

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – APRIL 19 EDITION

South Georgia Conference, churches respond after destructive tornadoes hit region

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

In what was the most significant tornado outbreak in Georgia since April 2020, at least 25 tornadoes were produced in the destructive storms that crossed the state April 5-6.

The most damaging tornadoes occurred in Bryan, Houston, and Dooly counties, and the South Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church responded immediately to assess, respond, support, and meet needs.

“This is the worst disaster that I’ve ever been a part of,” said Coastal District Coordinator Kelly Crane, who lives Rincon, just over the Bryan County line in Effingham County. “I’ve never seen destruction like this from a tornado.”

Tornadoes struck within two miles of her home, and while she and her neighbors were spared damage, nearby Pembroke and Ellabell were two of the hardest-hit areas in South Georgia.

Dozens of homes were destroyed, trees were snapped like toothpicks, and mobile homes were tossed like toys, she said.

“Where this tornado touched down was catastrophic damage.”

On April 6, Crane, Conference disaster response coordinator Luis Morales, and other district disaster response coordinators began initial assessments. The same day, Crane, Coastal District Superintendent Rev. David Thompson, and Conference UMVIM Coordinator Rev. Shannon Baxter spoke with area agencies and churches about a coordinated response following the tornado that hit Bryan County.

Part of that coordinated response included Ellabell and Pembroke United Methodist Churches opening as relief centers and initial donation drop-off sites. Ellabell UMC also served meals and acted as a temporary shelter for linemen, first responders, and anyone affected by the storm.

Through generous offerings, the church collected more than \$120,000 in designated funds for immediate relief for those impacted by the storms.

“Seeing this disaster first hand has been a very emotional experience. It hits home and is different when it’s right here in your own backyard and community. Watching the amazing love and support from the community, surrounding areas, and even from other states has been such a blessing,” said Rev. Dylan Bowden, Ellabell UMC’s pastor. “Seeing how the connectivity of The UMC brings so many people together to be the hands and feet of Christ at work is truly amazing.

We have made a huge impact but still have a long way to go. God is good, even in the midst of chaos and struggles.”

And while the shelters have now been closed, there’s still much work left to do.

“We know this is going to take a long time; this is long-term recovery,” Morales said.

Most of the debris has been hauled away and many of the trees have been cleared, but Early Response Teams (ERT) are still needed to help homeowners pack, clean, move, and repair their homes.

South Georgia’s Disaster Response Team members are working with the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), the Coastal Empire Disaster Recovery Committee (CEDRC), Georgia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), and Bryan County government officials to assess damage and determine next steps.

UMCOR awarded the conference a \$10,000 solidarity grant that – along with additional grants and donations – will help meet needs and finance repairs.

ERT teams and monetary donations are and will continue to be needed in the weeks and months ahead, Crane said. Physical donations are no longer needed.

“We cannot fit one more toothbrush or one more bottle of water in the donation center. It’s just a testament to how people want to help,” she said. “But diapers and toothpaste aren’t going to help people rebuild their houses and that’s what we need to start looking at.”

She urged those interested in serving to continue to monitor the [Conference website](#) for specific needs and requests for teams.

“Everyone can get involved in Early Response Teams,” she said. “We need folks who can help serve meals, we need folks who can help pack and talk to homeowners and do assessments, there’s something for every skill level.”

Effingham County’s Encounter Church constituted

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

On Sunday morning, April 3, 2022, 87 people gathered to worship and celebrate Encounter Church’s founding and constitution into The United Methodist Church.

The mood in the room was expectant and excited as those gathered anticipated an announcement that had for several weeks been teased during worship services and via social media.

Preaching on 1 Kings 8 which tells of Solomon dedicating the temple, pastor Damon Hubert told the congregation its purpose is to point people to Christ.

“That’s what we were designed for. Now that temple is you. That temple is us,” he said. “Everything we do points to God. That’s the point of us as the new temple. Our purpose is to reach the world. That is the most important thing.”

And just as Solomon’s temple was a big deal, Hubert’s big announcement to those gathered was that the church was being formally founded and constituted as a new United Methodist congregation.

While technically a new church, Encounter Church’s story started well before 2022.

More than 11 years ago, on Sunday, Feb. 6, 2011, Gateway Community Church launched a new church in Rincon, in Effingham County. An offshoot of Gateway Community UMC’s main Pooler campus, the church, originally named Gateway Community North, had 35 charter members and was constituted February 3, 2013, with Rev. Andy Lamon serving as pastor.

