



Ascension Sunday and Memorial Day

May 24, 2020

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

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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 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: Ps. 68:1-10, 32-35, Acts 1: 6-14, I Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11, and John 17:1-11.

Please pause a moment this week to listen to our "We Remember: Tribute to Memorial Day" video also posted along with our sermon, communion, and scripture readings.



Check new posts next week to some more musical medleys from Tom Casey and also links to Donna Griffin Davenport's Mother's Day Piano Duets Concert and the violin and piano concert in memory of A. W. Griffin from the link to Snyder Memorial Baptist Church Facebook page.



A reminder to send Andrew (goacanes87@.com) pictures of any graduates you would like us to remember and send Penny (pbziemer@gmail.com or text to 919-920-4192) names, family connections, school info, and future plans by May 24, 2020. We want to celebrate them in our June Newsletter Thanks!

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

The writer Oscar Wilde is credited with saying, "If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life." We like to think of ourselves as patient without actually having to be patient. Jesus tells his followers in our reading from Acts 1 to go back to Jerusalem and wait. There could not be a timelier story for us -the call to wait. Some native American tribes in the cold northern parts of Alaska, particularly the Yupik and Inuit, have up to 50 words for snow. Most languages need to have multiple words for "wait," for there are many different ways to "wait." Our lectionary reading from Acts 1 today invites us to explore a few ways which might strengthen our faith.

The first thing we might note is how important waiting is in all our stories of faith. Take a moment to reflect of Noah's wisdom in waiting: first he waits "one hundred and fifty days until the waters had abated" on "the seventh month, on the seventeenth day." Then, "the waters continued to abate until the tenth month and in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains appeared. That was three months more. THEN, "at the end of forty days" more Noah opened the window and sent out the raven that went to and fro until the waters were dried up. We don't know how long exactly this was, but Noah still waited. THEN, he sent out the dove from him, but we are told the dove found no place to set its foot and returned to him. THEN, he waited another seven days and sent out the dove again, and the dove brought back an olive leaf, proving it was safe, but catch this, Noah waited another seven days and sent out the dove and it did not return to him. A lot of waiting here, and I wonder if some of his family was complaining, "Dad, let's just get out of here. Enough already!" God did not select Noah because he was foolhardy. Waiting is hard. We have been shut up in our own arks and we want to get out, but when will it be safe? All around I hear about churches opening because it is legal now, but is it safe? Our best advice tells us to wait three weeks after we have zero cases or a decline. Cases are climbing at this point and estimates are we may peak here in Goldsboro the first week in June, but with much more activity, this could change. Could the patience of Noah help us?

We humans are inherently impatient. I love the quote by Rob Schmidt: "I took a course in speed waiting, and now I can wait an hour in only ten minutes!" Good things happen when biblical characters are willing to trust God as they wait. Joseph waits in a pit and in prison. Moses stays on the mountain 40 days before

receiving the commandments and then it appears he repeats this process after the first set of tablets are broken. Joseph and Mary wait in Egypt until it is safe to return home. We wait at Advent and during Lent for 40 days for Easter. The early followers wait weeping at the tomb and behind closed doors scared. Both Elijah and Jesus fasted for 40 days in the wilderness and each was led by the Spirit through hard times that followed. In the wilderness, we learn we are weaker than we thought, and God is stronger than we thought. If I may borrow an example I used last Father's Day, a father was watching his young son try to dislodge a heavy stone. He could not budge it. "Are you sure you are using all your strength," he said, "Yes, I am, dad. "No, you are not," the father replied, "You have not asked me to help you." Now we have Jesus asking them to wait again. But they will not wait alone. He will empower them. So much depends on whether we are willing to wait and how we choose to wait.

