



September 13, 2020

Ordinary Time, Proper 19

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

Minister Rev. Dr. Tom Millay

Church Telephone/Fax: (919) 735-3092 Minister's Cell: (919) 273-7030

Church email: [fccgb1609@gmail.com](mailto:fccgb1609@gmail.com) Minister's email [tom.millay54@gmail.com](mailto:tom.millay54@gmail.com)

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**.



### CMF/DWM Virtual Retreat

Are you in need of the life-giving waters of our faith? Please consider participating in the CWF/DWM virtual retreat, which is available online starting at 10 AM on Saturday, September 12<sup>th</sup>. The retreat is prerecorded and thus able to be watched when it is convenient for you. The themes of the retreat are unity and resilience, and retreat leaders will look at these themes in terms of Disciples past, present, and future. For more information, including a copy of the program, visit [ncdisciples.org](http://ncdisciples.org) or click [here](#).



### 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 worshiping 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 he will also be joined 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 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 the third phrase in the first verse of John's gospel, "and the Word was God." It's a statement that seems straightforward, but I promise you it is not!



### 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](http://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.

## PLEDGE

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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.



### Step into the Water: A Socially Distant Scavenger Hunt

Just because we're socially distancing doesn't mean all fun is off the table. We are going to gather on **Saturday, September 26th at 5 pm** as a number small, family-based teams, to collect care packages to distribute to members of our congregation. After bringing our contributions together, a catered meal will follow. Please **sign up** this Sunday and also **take a list** of the needed items, which will be available on Sunday. Alternatively, you can call into the church office to sign up and get emailed the list of items.



### **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 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](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: Exodus 14:19-31; Psalm 114; Romans 14:1-12; and Matthew 18:21-35.

### **Sermon**

#### **"And the Waters were Divided"**

What an awesome event the parting of the Red Sea must have been. Can you imagine standing there, seeing those waters part? What's stuck in my imagination is the movie version with Charlton Heston, how the waves instantly roll back and the Israelites walk on through. It may not have been exactly like that, but, truly, it must have been something to see.

The temptation for us, thousands of years later, is to envy these people their experience. If only we had seen such a display, we think, it would be easy to believe in God's power to save, to lift us out of whatever circumstance we find

ourselves in, no matter how desperate. It would be easy to in every circumstance remember that God is real and has spoken to us and directed us and given us the power to withstand trials. We imagine that we are at a disadvantage, in comparison to the ancient Israelites who saw this great event.

That's an understandable sentiment. But let's follow the narrative of Exodus a little further. The Red Sea is parted in Exodus 14. We don't have to go very far forward. The Israelites are found complaining about their lack of water to drink in Exodus 15 (Ex 15:24). As if the God who parted waters, who divided waters in two and let the people of Israel walk through on dry land—as if this God could not provide water to drink. In a way, it really does not matter that these particular Israelites witnessed the parting of the Red Sea. A lack of faith is a lack of faith; it is impervious to any demonstrations. Jesus talked about this in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. He ends the parable by saying, of those rich men who refuse to give, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). That is, even if someone rose from the dead in front of you in order to tell you what danger your soul was in, if you lack faith, it won't make any difference at all; you will keep to your ways. You'll find some way to dismiss or ignore what you've experienced.

The Israelites in fact keep on doing this: they keep on dismissing, even though it has been only a few days since the splitting of the river. They keep on doubting God's power, though they have been witnesses to one of its most magnificent displays. After satisfying their thirst at the end of Exodus 15, in Exodus 16 the people get hungry. Here are the second and third verses of the chapter: "And all the community of Israelites murmured against Moses and against Aaron in the wilderness. And the Israelites said to them, 'Would that we had died by the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread, for you have brought us out to this wilderness to bring death by famine on all this assembly'" (Ex 16:2-3). The Israelites' doubt is again proven to be misplaced, as the next day a glorious bread is made to come down from heaven and satisfy these all-too-human people.

The point of these stories is not that the Israelites are a particularly bad or recalcitrant people. They are all of us. We like to imagine we would change our lives if we experienced such a 'life-changing' event; but the truth is we are so

resistant to changing our lives that we are absolute geniuses at wriggling out of making such an event matter for us. If we don't have a desire to change our lives, they won't change: no matter what happens to us, no matter what we see or what we witness.

So how can we be a faithful witness? It really doesn't have much to do with being there in person when something happens. The only way to be truly contemporary to an event that involves God, to be a witness to it in a way that matters, is to make that event mean something for one's own life. It doesn't matter if you saw something, if it doesn't remain in your memory and make a difference in your life. We become contemporary, we become a witness, when we let these events have an impact on our lives, when our lives become the dusty crater left by a God whose kingdom has slammed into this world, in all its power and all its glory.