In 2018, Gateway Effingham – as it had come to be known – merged with The Chapel Ministries and became The Chapel Effingham. During the past three years, The Chapel Midtown in Brunswick and The Chapel Effingham have pooled their resources to more effectively serve and reach their local communities for Christ.

But as the peak of the coronavirus pandemic began to wind down and the Effingham congregation was able to gather in person again, it became important to strike out on their own, said pastor Damon Hubert.

“The Chapel was phenomenal, but when you’re part of something local you have more ownership, you have more of a feel of the direct results of your ministry,” Hubert said. “We are grateful for The Chapel and everything they’ve done, but we wanted to give the opportunity for our local people to have ownership of the ministry we do here.”

Hubert gave thanks to Coastal District Superintendent Rev. David Thompson for his leadership and guidance throughout the process.

“The word church in Greek is ‘ekklesia.’ It means the people called out. People called out of darkness into light, people called out of death into life, out of slavery into service, out of bondage into freedom; we are called out to be His,” said Rev Thompson, who oversaw the official constitution of Encounter Church.

“What an exciting time,” Rev. Thompson said about the day. “Constituting a new church is a complete and total blessing.”



Dr. Don Wood inducted into UMAC Hall of Fame

Compiled from UMAC publications

During the 2022 United Methodist Association of Communicators (UMAC) Annual Meeting, Dr. Don Wood, an ordained elder in the South Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church, was inducted into the UMAC Hall of Fame.

From 1977 until his retirement in 2012, Dr. Wood served as executive director of Good News Television (GNTV), a media ministry within the connectional structure of the South Georgia Conference. During his tenure, he helped steer the ministry from its beginnings as a cable television channel into an audio, video, and lighting production ministry that provided event support for more than 60 events each year.

“GNTV has allowed me to help the church tell its story throughout the world,” Dr. Wood said.

Over the years, GNTV Media Ministry has supported the work of The United Methodist Church across the country. Event production support began in 1978 by providing support for the South Georgia Annual Conference. GNTV started out focusing on video recording, editing, and distribution for events, but quickly learned that events had a need for quality lighting, sound, video projection, and eventually internet streaming. Over the next 34 years, Dr. Wood managed and expanded the work and the reach of GNTV in support of events.

GNTV grew to have a staff of 10 full-time professionals who worked to support events for The United Methodist Church, Presbyterians, Salvation Army, Episcopal Church, Lutheran Church, and several other multi-denominational events. Dr. Wood has attended and helped support more than 150 Annual Conference sessions in his life.

GNTV also worked extensively to create videos that helped the church share what was happening. This work included support for ministries, clergy, local churches, districts, annual conferences, general agencies, and the World Methodist Conference. Hands on in creating videos, Dr. Wood’s love for photography and telling stories was evident.

Dr. Wood created videos that made major contributions, including the 50th Anniversary of the Upper Room; the “Come, Share, Rejoice” series where he traveled to 12 different annual conferences to highlight their work in partnership with United Methodist Communications; Overview Videos from the World Methodist Conferences in Nairobi, Singapore, Rio de Janeiro, and England; the Daily Highlight Overview Videos from the “Youth” events lead by Discipleship Ministries; and a semester-long seminary teaching course about John Wesley in conjunction with Wesley Theological Seminary and experts from around the world.

As a member of UMAC, Dr. Wood’s work has been honored with awards of excellence and certificates of merit, and in 1983 he was named the first Communicator of the Year. He also helped extensively with the volunteer support of General Conference sessions before United

Methodist Communications handled production and served on the advisory committee for United Methodist Communications.

When he retired in 2012, GNTV supported an average of 65 events per year and produced 15 videos each year. During his ministry Dr. Wood traveled to every state in the United States and 15 countries around the world, taping and supporting events. Since his retirement he has continued to travel and work on church events around the world.

“Don Wood has been instrumental in encouraging the larger church to use cable, broadcast television, and later the Internet to share about the work and ministry of the church,” said his son, Rev. David Wood, who now serves as Executive Director of GNTV. “He did this by traveling and sharing about what was happening all across the United States and in the Methodist connection all around the world.”

Dr. Wood received his Master of Divinity from Candler School of Theology at Emory University and his doctorate from McCormick Theological Seminary at the University of Chicago. Before moving to South Georgia he served churches in the Central Pennsylvania Conference.

