



October 4, 2020

Ordinary Time, Proper 22

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. 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**.

PLEDGE

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Pledges are due this **Sunday, October 4th**! Our regional Disciples office has noticed that one of the trends in giving during the pandemic is that **churches have become more insular—more self-focused**. They are concerned with sustaining their own congregation through this time. That is entirely understandable, but I am so happy to report that is not the case for our congregation. We continue to support local organizations such as Literacy Connections, the Red Cross, Boys and Girls Club, and the Boy Scouts—and we are doing this in a time where it is more needed than ever. As you reflect on your pledge during this month, keep in mind that you support a congregation obeying the Gospel mandate to be turned **outwards** in care for our neighbors. Remember to fill out and return your pledge by **Sunday, October 4th**, so the Stewardship Committee can plan our church budget for approval at our annual meeting in November.



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. 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 new 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 1:4-5: "In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."



September Special Offering

Our **missions special offering for September** supports the **Reconciliation Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**. Offerings fund the Church's mission to become a pro-reconciling and anti-racist church utilizing experiential education, inclusive worship, and intentional dialogue. Through this mission, the Church seeks to promote healing, relationship, and restoration in the whole family of God. The mission provides programs for leadership development, curriculum for dialogue and learning, and partnerships within the Church and our communities. Our gifts help to **ensure the human dignity of every child, to ensure all have access to Christ's abundance, to fully flourish in education, financial stability, and friendships across God's human diversity**. For more information, visit reconciliationministry.org, where you can find out about ministries such as the "[One Bag of Tea](#)" project. You can also contact Pastor Tom or our missions leader Ronnie Thompson. Thank you for your generosity.



A Prayer for Repentance

In 1849, there was a cholera outbreak in America. President Zachary Taylor called for a National Day of Fasting in response, calling all Americans to "humble themselves before His throne, and while acknowledging past transgressions, ask a continuance of the Divine mercy." In his call for fasting and repentance in response to a crisis, Taylor was echoing earlier prophets such as Haggai, Habakkuk, and Joel. This month, **we are asking you to join us in penitential prayer**, while also asking for God's mercy and healing power to be present in our world broken by disease and by violence. **Would you commit to uniting with us for 30 days of daily prayers for repentance?** If so, please sign up at church, call in—or you can add your name online to the following Google form: <https://forms.gle/M7eZEYb6FyuKCjPP7>.

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 20:1-4; Psalm 19; Philippians 3:4b-14; and Matthew 21:33-46.

Sermon

"Sweetbitter/Bittersweet"

Psalm 19 speaks of two great gifts our God has given us: nature and the law. How are we to know of God's greatness? Well, Psalm 19 says, just look up at the sky! See the stars, see the planets, marvel at God's design. How are we to know of God's wisdom? Well, Psalm 19 says, just open the pages of the Bible. In these pages can be found a way of living that is truly, lastingly, good—a way of living that does not just seem good, is pleasant and delightful for a moment only to fall apart and leave you with nothing. What we find in God's law is a way of living that firmly establishes its followers in a joy that will never fade.

Wisdom has to do with time. It is not that the unwise know no goodness nor pleasure in their lives. They do. The problem with the unwise is that their goodness fades, their pleasure withers. They have attached themselves to the momentary. To choose the lasting good: that is what it means to be wise. As the very first psalm says, those whose "delight is in the law of the LORD" "are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither." "The wicked," on the other hand, "are like chaff that the wind drives away" (Ps 1:3-4). Do you want your life to be a well-watered tree, firmly planted, or dry piece of chaff, easily blown away? Do you want your house to be built on stone or sand? These are the questions of wisdom. Wisdom is wisdom because it can look ahead and see what will last. How can it look ahead? Because it is grounded in God, who created this world, and who gave us the law, both the law found in the Old Testament and the "law of Christ" spoken about in Galatians 6:2. The God who created this world and gave us the law knows what

makes for the good life—that which does not only *seem* good, but *is* good, and lastingly so.

Wisdom lets us know that there are things in this world that are sweetbitter, and things in this world that are bittersweet. Those things that are sweetbitter seem sweet in that first moment you indulge them, like a candy bar. They only reveal their bitterness over time, leaving you hollow, empty, and lacking: lacking the good, lacking that which brings joy. Those things that are bittersweet, on the other hand, they are things that seem bitter at first. These are things like putting others before oneself, like serving instead of being served; things like loving a neighbor whom one finds annoying or frustrating or wrongheaded; these are things like waking early to pray, or sitting in silence, not accomplishing any tasks, waiting for God to speak, or making that extra call to a friend whom you know needs companionship, even if you don't exactly feel like making a phone call beforehand. Only over time does the sweetness of such practices come to light. What seemed difficult at first leaves you feeling uplifted and in communion with the everlasting Good. You are left with a joy that has been earned over time.