What happens in the Biblical story when folk choose *not to wait on God*? We might want to take a minute to remember the experiences Eve and Adam, Samson, Saul, and David. We might recognize our own restlessness and independence in the choices they made. Like Eve, our curiosity, pride, and more than pride, hubris, sends us out to that tree. Hubris is that egocentric sense that we control our destiny and nothing bad will happen we can't fix, and so she goes outside the safe boundaries God has set. The snake feeds her hubris, "Did God say you would die if you ate this fruit? No, you will just be like God." Someone compared the argument that if we had enough faith, God would protect us from COVID to Satan's argument when he tempted Jesus, "Ah, go ahead and jump. The angels will bear you up!" Like Samson who sees that honey in the rotting lion's carcass, like David who sees Bathsheba on the roof, we want what we want, and we don't want to wait. King Saul was told not to move forward until the prophet Samuel came to offer sacrifices to God, but he wanted to remain popular with his troops and had a little competition complex with David. Consequently, he forgot about trusting God and forged ahead, a decision that brought loss of lives and almost the life of King Saul's own son Jonathan. Time after time in the Bible, when folks act impulsively or rashly to please themselves, please others, stay popular or follow the crowd, it never works out well!

So, how will we wait? Our first clue is found in Jesus' words, "go back to *Jerusalem and wait*." They are called back to a place which for them is rich in

history and tradition. They come back to wait for Pentecost. They hope, as they had hoped when Jesus rode into the city on Palm Sunday, that *this* will be the time Israel will be restored, but Jesus tells them the time for that is in God's hands. The question is: how will they wait? As they wait in Jerusalem, they wait in a place, rich for them in history and faith formation. Friends, we could spend at least 40 days meditating on the experiences Israel's ancestors had in this city. These experiences cover every possible human experience, ranging from terror to pure joy. Jerusalem's original name was "Salem," related to the word shalom and peace. That said, in some historical analysis, Jerusalem is a city that had been fought over sixteen times in its history, destroyed twice, besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times. Jesus was dedicated as a baby in Jerusalem, conversed with the Scribes and Pharisees there at the age of 12, preached there, rode a donkey there on Palm Sunday, overturned the Temple tables there, wept over the city, hosted a Last Supper there, was denied, betrayed, beaten, crucified and resurrected outside the city gate. Jerusalem's identity is grounded in peace (Salem/shalom), but oh, the strife known there and oh, the price of peace! Only Christ's loving sacrifice strengthens us to survive those "fiery ordeals," referenced by our writer in our lectionary reading from I Peter 4:12-14. Have you had "Jerusalem" experiences? Do you face those challenges? Trust God.

Everything depends on whether we pause and how we pause. A comma is that punctuation mark that signals us to pause, to wait a bit. To add a bit of humor, we may want to remember how a misplaced or omitted comma changes everything. Consider the difference in "Let's eat, Grandma" and "Let's eat Grandma" or "I'm sorry, I love you" and "I'm sorry I love you." Or "Caution, Pedestrians, Slippery When Wet" and "Caution, Pedestrians Slippery When Wet." Or, "She loves cooking, her family, and her dog" and "She loves cooking her family and her dog." Yikes! We get the point. Pauses are important spiritually as well as grammatically!

So, a second key to waiting is to wait encouraged by *God's promise* of empowerment. Sometimes our cultural experiences have taught us to wait with little hope. How many of you remember the humor of Lewis Grizzard? He once wrote, "there is something wrong when you wait in line thirty minutes for a hamburger cooked for ninety seconds an hour ago." Will we wait for Pentecost in hope? I shared with you some months ago what can happen when we wait in the

doldrums. Here just before Pentecost, just before the wind of the Spirit stirs, it's easy to fall into what sailors experienced in certain regions of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans where there is no wind to power any movement. The doldrums are caused when sunlight beams down directly on area around the equator. This heating causes the air to warm and rise straight up rather than blow horizontally. The result is little or no wind, sometimes for weeks on end. When we are stuck in the doldrums, we can hurt ourselves and others trying to forge on under our own inadequate steam, we can become listless, paralyzed, immobile. "Doldrum waiting" damages both body and spirit. The time between Ascension and Pentecost Karl Barth termed "a significant pause." But this pause should not lead to paralysis.

