



September 20, 2020

Ordinary Time, Proper 20

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 Minister's email 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**.



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 by **George Thigpen**. 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, 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

© Can Stock Photo

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 (NEXT WEEK!)** 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, 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 16:2-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Philippians 1:21-30; and Matthew 20:1-16.

Sermon

"The Heart of the Gospel"

For the past 14 Sundays, we have been reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans. The lectionary has us walk slowly through this text and give our attention fully over to it. We are, today, finally moving past Romans into Philippians for our epistle lesson. But I want to take this chance, as we are moving on, to look back at Romans and reflect upon it.

I had someone say to me recently that Paul is not exactly easy to understand, a sentiment with which I agree completely. But I want to say the few things today that I do understand about this great letter, the letter to the Romans, because those few things are at the heart of the gospel.

One of the most important things Romans teaches us is that we human beings, even when we are at our best—are mere conduits. A 'conduit' is that which encloses an electrical current and allows it to flow. The Gospel teaches that any success in the Christian life, any actual achievement of the sainthood we are all called to (Rom 1:7), is to be understood in terms of being a conduit. Romans says to us: You are not holy. You are simply a conduit through whom the glory of God flows. You may house the glory of God. God may be working into the world through your life. But that has nothing to do with you. That is God being victorious despite the obstacles you are throwing up, God overcoming the flaws in our conduit

construction—that is God continuing to flow through our imperfect, earthen vessels into the world.

Our goodness is not our own. This is why in Romans 14 Paul can ask us: “Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God” (Rom 14:10).

Judgment is forbidden by Paul because to judge means to not recognize one’s own situation for what it is. Judgment means to ignore the grace upon which you stand, and to think instead that you are standing on your righteousness, to think that your goodness is your own.

This puts our lives as ‘people who go to church’ in an important context. We need to always remember we are no different from anyone else. When you see someone who is lost, no matter how broken they are, there is no difference—none!—between them and you. No difference: we are all united in failure. We are all lost. We are all broken. Just because that brokenness might be more outwardly evident in someone else doesn’t mean it’s not equally true of you.

Grace. Grace is the name Paul gives for that unearned act of God acting through us. Grace is the name for whatever progress in the spiritual life seems to be ours. As awe-inspiring as the parting of the Red Sea is, is it not yet more remarkable that God has overcome the resistance our souls put up? For we put up a spiritual obstacle much more firm, much more recalcitrant, much more stubborn and enduring than simple, physical water. The Red Sea is easy compared to even one of us becoming a follower of Christ. But God’s grace is powerful: it acts.

I think of this when I pray. There are times when, before I pray, I do feel like praying, when I long to enter the space of being before God. But for me these times are few and far between. Most of the times I pray, there is a resistance of my soul to entering that space of prayer. It suggests to me that I am too tired, too busy, too hungry, thirsty, and distracted to be able to pray right now. But somehow, despite this resistance, I still go and pray. And as soon as I place myself in that space of prayer, I find that I want to be there. That is a moment when I have allowed myself to be a conduit. I am doing nothing but being open; God is the one who is acting. God is present in our world in such moments. We can be conduits.

This is the moment of new life. This is what it feels like: when we do something other than what we know we would typically do, if left to our own devices. This is what makes new life new. In these moments it is not we who are living. It is an Other who is living through us. That's when new life happens. It happens because God the Creator of everything is somehow still concerned with every last moment in our lives, even the most mundane of moments. God is there waiting to be called on; God is ready to work and to act in every circumstance.

Each moment of our life is an opportunity to be open to newness of life. The old self has passed away, and the new self, the self that is united to the action of God, the self that is fundamentally *not* who we are: this self is coming to be. Paul puts it like this: "But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:8-11).

This is new life. It happens in things as simple as picking up your prayerbook before you go to sleep, even though everything in you wants to just shut your eyes and rest. It happens when we bridle our tongue and shut our mouths in those moments we most want to shout out and let someone know about our anger. It happens when we appreciate the glory of God appearing in our neighbor, instead of our gazes being wholly focused on ourselves. This is the miracle: new life happens. God flows through us. As Paul says, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? [...] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:35, 37-39). Nothing can separate us from God, which means that God can act in us, no matter who we are, no matter how broken our lives. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom 7:25). Amen.

Prayers of the Parish:

Fire, wind, and water all plague our country this last week. There are so many stories of loss. May God be present for healing in what seems to human sight as an overwhelming reality.

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

The Christian practice of keeping the feast of the Lord's Supper comes from the New Testament, from passages such as Matthew 26:26-29 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Yet, as with so much in the New Testament, there is in the keeping of the Lord's Supper echoes and remembrances of God's dealings with the people of Israel in the Old Testament. One of these echoes is found in manna, that bread of heaven that falls from the sky to feed the Israelites as they make their way through the desert between Egypt and the promised land. What this echo teaches us is how much we depend on this meal. We are in many ways still in the wilderness, still waiting to enter the land of promise. We need food that will sustain us along the way. May we be reminded this week of how God is providing for us through this meal, teaching us about what it means to be in fellowship and to welcome all equally. This is food we need. This meal is a constant reminder that we stand not on our own, but in the forgiveness of God, upon whom we continue to depend for our well-being in this time of continuing exile.

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 into a broken world, may we remember that we ourselves are broken. Free us from the delusions of pride. Fill us with your message of hope, so that we might be conduits making available your love to a world in need—a world in need that most of all includes ourselves. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Announcements and Calendar

Outdoor Church Service, Sunday, September 20th, at 9:30 AM (see information above)

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