



October 18, 2020

Ordinary Time, Proper 24

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#.

Outdoor Church

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 (weather permitting, and we pray for good weather!). 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.**



Music

"Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing" (Ps. 100:1-2). We will be worshipping the Lord on Sunday. We will be entering the Lord's gates with gladness and the Lord's courts with praise. **Tom Casey** will continue playing LIVE music during the Sunday service, and **George Thigpen** will join him for a song. Don't forget that more piano music from Tom Casey can be found online on the church's Facebook. Be sure to check out the online music, and feel free to share it with your friends!

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

Verse-by-Verse: Walking through the Gospel of John

Join us on Facebook for a video series titled "Verse-by-Verse," where Pastor Tom walks through the Gospel of John and unpacks the rich meaning of the text. We are going slowly enough to really pay attention.

This week, we will look at John 1:10-13: "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God."



October Special Offering

During the month of October, we will be receiving our annual special day offering to benefit the Church World Service Tools & Blankets program which we have traditionally called "**Blanket Sunday**." Through this program we remember and assist our less fortunate brothers and sisters around the world with our offering and the warmth of our love and prayers.

Each \$10 gift buys a warm blanket for someone in need who may be homeless or a victim of disaster, natural or manmade. A blanket at the right time can make a world of difference in the lives of children and families faced with an emergency. A blanket can mean warmth, shelter, privacy, or a bed to someone in a crisis.

Ten dollars is such an inexpensive way to get involved that children, families, circle groups, and individuals can all get involved. And remember, it's not just about feeling good. It is about loving our neighbors around the world just as Jesus commanded. Please give generously and give more than one blanket if you are able.

~From our Missions leader, Ronnie Thompson



Children's Sabbath

Sunday, October 18, is our annual **Children's Sabbath**. We will have special prayers for children and youth, and we will also have a youth video to share connected to our CWS Blanket Drive. In addition, our church has been abundantly blessed to have **Rev. Dr. Penny B. Ziemer's** wonderful Sabbath meditations, which feature a scripture, a prayer, and a reflection. Please spend time today and tomorrow reading, meditating, and praying for these precious gifts for whom we have been given the tasks of care and nurture.



The pandemic doesn't mean we have to stop celebrating the beautiful season of fall.

This year we will be having a **drive-thru Fall Festival** on **Saturday, October 31** from **1-3pm**. In preparation for the Festival, we are collecting bags of goodies which will be handed out to cars as they drive by. **Please bring bags** of candies, crafts, and other assorted fall funtivities to one of our Sunday services on October 18 or October 25, or bring a bag by the church up until Friday, October 30. On the day of the Festival, we encourage anyone who either has children or who can bring a bag to a child to stop by our drive-thru and pick up a goodie bag!



Now is the time of year some folks may be telling you 'You can't put on Christmas music yet, it's not even November!' But if you'd still like to start getting in the spirit, here is something you can do: put together a box for Operation Christmas Child. We will be putting boxes out for you to pick up at Sunday's service; you can also swing by the church and pick one up if you'd like. Instructions for packing can be found [here](#) or picked up at the church, and the final collection date for First Christian Goldsboro's boxes is Saturday, November 14th.



A Prayer for Repentance

Many of us are nearing the end of our 30-day prayer for repentance. As a fruit of this communal practice of prayer, I invite you to **submit your own written out prayer**, to be re-printed in the bulletin and read out at our weekly service. These prayers can either be handed in on Sunday or emailed to the church's email address.

Prayers for Repentance

Walter Cannon

Heavenly Father, I come to you today to praise you name, the Alpha and Omega of all things created. Without your hands nothing would exist, as I look at what my eyes can behold. I am reminded of Your goodness and strength.

Lord, my country is in a mess. We have strayed from Your word and we have taken on false gods in Your place, we have taken down Your commandment in public, we have forbidden prayer in our schools and we are killing babies by the thousands. We have taken on the role of a god and forgotten how America was founded on Your values.

Please let us turn back to you and seek Your face and let Your face smile upon America. Please forgive us of our sins and wash them all away. You said if we would turn from our sins You would forgive our sins and bless our land. I ask in Jesus name and seek your blessings to restore my America, not for me because I know that one day I will be with You, but for my children and the children to follow.

AMEN.

Linda Bell Thigpen

Our most gracious heavenly Father, I pray to you to help us to see the violence and disease as a time to ask for repentance. Our world has turned our eyes away from you. We have not shown love or respect for others who have different views. We have not listened with open hearts. We have placed our needs before others who are truly needy.

