



July 19, 2020

Ordinary Time, Proper 11

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

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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#.

****Note:** If you are using a landline, you may be charged for this call. Please check with your service provider.

Church Re-gathering

Praise God: We will continue to have outdoor services this Sunday. And a special blessing: there will be music from Tom Casey and Brantley Watkins. Church will begin at **9:30am** (weather permitting) 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 about the difference between the vice of anger and the expression righteous anger, along with how to love and pray for our enemies. 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 9-10.

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)
- 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. These contributions are due Saturday, July 25th.

Graduates

Join us in congratulating and praying for Will Bartlett, who will be moving to Raleigh soon as he begins his studies at Campbell Law School. Congrats Will!

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 28:10-19a; Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24; Romans 8:12-25; and Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.

Sermon

"Surely"

The fourth century theologian Gregory of Nazianzus used to pray every day for a revelation from God. He would start his day saying "Lord, speak to me," and he would fast and often go without sleep because he was busy pursuing that revelation. He was trying to make himself ready to receive God's presence. It was only after God spoke to him directly that he felt himself qualified to be a pastor of a congregation. In order to lead others as a pastor, Gregory thought that you shouldn't just know God through books; you should know God directly, personally, like a friend (*Oration 2*).

So Gregory spent a lot of time preparing to hear from God, and God did eventually speak to him. He went on to become pastor of a small but important flock in Constantinople, the city that is now Istanbul.

Our reading from Genesis today shows how Gregory's story isn't everybody's. Jacob, the protagonist of our story, wasn't exactly a shining example of preparing himself to receive a revelation from God. Before God's ladder appeared to him, he had spent his life extorting his brother Esau and tricking his father Isaac. He was no saint. And on the day of the ladder, circumstances were not optimal for a revelation. Jacob had fled Canaan out of a fear of Esau's rage. This was no

peaceful journey he was on, but a desperate attempt to escape the consequences of his own actions. So he's out there in the wilderness scampering away from Esau. He stops at night only because he has to. He stops when the sun goes down and he can't see anymore, making camp in a random land Scripture only calls "a certain place" (Gen 28:11). You can imagine Jacob is harried, he's fretting, he's anxious. And on top of all that, all he has for a pillow is a stone. So: not optimal circumstances.

But it's then that God decides to show up. Jacob sees a ladder "reaching to heaven; and the angels of God... ascending and descending on it" (Gen 28:12). Even more remarkable, though harder to imagine, "the LORD" then stands beside Jacob and speaks to him, saying that he will be blessed with descendants and with land (Gen 28:13-14). God says to him: "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go" (Gen 28:15).

Jacob has neither prepared for this nor earned it. Now in an earlier sermon we heard of Abraham that we know Scripture doesn't give any special reason for his being chosen (Gen 12). But of Jacob, one would think that there were plenty of reasons for his *not* being chosen. He doesn't deserve it; in fact, he deserves the opposite.

That doesn't seem to matter to God. As Isaiah says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is 55:8-9).

There don't have to be ideal conditions for God to speak into the world. Sometimes it just happens.

This makes me think of two things: When I am stressed out—when I am anxious, harried, fearful, frustrated as Jacob was—I find myself rejecting possible revelations. This is especially the case for the beauty of nature, though which God can definitely speak, and speak meaningfully, in ways that change you. I have seen light hitting the sticky green leaves of a spring tree before, I have seen the intense pink and white of crepe myrtle trees, and I've known in the back of my mind I was witnessing something of great beauty. But, because I was at that moment stressed out, I said to myself: 'Well, I'll have to pay attention to that

later. Right now I've got to get on with my day.' Of course, there is no 'later'. That moment has passed. God's voice goes unheard.

So that's one thing Jacob gets right, at least. When God speaks, he stops and listens. That he has a murderous brother breathing down his neck is no matter. Paying attention to this is more important to him.

And we can learn a second thing from Jacob as well. After he receives this revelation from God, Jacob makes a memorial stone. He sets the stone he slept on up as a pillar and pours oil on it. He names the place "Beth-el," "house of God" (Gen 28:18-19). It is similar to the Eben-ezer, the "stone of help," familiar to us from the song ("Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing"). Jacob is saying "Here by Thy great help I've come."

Jacob may not have done much right in his life up to this point. He may not have earned God's affection. But this he does do: he sets up a memorial to remember when God was close to him.

Those of us who have been living the life of faith for a while know that you don't feel God speaking to you every moment of every day. So it's important to take note, to remember those moments when you have been drawn directly into God's orbit, those moments when—as the poet Kevin Hart puts it—"everything was overfull with us."

So Jacob is a witness to us today. He asks us: have you set up a memorial? What are you doing to remember? Are you being true to the gift you have been given?

This broken man can teach us. God can show up to a broken man. And thank goodness, because otherwise God would be in short supply. Let us say today with Jacob: "Surely the LORD is in this place" (Gen 28:16). Alleluia and Amen.

Prayers of the Parish: Lord, you show up in all sorts of unexpected places. We pray today that you reveal yourself where you are needed. Heal our broken 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: 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, Mary Ellen Ham, and Nick Rose.

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

In our epistle lesson for the day, it's as if Paul foresaw exactly what we are going through. He says that the created world has been "subjected to futility," that it is in "bondage to decay," and that "the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now." And he adds that *we* also "grown inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:20-23). Paul hit the nail on the head. Many of us are groaning, and the world is too. Yet he also speaks of "patience" and of "hope for what we do not see" (Rom 8:25). He says, "hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?" (Rom 8:24).

How appropriate, for a communion service in which we can't see each other! It is a reminder that this world has never been what we wanted. We want that heavenly feast, in which we see what we can now only hope for, in which we sit down with all our brothers and sisters, link arms, and rejoice, with You as our everlasting light. For the former things will have passed away. God then grant us patience—radical, superabundant patience—we pray. 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

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 For the benediction today, here these words from Psalm 23: familiar, but always needed and always new. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou annointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

Announcements and Calendar

Outdoor Church Service, Sunday, July 19, at 9:30 AM (see information above)

Wednesday Night Check-In, July 22 at 6:45 PM

Wednesday Night Book Study, July 22 at 7:15 PM