



June 21, 2020

Ordinary Time, Proper 7

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

Minister Rev. Dr. Tom Millay

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Weekly Conference Calls every Sunday at 9:45 AM and 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

Praise God: It's time to get ready to come to church again! Please join us for an outdoor service next Sunday, June 28, at 9:30 am. The service will last about 30 minutes. Masks will be encouraged, and we ask that you bring your own lawn chair. Our worship services will still be available online.

### Friday Vigil

Please join our regional North Carolina Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as we hold a vigil on the day this bulletin is being sent out, Friday, June 19<sup>th</sup>, also known as Juneteenth. The "Vigil for Freedom and Resilience" will take place online at 7pm and is available through our regional Disciples Facebook page, <http://facebook.com/ccinncc>. There are good resources available to prepare for the vigil: Bishop Valerie Melvin's "A Message of Resilience" (<https://www.facebook.com/CCinNC/videos/296843659049582/>) and Rev. Dr. Penny B. Ziemer's "Pentecost Reflection" ([https://s3.amazonaws.com/mychurchwebsite/c5238/a\\_new\\_spirit\\_and\\_a\\_white\\_confession\\_at\\_pentecost.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/mychurchwebsite/c5238/a_new_spirit_and_a_white_confession_at_pentecost.pdf)).

I want to praise God we are part of a church willing to address difficult issues, and encourage you to participate. More information can be found at <https://ncdisciples.org/2020/06/15/a-vigil-for-freedom-and-resilience/>.

### Book Study

Our summer book study on Gabriel Bunge's *Dragon's Wine and Angel's Bread* began last Wednesday with an introductory video posted on Facebook. This week, I will be posting a reflection Monday evening, and then we will be having a conference call discussion about the reading on Wednesday night, following our usual phone check-in, around 7:15pm.

The book is on the topic of anger, and can be purchased at [https://www.amazon.com/Dragons-Wine-Angels-Bread-Teaching/dp/0881413372/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=23Q1PH9AB4H3W&dchild=1&keywords=dragon%27s+wine+and+angel%27s+bread&qid=1592561501&sprefix=dragon%27s+wine%2Caps%2C154&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Dragons-Wine-Angels-Bread-Teaching/dp/0881413372/ref=sr_1_1?crid=23Q1PH9AB4H3W&dchild=1&keywords=dragon%27s+wine+and+angel%27s+bread&qid=1592561501&sprefix=dragon%27s+wine%2Caps%2C154&sr=8-1) if you would like to read along. However, reading along is not a requirement! You are welcome to participate in the discussion regardless, as we reflect together about what separates righteous from unrighteous anger and how anger relates to prayer. We'd love to have you!



Some of our graduates were highlighted in our June newsletter. If we did not receive your info about graduates in time for the June newsletter, we will be glad to include in the July newsletter, so send any pictures you have to Andrew ([goacanes87@yahoo.com](mailto:goacanes87@yahoo.com)) and send info to Tom over email ([tom.millay54@gmail.com](mailto:tom.millay54@gmail.com)) or text (919-273-7030). Thanks!

### Youth

Virtual Camp Caroline is starting Monday June 22 and will continue every 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.

### Fathers

June 21 is a very important day... Fathers' Day! Let's all remember to obey the Scriptures and honor our fathers on this day. Let them know you care.

### Worship

Welcome to Worship! Visit us 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 21:8-21; Jeremiah 20:7-13; Romans 6:1-11; and Matthew 10:24-39.

### Sermon

## "Standing at the Bottom of a Well"

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jer 29:11).

It's a scripture most everybody knows. Some of you may have received it on graduation cards recently. Some of you may have written it on graduation cards recently. Someone gave our little daughter Margaret a blanket when she was born

that had this verse on it. The word the verse speaks is a hopeful word, a word of prosperity and optimism.

Yet it comes from one of the most mournful books of the Bible: Jeremiah.

Jeremiah is often known as the 'weeping prophet,' so full are his writings of condemnation of the people of Israel and warnings about their coming doom.

And Jeremiah had reason to weep. He wasn't just a pouter, like Jonah sitting under the leafy plant, angry that the Ninevites hadn't been destroyed (Jonah 4). Jeremiah had good reasons to be sad. He had gone through some stuff.

