks: What kind of soil are you? Are you that rocky soil, who starts out excited about faith, but who withers quickly over time? Are you that thorny soil, in which the cares of the world choke the Word of God and make it unfruitful? Or are you that good soil, who yields thirty, sixty, even a hundred fold? It seems to me that the quality of one's soil depends a lot on how well one listens, to God and to one's neighbors. Are your ears open? Jesus says to us, "Pay attention, then, to how you listen" (Lk 8:18). Are we truly listening to others—considering, thinking on what they are trying to tell us. It's a question worth asking every day. Without listening, there is no communion. May we pray to God daily to give us ears to hear, so that we may truly be sharing that communion we do want to share.

**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** God of all creation, equip us to do the good works to which you have called us. Fill our hearts with renewed purpose this Sunday, so that throughout the week to come we may be diligent in working for your kingdom. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Announcements and Calendar**

Outdoor Church Service, Sunday, July 12, at 9:30 AM (see information above)

Administration Meeting, Tuesday, July 14, at 6:45 PM (Conference Call)