



July 5, 2020

Ordinary Time, Proper 9

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

Last Sunday, we had our first in-person service in quite a while! It was a joy to see those able to come. 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**, but this Sunday it will be **pushed back an hour, to 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 demon on our shoulder who tells us it's okay to be angry, and how frustrations about small things can distract us from larger problems—problems we should actually be angry about. 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 3-5.

Correction

We will be having our Administration Meeting on **Tuesday, July 14th** at 6:45 PM over conference call (not July 7th, as previously stated).

Graduates

Make sure to note our graduates who appeared in this month's newsletter!



Music

We invite you to enjoy pianist Tom Casey's "Patriotic Medley," posted to our Facebook on Saturday, July 4th.

Wanda

Wanda McCullen will be on vacation for the week of July 5th. We are thankful for her dedication and hard work.

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 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 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Song of Solomon 2:8-18; Romans 6:12-23; and Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30. We will also have a special reading on Sunday from Romans 7, verses 15-25.

Sermon

"Guilty"

I once visited someone in the hospital who was weighed down by a crushing burden of guilt. She was in the hospital because she was recovering from a car crash. She had been driving the car; the accident was her fault; and her best friend, who was riding in the passenger seat, was killed in the wreck. She had had a seizure while driving the car, and she knew beforehand that, because of a recent medical condition, having a seizure was a possibility. The possible happened; her friend died; and she felt enormously, inconsolably, guilty.

I was called to visit her because the doctors and nurses could see she was in despair. They had tried everything, they said to me. Over and over they repeated, 'It's not your fault. It was an accident. You shouldn't feel bad.' The doctors and nurses had tried everything, over and over again, everything except this one thing: acknowledging that she was guilty, that her feelings of guilt were legitimate and rightly belonged as a part of her.

If you know you're guilty, it doesn't help for someone to come and tell you everything's okay. You know, deep down, it's not okay; and no amount of reassurance can erase that fact. You are guilty. Now what is to be done about it?

One benefit of being Christians is that we can be honest about guilt. We live in an age where a lot of younger people have left the church, but still find themselves wanting something more than their day-to-day lives. So they take up other passions. And there are many trendy passions now. Some young people become gourmands: they become intensely, one might say religiously, dedicated to the world of food, always seeking out the newest places, the highest rated spots, the most niche crossover kimchi-with-hot-chicken-taco concoction. Others take up hiking, becoming devoted to being out in parks as often as possible, hoofing it for days and even weeks on the Appalachian trail, subsisting on little more than trail mix and a stove top espresso maker. Or you can take up the world of art, finding transcendence in creative genius and the communities for whom these things matter immensely. I have been in several art museums that have a sanctified, religious aura to them. And there's still other things: there's CrossFit and long

distance running, radical politics and union organizing, craft beer and high-end coffee.

All of these things can be great. Yet, when confronted by life, there is something that nags at me. I wonder if any of these things, and the communities that surround them, can be honest about guilt. What if your best friend just died, and it was your fault? Can any of these things be enough?

Christians can be honest about guilt. We can be honest about sin. We can admit that we've said to ourselves, at least once, probably many times, "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24). We can admit that we've thought that and that we've had those dark hours. Strange as it may seem, honesty about guilt can be a gift. At least we're not being told to deny feeling what we can't help but feel.

Christians start here: You are guilty. Now what are you going to do next?

It seems to me that when you're honest about guilt, there are two roads. One leads to despair, and sometimes even to thoughts of suicide. That is a difficult and often lonely road. The other road heads toward acceptance of forgiveness. But that road is also difficult. Why? Because, as Julian of Norwich put it, it's not easy to accept one's acceptance (*Revelations of Divine Love*). There are times when your life shows that you haven't really accepted God's forgiveness, not at a deep level, even if you think on the surface that you have. This lack of acceptance can show itself in two different ways.

The first way is seeking after momentary pleasures. These can be anything from food, to drink, to sex and shopping. Many of these momentary pleasures are things that are in themselves good, but they can become bad when they are pursued as a way to avoid the thought of God.

The second way a lack of acceptance of God's acceptance manifests itself in our lives is in constant, frenetic activity. This can be a constant activity of doing good, constantly doing good for others. Or it can simply be constant activity of any kind: whatever will keep us from simply being still.

Both of these ways—both seeking after pleasure and constant activity—are driven by anxiety, anxiety about God's acceptance. If you are not sure God has accepted

you and that an eternity of delight awaits you, you are much more likely to go out and grab whatever pleasures can be taken, because this could be your only chance. If you are not sure God has accepted you, you are much more likely to be constantly trying to earn that acceptance by meeting some impossibly high standard, or you are likely to constantly be doing something because you don't want to rest with God, to think about God, to be still before God, because being in God's presence reminds you that you are guilty and might not be worthy of God's love (Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*).

I'll say it again: If you are not sure God has accepted you, your life will be driven by anxiety. So you can see it's actually not so easy to accept God's acceptance. Once you do, it is a wonderful thing; it is like relaxing into happiness. It is not a guilt-free life, but it is a life free from worrying that your guilt has separated you from God.

This is the explanation, I think, for Jesus saying: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest... For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt 11:28, 30). Otherwise, it doesn't make much sense. One would not usually say the Garden of Gethsemane or the apostles' later martyrdoms are easy yokes; generally it's not easy to bear the weight of the cross Jesus asks you to take up (Mt 16:24). But really, compared to the burden of guilt, if you've really felt it, if you've really felt despair and maybe even wanted life to end, compared to that, Jesus says: "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Another word for acceptance, for openness to God's forgiveness, is *faith*. This is our Christian faith, this is the gospel: that I can say both that I am a wretched man, and that I am loved. Glory be to the God who loved us first (Rom 5:8). Amen.

Prayers of the Parish: God, you have given us a message of hope for the world. Make us witnesses to this message; make us bearers of hope. In all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of Your purpose. God whose ear is close to us, have mercy on us and heal us in all our brokenness. Be especially with those whom you have given this community to care about, and may our daily prayers for our family members who are in need give You glory, as we learn in our concerns to echo Yours.

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, and 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

One of our Old Testament readings for the day was from the Song of Solomon. Nowadays, we tend to read this book as it was probably originally intended to be read, as a series of love poems between a man and a woman, with each praising the other's beauty and expressing the desire to be with them. But the early church read this book differently (Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*). They saw it as being about the relation between God and human beings. Though it may seem strange to us, there's something important that this interpretation captures. It's the intense longing to be with God. The people who read this book and think of God don't live a Christian life because they think it's the right thing to do, the moral thing to do, to be a Christian. They live Christian lives because they desire to be with God. That's what they most want. That's what they've found fulfillment in. The truth of communion lies here. Those who truly come to the Lord's Table are those who *want* to be here, who want simply to come and eat bread and drink wine together, and to do so with the God of the universe present there, welcoming them, wiping every tear from their eye and making their joy complete. We eat this meal every week together because this is what fulfillment looks like.

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

Our Lord, our God, we acknowledge our guilt before You. We know who we are. Yet we also know who You are. We acknowledge that You love us anyway. Open our hearts to Your acceptance, grant us the peace of faith. Inspire us by Your Spirit to share the good news of great joy with all around us. In Jesus' name I lift up this prayer of benediction. Amen.

Announcements and Calendar

Outdoor Church Service, Sunday, July 5, at 9:30 AM (see information above)

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

Some addresses: **Phil Ham**

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