Today's Hebrew Scriptures passage is one of the most beautiful expressions of human anguish in the Bible:

"You enticed me, O Lord, and I was enticed.

You were stronger than I, and you prevailed.

I became a laughingstock all day long,

all of them mocking me...

For the word of the Lord became to me

disgrace and contempt all day long" (Jer 20:7-8, Robert Alter's translation).

The word that is translated "enticed"—this word can also mean "seduced."

Basically, Jeremiah feels misled by the Lord, and trapped in his prophetic vocation. He wishes he did not have to speak the words of the Lord, and he tries to keep his mouth shut. But he finds he cannot.

He says: "And I thought, 'I will not recall Him,

nor will I speak anymore in His name.'

But it was in my heart like burning fire

shut up in my bones,

and I could not hold it in,

I was unable" (Jer 20:9, Alter's translation).

Jeremiah wanted to stop speaking the words of the Lord because of how people reacted to these words. In sum, people *hated* Jeremiah. It seems he was always being 'thrown'. The usual reaction to hearing Jeremiah speak was to throw him places. He was thrown into stocks, those wooden cuffs around your head and hands; he was pilloried and shamed before the city of Jerusalem (Jer 20). He was thrown into prison, where King Zedekiah kept him in an effort to shut him up (Jer 32). Finally he was thrown into a well and left to die, his feet sinking into the mud as he laments the day he was born (Jer 38; Jer 20). It seems the immediate natural reaction one had to hearing the words of Jeremiah was to try and grab him by the shoulders and arms and throw him somewhere to make his unwelcome, needling voice go away.

And this reaction to Jeremiah—to want to throw him places and shut him up—was completely understandable. Think about the situation Jeremiah was speaking into. The city of Jerusalem was under siege by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The threat that the walls of Jerusalem were going to be breached was a clear and present danger. It seemed the very existence of the people of Israel was at stake.

Into this precarious situation, in which one might think here above all a word of hope is needed, Jeremiah comes and says: you are going to lose; you are going to be exiled; the Temple is going to be destroyed and many of you are going to die. Needless to say, this was not exactly the type of word the rulers of Israel at the time wanted for the people.

Let's take a counter-example of the kind of thing the rulers would have wanted the people to hear. Let's turn to the film *Braveheart* starring Mel Gibson. It's a film that's been beloved of youth groups around the nation, and its main character is named William Wallace. William Wallace is a legendary Scottish resistance fighter, who led the Scots into battle in the First War of Scottish Independence. Before he leads the troops into battle, Wallace gives a rousing speech. He has the crowd of troops cheering and yelling and believing in themselves, that they can win. Wallace's speech ends with the immortal phrase, "For they may take our lives,

but they can never take... our freedom!" And then he takes his long flowing hair and rides out into battle with all the troops screaming and running in his train. That's what you're supposed to do before everyone goes into battle. It's what Aragorn does in the Lord of the Rings, before the Battle of the Black Gate. But it is not what Jeremiah does. He says, "There will come a day when the courage of men fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship. And that day is today. We are going to be devastated." And he says, "For they may take our lives, but we have already given away our freedom, using it to become enslaved to false gods. So our lives aren't worth much anyway." It's not exactly an inspiring speech. I can't imagine being enthused to run onto any battlefield afterwards. So it makes sense that the rulers of his age tried to shut Jeremiah up.

Still he remained true to the Word that was in his bones and had to get out. It's clear that Jeremiah was suffering for doing good, for speaking the truth, which brings us back to last week, where Paul was talking about the redemption that can come out of suffering for the good in a world full of evil. Today's sermon is a kind of partner to last week's sermon, as we come again to this theme. I do have something more to add today, and then I promise that in the future not every sermon will be about suffering.

What I have to add today is an imperative that can be learned from Jeremiah and from Paul, which comes to us from one of my teachers, Stanley Hauerwas. He says: 'Live in such a way that if Jesus were not resurrected, your life would make no sense.'

