



July 26, 2020

Ordinary Time, Proper 12

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**.



### Book Study

Join us for our final discussion of Gabriel Bunge's *Dragon's Wine and Angel's Bread*. Last week, we talked about different types of prayer, from short prayers throughout the day to spending time in silence. 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 11-12, and on the Epilogue. I can't believe it's the last week!

## 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. 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. So far this year, Church World Service has distributed approximately **40,000** kits worldwide, and we are more than happy to contribute to this vital ministry.

## 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 (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!

## Local Ministries

First Christian Goldsboro continues to support local ministries such as **Rebuilding Broken Places** and **Literacy Connections**. These organizations are doing vital work, especially for children whose future in-person schooling is uncertain.

## Minister News

Pastor Tom will be out of town next Monday through Wednesday to attend and participate in leading the funeral service for his grandmother, Betty Millay. He will be in Evansville, IN, and appreciates your prayers.

## 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 29:15-28; Psalm 128; Romans 8:26-39; and Matthew 13:10-13, 31-33, 44-46, 51-53.

## Sermon

**"Will we see? Will we hear? Will we understand?"**

I speak in parables: so that seeing you will not see, so that hearing you will not hear, nor will you understand.

Teaching my undergraduates at Baylor, I would always ask them: Why do you think Jesus taught in parables? Invariably someone would raise their hand and say: 'Jesus taught in parables so that he could make his message easier to understand.' According to my students, the homely and agricultural images Jesus uses in parables were supposed to connect to the daily life of his audience and make his teaching easier to grasp, comprehend, and apply to their lives.

That sounds nice, doesn't it? And because it seems like the nice thing to do, well then Jesus must have done it, because he's always doing nice things for people.

Unfortunately, my students were wrong. Very wrong. Why? Because Jesus himself says just the opposite. He says he's teaching in parables so that people *won't* understand, so they *won't* grasp what he's talking about, so that they'll be left in the dark wondering what it is they're supposed to see.

That doesn't sound very 'nice'. But there is a point being made here by Jesus. He's saying: not everyone is ready to understand my teaching. Learning the kingdom of God is not like learning  $2+2=4$ . In Matthew Chapter 13, which is full of parables, only the disciples understand what Jesus is talking about. This can be confusing, because in our passage for the day Jesus asks the question "Have you understood all this?" and "They answered, 'Yes'" (Mt 13:51). But the "they" here who answers "'Yes'" is not the crowd (see Mt. 13:36). It is only the disciples who are speaking here, and it is only the disciples who grasp Jesus' teaching. Everyone else is left in the dark.

This is not because of some divine cruelty, with some chosen to understand and some not. You have to look at the difference between the disciples and the crowd. The difference is that the disciples have left everything to follow Jesus (Mt

19:27); the crowd is just out for the day, seeking a spectacle. (I suppose you do these things when you don't have television.)

The disciples have left everything. Thus it has been given to them to understand the secrets of the kingdom of God.

Jesus is operating here on a kind of pedagogical principle. He is saying: your understanding of the teaching depends upon the way you live your life. If you're not living a certain way, you won't understand what I'm saying. Unless you walk the walk, you won't understand the talk.

And this makes sense. There are things you have to experience to really understand. Søren Kierkegaard used to say: unless you're out on 70,000 fathoms of water, you don't really understand what a boat means. You haven't really felt what it's like to rely upon a boat, to have it be the only thing between you and certain death. Or there's the experience of heat. My little one, my two year old, she won't really understand the meaning of "hot!" when we tell her "that's hot!" until she one day sticks her hand on the stove. She hasn't yet, thank God! But she will some day, and she'll understand what we were saying to her when we said "hot!" in a new way.

In the same way, you can't really understand the kingdom of God until you've left everything. Unless you've sold everything to purchase the pearl of great price, you don't really understand what this parable is about. Unless you've left everything to search for where God is in the world—where God, that sometimes elusive presence, is—then you don't understand the mustard seed or the yeast.

So before you go thinking you've got Christianity figured out, you've got to ask yourself: am I in a position to actually understand Christianity? Have I left everything behind? And if I haven't, why do I think I understand the first thing about the kingdom of God?

We need to begin again. We need to always ask these questions. Complacency in thinking you know who Jesus is: that is a sure sign of spiritual deadness.

Unless you're walking the walk, you're not going to understand the talk. So ask yourself today: Have I left everything behind? What do I need to leave behind? What am I still grasping onto—is it wealth, is it power, is it pleasure, is it security or family or comfort? In order to enter the kingdom, your hands need to be empty, so that you can form your hands into fists and knock on the door. What do I have in my hands that is keeping me from being free to stand at the door and knock?

May God reveal to us today what we need to let go, so we can say along with the disciples: "See... We have left everything to follow you" (Mt 19:27). In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Prayers of the Parish:** "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom 8:35, 37).

Through the power of Christ, we are more than conquerors. May we call on that power this week as we pray for our brothers and sisters and for our world. Mourning and crying and pain are present in our world. May our hearts be strengthened, knowing that Christ will defeat these enemies. May all who need this knowledge receive it.

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 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**

Usually when "scribes" are mentioned in the Bible, it's not a good thing. For example, Jesus says: "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces" (Mk 12:38). But in today's Gospel reading we have an exception to the rule. There are, apparently, scribes who have been "trained for the kingdom of heaven." "[E]very scribe," it says, "who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Mt 13:52).

What this scripture is saying is that everyone of us should be a scribe. We should all be able to bring out of the storehouses of Scripture the right word for the moment. We have a duty to our brothers and sisters in Christ to be able to share with them the scripture they need in a given situation. The communion of saints builds each other up with Scripture. May this be a table around which the Word is shared. 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** Lord, we seek to walk in the path You have set out for us. May we leave behind everything that hinders us from following. Empty our hands. Fill our hearts. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

**Announcements and Calendar**

Outdoor Church Service, Sunday, July 26, at 9:30 AM (see information above)