One example of the bittersweet life of a Christian is the subject of my scholarly research, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). Kierkegaard believed that he had been called by God to be an author. As a consequence of this call to be an author, Kierkegaard felt he had to reject the possibility of a happy family life. He knew that his devotion to what God was calling him to, to the life of an author, meant a life of poverty and controversy—neither of which, Kierkegaard knew, combine well with the comfort, security, and joy of a happy family environment. At the time when he received God's call to be an author, he was engaged to a young woman named Regine Olsen. Kierkegaard broke off his engagement to Regine and lived the life God called him to, a single life of writing, solitude, poverty, and controversy. Kierkegaard chose bitter medicine instead of the sweetness he could have had, and he did so because he felt God's call and decided to be obedient to the law of Christ. He continued to do this later in his life: even though he was a passionate and devoted Christian, and respected by many Christians during his life for his writings about God and Jesus, Kierkegaard decided at the end of his life to attack the state church of his day, the Lutheran church in Denmark; and he was hated and reviled and mocked and called an atheist for this attack on the

church. Yet, despite all this bitterness, Kierkegaard's life with God only grew more and more sweet, as we know from his journals. He tasted the sweetness of God more fully over time; he knew that sweetness in the face of the bitter suffering given to him during this life. To the end of his life, his favorite Bible verse continued to be James 1:17, "Every good and perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father of lights," and Kierkegaard's grave is adorned with these words: "Just a short while and I have won, Then the whole battle will at once be done, Then I can rest in halls of roses, And unceasingly, unceasingly, Speak with my Jesus."

You only have one life. Choose wisely. Don't chase after the pleasure of the moment. Choose the Good that lasts.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of the Parish:

This week, I would like to pray about prayer. I pray that this time of greater isolation is for us a space—a space in which we can renew our prayer lives. I pray we take this chance to grow in our heartfelt devotion to God, where we take the time we need to really be in God's presence and speak with Jesus. I pray we develop new ways of praying and deepen all our old ways of praying. I pray our whole life is transformed into a living sacrifice for our King, that our hearts burst forth in unceasing prayer, prayer that cannot be contained to a time of prayer but that pervades every moment of our being. I pray that throughout our days we breath the breath of the Holy Spirit, that with every breath we say "Holy Spirit, breath in me," or "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me," or "Glory to God in the highest." May this time be a time when we make a return to God, when we re-root and re-ground ourselves in love. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

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

Look at the above picture: This is one of the earliest known Eastern Orthodox icons. In this special icon, Jesus has his arm around his friend, Apa Mena, an early church monk. Look closely: Jesus's arm goes around Apa Mena and rests on his shoulder. Looking at this icon reminded me not only of how much we need and desire Jesus's friendship, but also how Jesus himself desired friends when he was on earth. If Jesus, who had the closest relation to the Father of any human being ever to live, still needed earthly friends, how much more so do we? This table, the communion table, is for gathering: it is for the fellowship we all need. If we don't think we need friends, we are deluding ourselves. God has given us the gift of communion knowing who we are and what we need. Let us be reminded as we share communion today of the grace of friendship, of how much we need it and of how God has richly provided for us. Praise to our God, from whom the blessing of friendship flows, 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 - 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 As we go out into the world to pour ourselves out for others, may we continually bring to our minds how much we have been given and how thoroughly we rely upon God's gifts. We can give because we have been given to. With that in mind, let us share with others; may we give so that the Good News can be found. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Addresses You May Need: John E. Kleinert Jr.

38 Pebbles Court

Sanford, NC 27332

Announcements and Calendar

Outdoor Church Service, Sunday, October 4th, at 9:30 AM (see information above)

Board Meeting, Tuesday, October 13th, at 6:45 PM via conference call

Poem for Solitude
from William Wordsworth's *Prelude*

When from our better selves we have too long
Been parted by the hurrying world, and droop,
Sick of its business, of its pleasures tired,
How gracious, how benign, is Solitude;
How potent a mere image of her sway;
Most potent when impressed upon the mind
With an appropriate human centre—hermit,
Deep in the bosom of the wilderness;
Votary (in vast cathedral, where no foot
Is treading, where no other face is seen)
Kneeling at prayers; or watchman on the top
Of lighthouse, beaten by Atlantic waves;
Or as the soul of that great Power is met
Sometimes embodied on a public road,
When, for the night deserted, it assumes
A character of quiet more profound
Than pathless wastes.