The Scriptures themselves give us an example of this. The Psalmist who sings his songs in Babylon, a thousand years after the Israelites had been in Egypt, in fact does a better job remembering the parting of the Red Sea than those who experienced it. In the midst of exile, when he might be expected to grumble, when he might be expected to sigh, when he might be expected to complain, instead we find the psalmist remembering the Exodus, saying "So [the LORD] brought his people out with joy, his chosen ones with singing. He gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples, that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws. Hallelujah!" (Ps. 105:43-45). The psalmist wasn't there. He didn't see the waves rolled back or walk on dry land where there was once a raging river. Yet he remembers. He recollects the glory. He recalls the power. He takes that memory of the Red Sea and puts it to work in his life. He defeats the temptation of despair through the power of memory. Because we serve a God who acts in this world and acts in this world to save, hope can always be found in memory.

I'll share a very mundane example of the power of this memory. On Wednesday morning last week, I was really dragging myself around. Some of you may remember that we had our church workday last Tuesday. Let's just say it took a little while for me to recover from that. Two-year-olds, however—I've found they don't have an inherent respect for such excuses. They want to play. They've got to be changed. They've got to be fed. So I found myself tempted to grumble. I found

myself tempted to sigh. I found myself tempted to complain. But I remembered to pray. I prayed the simple prayer that the desert monks recommend for situations like these: "O Lord, make haste to help me," quoting from Psalm 70. I found strength in that, but what really enabled me not to give into temptation was the memory of the Exodus. I thought to myself: 'Well, if God can part the Red Sea, surely God can get me through this situation.' And God did, God got me through: at least for once in my life, I mostly did not succumb to a temptation.

That situation with my little one might be mundane. But what we need to work on is bringing the memory of God into every aspect of our lives. There's no situation too mundane to remember that we serve a God who is close at hand, who observes, who hears, and who acts for us. Our God is the God who parted the Red Sea and who raised Jesus from the dead. Surely we can also be helped, in whatever situation we are in.

## **Blessing of Children: for Charlie Benson Nassef**

*Welcome*

We welcome in God's name Chris and Carolyn and their family, who have brought their child, Charlie Benson Nassef, to be dedicated to God, the maker of all things and giver of all life. In this act of dedication we follow our Lord Jesus, who took little children in his arms and blessed them.

*To the family*

In presenting this child to God, do you promise that through the grace given you and in partnership with the Church, you will teach him the truths and duties of the Christian faith; and by prayer, precept, and example will bring him up in the love of God?

**We do.**

*To the congregation*

Do you, as members of this congregation, acknowledge and accept the responsibility of teaching and training this child, that he, being brought up in the love of the Lord, may be led in due time to trust Christ as Savior and confess him as Lord in baptism. If so, will you signify your acceptance by responding, "We do."

**We do.**

### *Prayer*

O God, as a mother comforts her children,  
you strengthen, sustain, and provide for us.

We come before you with gratitude  
for the gift of this child,  
for the joy that has come into this family,  
and for the grace with which you surround them  
and all of us.

As a father cares for his children,  
so you continually look upon us  
with compassion and goodness

Pour out your Spirit.

Enable your servants to abound in love,  
and establish our homes in holiness;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### *Benediction*

Charlie Benson,  
The Lord bless you and keep you,  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,  
and give you peace. Amen.

### **Prayers of the Parish:**

This week, we are thinking of those on the West Coast of our country who are battling raging fires. God, we pray for your protection, and we especially hold in our hearts those firefighters who are battling the twin dangers of fire and COVID.

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, and Jana Blackman.*

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**

Last week, we talked about how with everyone we come across, we must remind ourselves: I want to be around a table with this person, sharing a meal. This week, our Gospel reading helps answer our objections—because we are always objecting, saying, 'Surely not this person, Lord?' If we think another person is not worthy to gather around the table with us, that means we have forgotten how much we have been forgiven. Remember with what great and surpassing and completely undeserved love God has invited you to this table. If you remember that, maybe you will be inspired to look at that other person and say: 'Come and join me.'

**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** Remember the Exodus. Remember that God has the power to save, no matter the circumstance, no matter how small or how large. God is waiting to be called upon. May the Holy Spirit lead us until we as a church reach that place of unceasing prayer, as we confront our broken selves and our broken world. May our hearts be filled once again so that we may be ambassadors of the good news of great joy. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Announcements and Calendar**

CMF/DWM Virtual Retreat, Saturday, September 12<sup>th</sup>, at 10:00 AM (online)

Outdoor Church Service, Sunday, September 13<sup>th</sup>, at 9:30 AM (see information above)

Elders Meeting, Tuesday, September 15<sup>th</sup>, at 6:45 PM (over conference call)

Scavenger Hunt, Saturday, September 26<sup>th</sup>, at 5:00 PM (church parking lot)