Forgive our sins dear Lord. Please help us to look at others through your eyes and teach us to show compassion to them. Show us how to listen and extend our hand of friendship to those different from us. We ask for healing and anointing for our leaders, our nation, our country and our churches. Help us dear Lord to focus on the important things in a Christian's life so we can prepare for our eternal home. For this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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: Exodus 33:12-23; Psalm 99; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; and Matthew 22:15-22.

Sermon

"Called to be Mystics"

When the name "Moses" is mentioned nowadays, we usually think of two things: the exodus and the Law. We've already talked this year about the exodus, about Moses leading the people of Israel across the parted Red Sea, and how quickly the Israelites forgot this display of omnipotent power. And we've also mentioned the Law, that is, the Law of Israel, that Law that tells its followers not to steal nor kill, but also not to eat pork or shellfish, to keep kosher, to circumcise male children on the eighth day and to offer a variety of sacrifices to restore right relationship with God. This is the Law recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Law was given to the Israelites through Moses; he is the one who received it and wrote it down, so it is natural that we associate him with it. Paul in the New Testament also associated Moses with the Law; in fact, sometimes he just uses the name "Moses" as a kind of shorthand for the Law (Rom 5:14): the two words—"Moses" and "Law"—mean basically the same thing, for him.

So the name Moses is associated with these two things, with the exodus and the Law. But it wasn't always the case that Moses was only associated with these two things. The early church remembered another important aspect of Moses's life, one that shouldn't be forgotten: Moses saw God. He had a vision of God. And, as our lectionary reading for the day makes clear, Moses asked for this vision. He said to God: I want to see you! Let me experience the fullness of your presence!

God answers Moses's request as fully as it can be answered for a human being. Moses says to God "Show me your glory, I pray." Then God replies to Moses: "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," [God] said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live'" (Exodus 33:18-20). Then Moses is hid by God in the cleft of a rock, and Moses sees God—he sees maybe not God's face, but he does see God's back: He sees as much of God as can bear seeing.

This event in the life of Moses is why, for a church father such as Gregory of Nyssa (335-395 AD), Moses was not just a liberator or a lawgiver; he was also a *mystic*. According to Bernard McGinn, a mystic is anyone who experiences the presence of God and lives to tell the tale. Moses was undoubtedly one of those people, and Gregory of Nyssa holds Moses up as a kind of model for us. Gregory compares Moses to the light of a lighthouse. Moses's life gives guidance for what is the right way to those who need it, those who might otherwise wreck themselves as they make their way to the shore. Gregory says: "It may be for this very reason that the daily life of those sublime individuals [such as Moses] is recorded in detail [in the scriptures], that by imitating those earlier examples of right action those who follow them may conduct their lives to the good" (*The Life of Moses*, I.13). Following in the footsteps of Moses, we are not only supposed to be committed to liberation, to the exodus of men, women, and children away from the systems that oppress them (Isaiah 61:1, quoted by Jesus in Luke 4:18); and we are not only supposed to love God's Law and delight in God's teaching, loving our neighbors and worshiping God in spirit and truth (Ps 119). Following Moses, we should not only do these two things: we should also try to be mystics. We should be trying to experience the presence of God. We should be saying to God, "Show me your glory, I pray."

How often have you sought after a visionary experience of God? I can't say it is at the top of my prayer priorities. I spend a good deal of my time praying for others. In fact, it's often been complained throughout Christian history that those who seek mystical visions of God are not spending enough time loving their neighbors; they are, in some way, selfish.

But look at Moses! He cannot be accused of not being concerned enough about his fellow creatures. Most everything he wrote is an attempt to guide others in their love of God and in their love of each other. Yet he also sought his own vision of God. I think maybe what we don't understand is how related these two things are. I think what we don't understand is the fact that how well we love our neighbor depends on how much we love God. Having the experience of a vision of God transforms who you are as a person. It makes you into the kind of person so full of inward happiness and joy that your whole life can be spent in service of others—in feeding, clothing, washing feet and visiting the sick and imprisoned—and you never begin to feel that such service is coming at the expense of your own happiness. Because your happiness is wrapt up with God; it is there, it is in the cleft, when you looked out and experienced the fulness of the goodness of God, and experienced it in such a way that an impression was left, an impression that will never leave and that you can always return to as a source of joy and comfort.

If Gregory of Nyssa is right, and Moses is to be an exemplar for us, then we are all called to be mystics. You may not have thought of yourself this way before: You are called to be a mystic! You are supposed to have, and you are supposed to seek out and pray for, intense experiences of the presence of God. If you are not experiencing these, I want to be clear, it doesn't mean something is wrong with you. There are mystics such as John of the Cross who write about how sometimes God tests and refines our souls by withdrawing our sense of God's presence. But what Gregory is saying is this: we each and we all should be praying for God to share with us a taste of the glory, a brief vision—however limited—of God's own self, come down to visit our soul like rain that waters thirsty ground.