A third way to wait is to wait *prayerfully*. With Jesus' ascension, prayer takes on a whole different dimension. We learn that Jesus not only ascends to sit on the right of God but also that Jesus is interceding for us. Ronald Turner adds that our prayers ascend even now with the exalted Christ to the very heart of God. But there is another way to imagine it. Jesus is not remote from us, removed to some distant place and time, but at the right hand of the father. Jesus not only sends his prayers for us up, he will hand them over to his father. They will share them. Our Gospel today from John 17 explains Jesus' desire to share the life he has with God in the powerful prayer recorded there; listen to it again: "as you father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father I desire that those who you have given me may be with me where I am. Jesus' great desire for us to know the same love he shares with the Father.

A fourth way to wait is to wait with a *new perspective* of Christ's sustaining presence amid his seeming absence. What must that have been like to see Christ leaving their presence? Can you imagine their point of view as they look up at him rising and disappearing into the heavens? We will miss the heart of this story today if we don't revisit some other stories of ascending and descending. We remember the dream Jacob has after stealing his brother's birthright, and the stairway to heaven with angels ascending and descending. It was at this moment that he declared, in one translation, "God is in this place, and I did not even know it." John adds in 1:51: "**And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'**" or in John 3:13: "**No one has ascended into heaven except the one who**

descended from heaven, the Son of Man." We must resist the temptation to want to ascend to the heavens, to dethrone God although we need to confess that like those in the Tower of Babel story, have we ever tried, in the words of Is. 14:13 "to raise our throne above the stars of God?" The Psalms of Ascent celebrate both the joy and the responsibility of worshipping God by "ascending the hill of the Lord" to move upward to the temple mount and stand in his holy place." And who has not been comforted several times during COVID and before by the words of Psalm 139:7-12:

- ⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
¹¹ If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night',
¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

You know what I find amazing? If we return to the most memorable image of ascending before Jesus' own ascension, Elijah's ascension in a chariot of fire by a whirlwind into heaven from 2 Kings 2:11, what strikes me is the startling difference in the way Jesus leaves - not in fire or smoke or tempests. He leaves humbly. Now the fire and wind will come at Pentecost later, but he leaves as simply and humbly as he came silently in a manger in Bethlehem, not in a display of his own power, but promising them power: "⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight." How different from Elijah's exit. In every way, his manner empowers us to live humble lives imitating his life, death, resurrection and ascension, a point made also in I Peter 5:6-11: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.... ¹⁰And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who

has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you."

And so, we wait for Pentecost, we wait actively, we wait *remembering*, we wait *prayfully* for his power, his promise, and God's perspective. As Jesus disappeared out of sight, they stood still and they, like us, needed the word of the two angels, "Why do you standing here looking up?" There are those who spend much time looking into the heavens and trying to tease out from apocalyptic texts the time of his return. This is not the way to wait, the angels warn us. He will come as he left. Those times, like all time, are in God's hands. As resurrected people of hope, raised up in power and waiting for an even greater promise, we are to thank God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the power just around the corner, the power to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, in their day and in ours, in the days of COVID and beyond. In that hope, we wait, grateful for his grace; we wait, grateful for the glory he now shares with the Father and the love which he continues to send down to us. For as Will Willimon reminds us in the volume for *Acts* in the *Interpretation Series*, "in the words of the ancient Ascension Day anthem, *Deus Ascendit*: 'God Has Gone Up,' not gone away from the church, but gone up to be the empowerment for the church." May it always be so!



Prayers of the Parish: God, on this Memorial Day, we remember your invitation to love our enemies rather than war against them. May we sacrifice our violence so that we may be filled with your love. Show us how to replace our desire to retaliate with your desire that we reconcile our hearts and lives to you and each other. Thank you that Jesus came so we might know you more fully. Draw us into your presence so that we might make sacrifices acceptable to you. We praise you that Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice of love to draw us closer to your heart. We also lift up:

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, Teenie Wilson, 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

We ask that you keep us safe from COVID 19 and protect those who have suffered in many ways from this pandemic. 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.

