



June 7, 2020

Trinity Sunday

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#.

Welcome, Rev. Tom!

Rev. Dr. Tom Millay has begun his ministry with First Christian. His communion video was posted for May 31. Videos of his Gospel Reading and June 7 sermon and communion will be posted online by 9:00 AM on June 7. His written sermon for June 7 is included in this mailing. He has also posted a Wednesday meditation on our Facebook which Andrew is linking to our website. His contact info is included above. Welcome to First Christian, Rev. Tom.

Update on Church Re-gathering

Plans are being presented to the Board on June 9 for an outside worship experience on a Sunday later in June. The service will last about 30 minutes. Once the details have been worked out, your elder will let you know the date and time. Instructions about practicing social distancing will be explained. Our worship services will still be available online.

Welcome to Worship! Visit us 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 1:1-2:41, Ps. 8, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13 and Matthew 28:16-20.



Check our links to violin and piano concerts by Donna Griffin Davenport and a new Spirit medley by our own Tom Casey!



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) and send info to Tom over email (tom.millay54@gmail.com) or text (919-273-7030). Thanks!

"Surprised by the Holy Spirit"

Let's start today with a temptation. It is tempting to think that if we were around in the time of Jesus, if we were able to see the miracles and hear the teaching, then our lives of faith would be easier. If only we could have been there, it would have been easy to know who Jesus was and to believe in him, to believe that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God, and even to believe that he was God-with-us here on earth, to believe that he was Emmanuel.

It's tempting to think that way and to write off any struggles we have with faith to being born at the wrong time. Yet we only give in to the temptation to think that way if we completely ignore the life of the disciples. They, those closest to Jesus while he was on earth, consistently just don't get it. Again and again, they make mistakes, they lack faith, they quarrel, most of all they lack understanding. Some examples. Jesus feeds five thousand people in Matthew Chapter 14; then in Matthew Chapter 15 the disciples are worried Jesus won't be able to feed four thousand people. In the next chapter, Jesus warns the disciples to beware of "the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Mt 16:6). The disciples think Jesus is scolding them for forgetting to bring bread for their journey. Then there is also Jesus performing the amazing miracle of walking on water in order to join the disciples as they are making a journey over the sea. As he walks toward them, the disciples are convinced he is a ghost and are terrified (Mt 14:26). Out of all the disciples, Peter seems to be the one closest to recognizing Jesus for who he truly is. Peter does confess that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16). Yet it is just a short while later, in the same chapter of the Bible, that Peter rebukes Jesus after Jesus has said that he must suffer and die, and Jesus famously responds to Peter's rebuke with a rebuke of his own: "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mt 16:23). So even Peter, who seems closest of all to knowing the truth, fails miserably.

This same pattern of incomprehension is repeated even after Jesus' resurrection. You would think that rising from bodily death and being able to transport through walls—added to all the earlier wonders like walking on water and giving sight to the blind—you would think these would have been enough to convince everyone. But no. What does our text for today say? "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee [that is, after the resurrection they went there], to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted" (Mt 28:16-17).

And even those who believe and worship Jesus after the resurrection: even they have their own problems. It tells us in Acts that when the disciples gathered together with the resurrected Jesus, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Meaning: Is this the time when you are going to lead a military revolution to overthrow the occupying Roman empire? So even those who believe in Jesus don't do so with knowledge.

It is only when the Holy Spirit shows up at Pentecost that things start to change. It's only after Pentecost that anyone preaches anything like the Gospel, because before Pentecost no one understood the Gospel well enough to preach it anyway. There's a bit of divine humor at work here. It's as if God is saying that it takes an act of divine intervention for us to actually understand anything. And by no means are we any better than these disciples. We too would have been just as dense as they were until God showed up and forced our eyes to open to the truth.

It's with the Holy Spirit that a new beginning for human beings really begins. But that fact should lead us to recognize a problem in the history of Christians. Today is Trinity Sunday, and the Holy Spirit has not always gotten due respect in the history of the church, along with the other members of the Trinity.

Belief in the Trinity—in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—was first really defined as Christian teaching in 325 AD; that is, almost three hundred years after the death and resurrection of Christ. In the creed that defines the Trinity, the Father receives due respect as the "Maker of heaven and earth," and the Son, Jesus, gets a whole long paragraph talking about how he is equal to the Father, "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God." Yet, in the original 325

creed, the Holy Spirit gets only one line. All it says is "We believe in the Holy Spirit." That's it. It seems the Holy Spirit was something of an afterthought.

Yet the Scriptures show us the Holy Spirit should be anything but an afterthought. We don't really understand anything about God without the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit shows us who Jesus is and where Jesus is to be found in our world. The Holy Spirit is our Helper because the Holy Spirit renews our minds so that we are able to understand who Jesus is and why he came down to earth to be among us. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter because the Holy Spirit makes Jesus present to us on earth again, no matter when we live. The Holy Spirit brings to us again the gentleness, the mercy, the acceptance that we see Jesus giving in the Gospels and that we all treasure finding in our Lord. Yet, strangely enough, the Holy Spirit often does not bring Jesus to us in the same physical way he was present in the Gospels. The Holy Spirit brings us Jesus, the presence of the loving God among us, in the form of other people. We meet God, often unexpectedly, through our neighbors. And, also very strangely, it seems we know and understand Jesus better in this way than the disciples were able to understand Jesus, even though he was physically present there with them. And this happens not because we are better or smarter than the disciples, but because the Holy Spirit is teaching us how to find God in the presence of our neighbors.