During UMAC’s annual meeting, James Salley, president and chief executive officer of Africa University (Tennessee) Inc., one of three entities that run Africa University in Zimbabwe, introduced Dr. Wood. Salley said he couldn’t think of a better person than Dr. Wood to receive the honor of being inducted into UMAC’s Hall of Fame.

“Don Wood is a pastor, a communicator extraordinaire and an entrepreneur,” Salley said, noting Dr. Wood embodies the Greek proverb that societies become great when old men and old women plant trees under whose shade they know they will never sit.

“He is a tree planter and a person who has a heart of gold and who is a servant of God.”

Dr. Wood, joined onstage by his wife and son, hugged Salley in gratitude as he accepted the award.

“I didn’t do it,” he said of his honors and accomplishments. “God did.”

[Read more about Dr. Wood in UMAC’s digital program booklet.](#)

The UMAC Hall of Fame is dedicated to men and women who have excelled in the ministry of communications.

History of GNTV under Dr. Don Wood’s leadership

In 1977, with a programming schedule of only two hours a day and a volunteer team assisting him with production, Dr. Wood grew the cable television channel in Macon known as Good News. Focused on local and Methodist programming, programs included Good News, a daily, live half-hour local Christian talk show; Pace Setters, a weekly program aimed at the older adult

ministries taking place in Central Georgia churches; Open Line, a weekly live call-in community service talk show that Rev. Wood hosted for many years; The Georgia United Methodist, a weekly program that highlighted the work of United Methodists across the state and was distributed over broadcast television stations in every city; and the Southeastern Jurisdictional Television Network, which shared videos of the work happening around the region.

Over the next 13 years, the cable channel grew to be on air 24 hours a day with a mixture of local and national church programming. In the late 1980s, as cable systems started to refuse to carry local cable channels, Good News TV lost some of its placements and realized the next step was to become a broadcast television station. Under Dr. Wood's direction, in 1990 WGNM, a Macon-based broadcast television station, was born. It allowed Good News to expand from four cable systems to 15 cable systems and the growth that followed allowed new shows to be produced by Good News.

In 2004, Good News made the challenging decision to spin off the broadcast television station because of the high costs of upgrading to HDTV as required by FCC-mandated changes, and WGNM became part of the Christian Television Network out of Tampa, Fla.

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Denman Award nominations due this week

The South Georgia Annual Conference is now accepting nominations for The Harry Denman Evangelism Award for Clergy, Lay, and Youth.

The Harry Denman Evangelism Award program recognizes United Methodists in each annual conference whose exceptional ministry of evangelism – expressed in Word (what), Sign (why), and Deed (how) – brings people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

Evangelism happens in many contexts and many settings; impacts and engages all generations; and requires relationship among a variety of persons. Persons who demonstrate the spirit of this award are ones whose life and ministry exemplifies the teaching of Christ and the Great Commission.

Recipients of these awards, nominated by individuals, churches, or districts and selected by the Conference Witness Team, live their call to “Offer Them Christ” daily as modeled by Dr. Harry Denman, founder of The Foundation for Evangelism that sponsors these awards.

Neither the size of the local church with which the person is affiliated, the age or gender of the person, nor the length of their service limits a person's eligibility. What is important are the persons whose lives have been changed by the life and ministry of the nominee. (Note: the youth award is limited to individuals who would be considered students - college age or younger.)

The award is named for the late Dr. Harry Denman, who was a distinguished lay evangelist. The awards are made possible by The Foundation for Evangelism, which was founded in 1949 by Dr. Denman, who felt it was the business of every Christian to be an evangelist. It is most fitting that annual conferences today honor persons who carry on the spirit of Harry Denman.

Nominations

To learn more about the award or to download nomination forms [click here](#) or contact the SGA Conference Witness Chair, Rev. Danita Knowles, at danitaknowles52@gmail.com.

Nominations must be received no later than April 20.

Freedom in the King

Spring Quarter: God Frees and Redeems

Unit 2: Liberating Gospels

Sunday school lesson for the week of April 24, 2022

By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: John 8:31-38

Key Verse: John 8:36

Lesson Aims

1. Identify the two referred to as "Father" and "father."
2. Explain the nature of the freedom available in the Son.
3. Create a list of ways to continue abiding in Jesus.