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.*

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." (COMMUNE) 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." (COMMUNE)

The Lord's Prayer

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 Selection from *A Sonnet for Ascension* by Malcolm Guite

"We saw him go and yet we were not parted
He took us with him to the heart of things
The heart that broke for all the broken-hearted
Is whole and Heaven-centred now, and sings,
Sings in the strength that rises out of weakness,
Sings through the clouds that veil him from our sight,
Whilst we our selves become his clouds of witness
And sing the waning darkness into light,
His light in us, and ours in him concealed,
Which all creation waits to see revealed."

Announcements and Calendar

Elders on Zoom Thursday, May 28 at 6:45 PM

NC Regional Assembly Business Session on Zoom, June 6 from 10 AM to Noon

Rev. Tom Millay will host our online Communion next Sunday, May 28, for Pentecost



Today We Remember: A Memorial Day Tribute

Today we remember all those around the world who have lost their lives to war and violence; we remember the families and communities and whole countries who still grieve unspeakable losses. Today we remember.

On May 5, 1866, residents of Waterloo, New York, observed a Memorial Day in honor of all who died during the Civil War. Businesses are closed and soldiers' graves are decorated. In 1868, General John Alexander Logan officially proclaimed May 30, 1868, as Memorial Day in honor of the Union soldiers who died in the Civil War. Until after World War I, southern states celebrated a separate Memorial Day in honor of the Confederate dead. In 1971, Congress declared Memorial Day a national holiday to be celebrated the last Monday in May, and on Dec. 28, 2000 , [President Bill Clinton](#) signed the "National Moment of Remembrance Act," which designates 3:00 p.m. local time on Memorial Day each year as the National Moment of Remembrance. Today, we pause to remember.

We, who have been confined to our homes for two months, pause to remember
Those confined in POW camps and those who didn't make it out alive,
We ,who have been sheltering in place for two months, pause to remember those
Who went into prison camps for years without any hope to come out alive,
Those who went to war to keep us safe for years at a time, sheltering in
Forests,
Ditches,
Trenches,
Dugouts,
Beaches,
And abandoned buildings,
Caves and hillsides,
Valleys,

Swamps and
Rice Paddies.

We remember those who sheltered in place hoping no one would know they were there.

We remember those

Drenched wading through swamps in the rain,
Parched marching through desert winds in the heat,
Frozen camped out in tents in the cold,
Flying in unsafe places of low visibility
Submerged at unsafe depths of great vulnerability
Sometimes without clothes or enough food.

Today we remember the many soldiers from various races and ethnic groups, who were never recognized, never counted, yet they fought, often given the most undesirable assignments, and in some conflicts, they fought and died for a country that did not even recognize them as citizens.

We remember the children, the elderly, the broken and separated families, the refugees, the political prisoners, and the poor, often the greatest victims of war and conflict.

We remember homes, villages, communities, whole cities, and whole countries leveled by war.

We remember families torn apart who were never able to be reunited.

We ask for forgiveness for any part we have had in shedding blood to support our privileged ways of life, for shedding blood under the illusion that this was God's will.

We face COVID here at home.

Far from home they faced yellow fever, malaria, typhoid, dysentery, trench fever, hoping to stay alive to keep us safe.

Today we who have been sheltering in place remember

Those who would cherish coming home and staying inside because they know what it's like not to be able to come home.

They know what it's like to suffer alone and die alone. All around the world, we remember those who *didn't long to leave home, but longed to come home*
And never could, and never did.

On Memorial Day, we remember those who lost their lives from combat, disease, and confinement. Today we ask mercy for those lost loved ones. We ask for a

transformative vision for those who wrongfully believe we need to kill some so others may live.

Today as we remember the One who suffered alone on the Cross and died to save us, we remember all those who kept on dying even after he did. He died to put an end to violence and brokenness and yet we still hate and break. Lord, have mercy today. Restore to us your transformative vision of shalom and peace. Don't let all you died for on Calvary go to waste as we continue to waste opportunities for reconciliation. We remember the hope of peace you still offer us. May our eyes and hearts be open to vision and may we passionately seek it today, as we remember.



Church Reopening - We are preparing safe protocols for when we open our church for services and will keep you updated!