Once we taste of this, truly taste of it, the experience will never be enough. Even the best meal in our world would sour if it were eaten every night. It is not so with God. Every taste of God increases our desire to taste more. Every sight of God makes us want to increase our vision, to rub from our eyes whatever impurities are keeping us from a fuller glimpse of the glory. Our desire for God can never be satisfied, neither here nor in the life to come. We will always be wanting to know more and more of this Love who has given us being. As Gregory of Nyssa puts it, "the true sight of God consists in this, that the one who looks up to God never ceases in that desire," for "This truly is the vision of God: never to be

satisfied in the desire to see him" (*The Life of Moses*, II.233, 239). Sometimes, when the cares of the world rise to choke us, we forget this. But truly, nothing brings more happiness than closeness to God. That is what we should desire; and if we find ourselves distracted, if we find ourselves wanting something else, let us remind ourselves where fulness lies. Let us remember that "Every good and perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation nor shadow of change" (James 1:17); there is no change, no, there is only the unending bliss of knowing that the love we have been given—the love which has seen us and known us, known our deepest self and accepted us and valued us—this love will continually be given, continually, unendingly, unceasingly given, until we know our God face-to-face and our hearts burst with a praise we did not even know we were capable of. Lord, make us open to your presence. Show us your glory. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Amen.

Prayers of the Parish:

Differences don't have to mean division. Now, in a time when differences are dividing—now is a time when the supernatural character of Christian unity can be even more evident than ever before. In order to be an ambassador of Christ, we have to be practicing the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20), and now is the time to practice it, because it is so needed. Let us each pray the words Linda shared with us: Please help us to look at others through your eyes and teach us to show compassion to them. Show us how to listen and extend our hand of friendship to those different from us. Amen!

We continue pray for the end of violence of all kinds. May the God of peace break into our world and banish all forces of the Enemy who incite us to harm each other, and may those through whom harm has happened be free of the spiritual forces which keep them in bondage. May they know the power of the Gospel which frees us. May we all be reminded of our true enemy: Satan and all his forces who work together to wreck the lives of human beings made in the image of God. With that in mind, let our hearts be filled with love for each and every person on the face of this earth: "O Lord, make haste to help us!"

Let us lift up our weekly requests. 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, and especially those students, teachers, and administrators who are now or are soon going back to school; we pray for childcare workers; for 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. Visit all those who cannot find safe work in these moments and who are feeling more threatened than ever this week. Visit the sick, the hungry, and the imprisoned. Be present to those in our armed forces, who are in especially precarious times. 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, Ken McCoy and family, Jay and Kelley Pittmann, Jana Blackman, Joyce Sauls and Johnnie Kleinert.

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 the virtues Moses has is great boldness before God in his prayers. If he wants to see God's glory, Moses says so: he asks for it. In Ephesians, Paul says that one of the gifts Christ has given us is the ability to speak boldly and confidently before God (Eph 3:12). That means we can all be like Moses. Let us not be timid in our faith. May the prayers we have said today be placed before God in all boldness, in the expectation of an answer from our saving God. And may our prayer for unity, our hope of unity which is embodied in the meal we share around this table: may that prayer and that hope be full of boldness and confidence, may we be certain that God's victory over sin and death means that we may all be one, together, no longer afraid of each other, but joined in joy. "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph 3:20-21).

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 - We at First Christian are not ashamed of the power of the Gospel, and there's a very good reason for that: the Gospel is the healing power of God, coming to mend our broken world. May we continue to be part of God's action through the gift of our own selves: our time, our resources, and our spirits in prayer. Sanctify the gifts of the church this week, O Lord. First and last, we offer our praise to God, from whom all blessings flow, and from whom every good and perfect gift comes down. Amen.

Confession - As Christians, we recognize we are not perfect. Join me in a moment of silent confession, for things done and for things left undone.

Let us rejoice: our sins are forgiven through the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. May the power of the Holy Spirit draw us all more closely to God in the week to come. Amen.

Communion Prayer - "Be present, be present, O Jesus, our great High Priest, as you were present with your disciples, and be known to us in the breaking of bread; you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen" (Book of Common Prayer, 834).

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, show us your glory! Reveal yourself to us, let us see you and taste you. May that sight and that taste fill us with an ever-increasing desire to be near you. Give us words to share with others what it means to be abundantly satisfied by the knowledge of you. Send us out to share what we know about the only hope that cannot be defeated. In the name of Jesus: Amen.

Announcements and Calendar

Outdoor Church Service, Sunday, October 18th, at 9:30 AM (see information above)

Elders Meeting, Tuesday, October 20th, at 6:45 PM via conference call

Poem for Solitude
from Wendell Berry
"The Peace of Wild Things"

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.