The writer of today's lesson tells us that freedom "can be looked at from at least four angles: (1) those who have freedom, and they know it; (2) those who lack freedom, and they know it; (3) those who have freedom, but they don't realize it; and (4) those who lack freedom, but they don't know it." Now, various forms of the words "freedom," "liberty" and their synonyms occur dozens of times in the New Testament, indicating the importance of this topic of freedom. Our need is to know which of the four categories we're in spiritually.

Lesson Context

Today's scripture passage is a part of a longer discourse that took place in Jerusalem during the Festival of Tabernacles (see John 7:2, 10, 14). The observance was one of Israel's most important celebrations and dated to the time of Moses (see Leviticus 23:33-36, 39-43; Numbers 29:12-34; Deuteronomy 16:13-17, 31:10).

The festival began on the 15th day of the month of Tishri, which is in late September or early October. Its significance was twofold. First, it celebrated the end of the harvest season. Second, it commemorated God's provisions during Israel's wilderness wanderings. After the Israelites left Egypt but before they entered the Promised Land, the people lived in tents. The celebration was to remind Israel of this history. Ultimately the Festival of Tabernacles thanked God for his daily provision.

The festival also provided a backdrop for Jesus to express his divine identity by using terms common in first-century observation: water and lamp light. During the festival, a priest took water from the Pool of Siloam, carried it to the temple, and poured it over the altar. On the festival's final day, the priest marched around the altar without pouring water. This act demonstrated hopeful expectation that the Messiah would provide water as had been promised centuries before (see Joel 3:18). On the festival's seventh day, against this backdrop, Jesus stated, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink" (John 7:37).

Additionally, we are informed that on each night of the festival except on the Sabbath, giant oil lamps were lit in the temple's Court of Women. It was against this backdrop that Jesus proclaimed himself to be "the light of the world" and that whoever followed him will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8:12). Jesus proclaimed himself to be the fulfillment of Israel's messianic hope, speaking the words of his heavenly Father (see 8:28).

I. Jesus Speaks (John 8:31, 32)

The focus of Jesus' teaching was on "the Jews who had" believed in him. Their belief was due in part to his pointed teaching (7:14, 46) and miraculous healing acts (7:21). However, Jesus questioned whether they had true belief of "he who sent me...you do not know him" (7:28). Did their belief go no deeper than simple amazement at his miraculous healing acts?

In the same verse we are discussing (v.31), Jesus established the way to distinguish proper belief from improper belief. It is only those who continue in his "teaching" that were to be counted among his "disciples." Simply to be amazed at and respectful of his miraculous acts and brilliant teaching was not enough. The true and lasting belief was to be found in persistently following Jesus' words, teaching, and commandments (see John 14:15, 21, 29; I John 2:4). Fickle faith in contrast to valid faith is a running theme in John's Gospel (compare and contrast John 2:23-25; 4:48; 5:24; 6:60; 10:38; also 2 John 9; Revelation 2:26).

The Old Testament described Moses as Israel's teacher (see Deuteronomy 4:1-2). Therefore, Jesus' opponents claimed to be disciples of Moses (John 9:28-29). Their claim was appropriate – God spoke through Moses, so to be Moses' disciple was to be God's disciple.

But now God had revealed himself more fully through Jesus, so to listen to the teachings of Jesus was to listen to God (see 7:16; 12:49-50).

God said that he would hold Israel accountable for ignoring the teachings of his prophet Moses (Deuteronomy 18:19). To reject or ignore Jesus' words was the same as rejecting God's words. And as a result, God would hold people accountable, just as he did with ancient Israel. If God punished Israel for not listening to Moses, how much more will he judge those who don't listen to the teachings of Jesus?

Now, to "hold" implies the intimate knowledge disciples are to have of Jesus' teachings. They are to dwell on them and in them.

True discipleship is evidenced by continuing in the Word of God. The implication here is that if we are not continuing the Word, we are not His disciples. So one of the great characteristics of a follower, of a real disciple of the Son of God, is abiding in His Word. How can we know the will of God if we don't stay or live in the Word of God?

In a day when street preachers were a common sight in New York City, a man named Charlie King could sometimes be seen on a street corner near Times Square. What would he be doing? He would be running around his hat, shouting, "It's alive! It's alive!" And when a crowd gathered he would pick up his hat, under which was a Bible, and he would proceed to preach the gospel. "It's alive! It's alive, we are talking about the Bible, especially the teachings of Jesus. As disciples, we are to continue living in the teachings of Jesus.