This teaching process—God educating us about where God is to be found in the world—is exactly what we see happening in the book of Acts. In Acts Chapter 10, we have perhaps the most significant turning point in the whole history of the church, and it has to do with finding God where God was not expected to be. It is there in Acts Chapter 10 that Peter is speaking to a group of gentiles: Cornelius and his household. Peter is telling these gentiles about Jesus, whom Peter—thanks to the intervention of the Holy Spirit—has now come at least *a little bit* to understand. Peter is telling them how Jesus is "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36), "the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead" (10:42), in whose name we receive forgiveness of sins (10:43).

And it is while Peter is telling them about this Jesus that something utterly remarkable happens. The Holy Spirit falls upon these gentiles; they start "speaking in tongues and praising God" (10:46). To his credit, Peter follows God's

lead, and immediately baptizes Cornelius and his household, this group of uncircumcised gentiles.

What is so remarkable about this is that it goes against all the expectations of Peter and the other apostles, who were all Jewish. Now, the apostles did think gentiles could be saved, but they thought that in order to be saved, they had to effectively become Jewish: they would have to be circumcised and follow kosher dietary laws like not eating pork. So maybe Cornelius and his household would one day be among the saved, but it was a fairly lengthy process, and it involved some fundamental changes in the ordinary culture of these gentiles.

Against all these actually fairly reasonable expectations—*there* is the Holy Spirit, *there* the Holy Spirit appears! God was present in these unclean gentiles, breaking all the rules that were thought to hold about where God should be.

It's in this way that the Holy Spirit leads us and teaches us. Not only does the Holy Spirit teach us *who* Jesus is, the Holy Spirit teaches us *where* Jesus is, and he is often found in such unexpected places.

This moment of surprise that God is already at work among *these* people has happened repeatedly throughout church history. Whether it be fourth century Christians on a mission to spread the Gospel to India, only to discover that the Gospel was already there (and in fact had been there since the first century), or modern day American Christians hoping to spread the Good News in Africa, only to discover that in just a few years there will be more Christians in Africa than in the United States and Europe *combined*. The message of Acts, a message still very much true today, is that God is already at work out in the world, and all we have to do is keep our eyes open.

So where would we be without the Holy Spirit, that most neglected member of the Trinity? In a heap of trouble, basically. We would be even less likely to recognize how and where God is acting in the world than we already are. So let us pray daily the prayer of St. Paul for us, that we “be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds” (Rom 12:2). Let us get up each morning and say: Holy Spirit, give me eyes to see, give me ears to hear. Make me like those who are open to Your presence. I make this, my petition, before You, the Lord, the Trinity, who loved us before the world began, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of the Parish: God we see in You a perfect model of love, a continual self-giving and presence to one another of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, since before the world began and for all ages to come. May you be present to us in all our joys and our pains, just as You are present to Yourself, in full acceptance and gracious welcome. May we feel Your closeness to us today. 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. 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, Mary Ellen Ham, 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, Mary Ellen Ham, Ruby Santee, Linda McCoy, and the family of Teenie Wilson.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

As we go forward, we ask for wisdom to make decisions that keep us safe and bring glory to you. Please hear all our spoken and unspoken prayers in Jesus' name, 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

Today our epistle reading tells us to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (2 Cor. 13:12). Our Scripture recognizes something important here, that we want to be together physically, in our bodies: that this is an essential element in the joy of communion. There is always an aspect of sadness or even mourning if this cannot be the case. Paul often laments in his letter how he has not been able to visit a congregation recently, usually because imprisonment prevented him. When he says to "greet one another with a holy kiss," this is in part vicarious: the congregation will be doing what Paul wishes he could do. Yet still, even though he cannot be there to tell them so, to place his hands on their heads, still Paul offers a benediction, saying "The grace of the

Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (2 Cor. 13:13). Even if he cannot do what he wants to do, he does what he can. And there is joy in this, too. "I thank my God every time I remember all of you," Paul writes from prison to the Philippians, "constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now" (Phil 1:3-5). May we also take such joy in remembering each other, in praying every day for one another, continuing to share in that fellowship of the Holy Spirit that cannot be broken.

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 Almighty God, you have revealed to your Church your eternal Being of glorious majesty and perfect love as one God in Trinity of Persons: Give us grace to continue steadfast in confession of this faith, and constant in our worship of you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; for you live and reign, one God, now and forever. Make us bearers of your love into the world. Amen.

Announcements and Calendar

Board Meeting Tuesday, June 9, at 6:45 PM on our Conference Call

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

Some addresses: Mary Ellen Ham at Willow Creek Nursing/Rehab Center Room 1007
2401 Wayne Memorial Drive Goldsboro, NC 27534 and
Mary Anne Cowley 225 West Park St. Cary, NC 27511