Think about Jeremiah. If the Lord was not the true and living God of Israel, then Jeremiah's life was full of suffering for no reason. Why not just speak the words the rulers want to hear? That way, you will be promoted, you will be loved, you will be given food and drink and honor and glory. You will live the good life, just as Jeremiah's opponent, the pseudo-prophet Hananiah, did (Jer 28). The only thing that can make sense of Jeremiah's life is if the Lord truly was putting these words in him to speak.

In the same way, Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 says, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:19). If Jesus is not the Lord, if Jesus remained in his tomb, if Jesus died and was not resurrected, then Paul's life makes no sense. Why the shipwrecks, the imprisonments, the floggings, the beating with rods, the toil and the hardship, the hunger and the thirst, the lack of clothing and the constant danger (2 Cor 11:23-27)? If Jesus is not Lord, there is no reason.

Could the same be said about our lives? I'm afraid my life would make all too much sense, even if Jesus was not resurrected. I haven't suffered for the Good as Jeremiah and as Paul did.

This is my hope for us today: that we will be led out of our normal lives and into a life that the world sees as irrationally committed to fighting for the Good, a life that is willing to sacrifice some of my own happiness to serve what God is calling me to do. I hope that the world will look at us and say 'What? Why?' and the only conceivable answer will be: the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the sure knowledge of an eternal communion with a God who gives a greater bliss than this world can ever offer.

This is my hope, and I pray that the Holy Spirit will realize it in us, that the God who began a good work in us will bring it to completion. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Prayers of the Parish:** God you are with those who suffer. You pour your love into their hearts. You are with us even if we find ourselves at the bottom of a well. We ask today that you especially visit the members of this church: let them know your love is near. Be present also to heal our city, our state, our country, and our world, all of which are broken, all of which need your intervention. God who tears down dividing walls and who desires the liberation of all, work in our world today.

May your ear be close to us today as we pray. We confess to You any sins and faults of our own that have kept You at a distance, and pray you have mercy on us, forgive us, restore us to fellowship with you and unity with one another. Open our hearts to those who you have placed on our minds today, as we each lift before you those we have been given to care for. 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. Give 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**

Our word from the Gospel today may seem like it's against communion. After all, Jesus says that he came not to bring peace but a sword, and that he will set family members against one another. And there is a sense in which Jesus does resist ordinary communion. It is typical for families, for tribes, for nations, to band together closely while also setting themselves against others. *We are Capulets, they are Montagues; we are white, they are black; we are Americans, they are Chinese, Nigerian, Iranian, Mexican.* This is the type of communion to which Jesus brings a sword. It will feel to people who are attached to these loyalties that Jesus is not the prince of peace, but someone who is violent and demanding, who takes away from them what they care about. Yet of course we know that Jesus values communion above all else, that he himself prays for the unity of the church (Jn 17:20-23). Only this is a different communion: not defined by family, not defined by ethnicity, not defined by nation. It rests only in our identity as brothers and sisters in Christ. That is ultimate, above all else. And if you ever find yourself using one of these old categories, if you think of someone as Mexican first, before considering whether he or she might be a brother or sister in Christ, you need to get your priorities straight. Jesus comes out you not in peace but with a sword. He says: get on board with the new Kingdom, or get out. That's a hard word for all of us to hear, and we all have repenting to do;

but it is also an invitation. It is also a liberation. I can look at anyone in the world as a friend. I am free from the things that held me back from doing this. That's the gift of the Holy Spirit working in us, forging us into a people who welcome. May we truly be a movement for unity in a divided world. 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**

Father, you are the source of all true communion. Root us and ground us in your love. Send us out to follow after your Son, Jesus Christ, through the inspiration of your Holy Spirit who binds us all in fellowship together. Amen.

### **Announcements and Calendar**

Friday Vigil for Freedom and Resilience, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 7pm (see information above)

Camp Caroline Virtual Camp begins June 22 (see information above)

Elders Meeting, Thursday, June 25, at 6:45 PM (Conference Call or Zoom, TBA)

Outdoor Church Service, Sunday, June 28, at 9:30 AM (see information above)

Administration Meeting, Tuesday, July 7, at 6:45 PM (Conference Call)

Some addresses:     **Mary Anne Cowley** 225 West Park St. Cary, NC 27511  
                             **Scotty Percise** (Teenie Wilson's daughter)  
                             203 Plantation Road



Goldsboro, NC 27530