It may be one thing to follow a Jesus whom we have engineered in our religious consciousness; it is quite another to stay with Jesus when he discloses who he really is.

Any discussion on the nature of freedom might lead to different interpretations. For some, an expression of freedom implies an unrestrained pursuit of personal desires. For others, an expression of freedom may mean nothing more than the ability to refuse to submit to anger – an attitude of defiance. However, these interpretations do not address the freedom that Jesus implies. The freedom to which Jesus alludes is an eternal freedom, not human expectations of earthly freedom.

As disciples continue to follow Jesus' teachings, their knowledge of God's "truth" will expand. We are told that Old Testament Scriptures describe "truth" in terms of God's faithfulness and salvation (see Exodus 34:6; 2 Samuel 2:6; Psalms 25:5; 119:142, 151, 160; Isaiah 61:8). John's Gospel continues with this same idea and applies truth to the person and work of Jesus, "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6; 1:17; 18:37). As disciples remain in Jesus' teachings, they will know his truth: a life made "free" through salvation found in Christ Jesus.

Point! The liberating power of the truth is unknowable apart from being Jesus' disciple, which in turn depends on one's relationship to Jesus' word. The truth and freedom that Jesus promises are

not abstract principles, but light and life are bound to the Word. The truth is the presence of God in Jesus (see 8:14-19, 27-28).

II. Believers React (John 8:33)

Jesus' reinterpretation of freedom evokes resistance in his listeners. Their response to Jesus acknowledges a particular nationalistic identity but showed disregard for a key part of that identity. Their place as "descendants" of Abraham was a central aspect of Israel's covenant with God (see Genesis 13:15; 17:8). Their identity as a people centered on the promises made by God to Abraham. Therefore, to align with Abraham was for ethnic identification that related Israel to God by means of covenant.

However, the declaration that "we...have never been slaves of anyone fails to acknowledge previous commands made to Israel. Moses commanded Israel to "remember that you were slaves in Egypt" (examples, Deuteronomy 5:15; 24:18). It was not as if Jesus' audience suddenly suffered amnesia. It is simply unclear whether they were willfully disregarding their collective history as a people who once lived in bondage or if they were expressing their own personal status having never been in bondage themselves. In either case their declaration showed a failure to follow what Moses had commanded of Israel, but perhaps more significantly, their declaration was a failure to remember their dependence on God.

Here in verse 33, the Jew's words can be read on two levels. First, they can be read as a statement that the Jew's descent from Abraham already guarantees their spiritual freedom so they have no need of what Jesus offers. The claim to be "Abraham's" lineage was true but lacked perspective regarding what was relatively more important – namely the kingdom of God about which Jesus taught.

Second, the Jew's words can be read as a reflection on Jewish history – a wrong reflection. Israel's history is characterized by periods of slavery and captivity and the situation in which the Jews currently find themselves, as subjects of the Roman Empire, is yet one more situation of slavery. Thus, in their desire to distance themselves from Jesus, they have already begun the process of distancing themselves from their own history (19:15).

III. Jesus Responds (John 8:34-38)

In verse 34, Jesus' response instantly upends the Jewish audience's faulty understanding of bondage and freedom. While they are concerned with an earthly sense of bondage, Jesus speaks of a more important form. Jesus applies the bondage metaphor to "everyone who sins." Such a person is a "slave to sin." The ironic aspect is that it is one's own sinful desires that bind a person.

Other New Testament texts continue the bondage theme when discussing the influences of sin. For instance, the Apostle Paul writes that the bondage of sin leads to death (Romans 6:6, 16-17). Therefore, to find freedom, people should seek to become slaves to righteousness" (6:18). And

the Apostle Peter warns against false promises of freedom that lead people to become “slaves of depravity” (2 Peter 2:19).

I read of a man whose testimony illustrates what it means to be a slave to sin. He said that at 16 years of age he became bored and his life became too much for him to handle. He had to do something to pass the time. “Why not? What’s the big deal?” he said to himself as he lit his first cigarette. A practice that he intended to pass the time with grew into something larger. As he got older, smoking had a bigger hold on him. He planned his day around each cigarette and each smoke break. When asked, he was quick to dismiss his habit. Everybody smoked, and he thought he could quite at any time.

In reality, he was addicted to cigarettes. Their influence simply took over his life and affected his health, his job, and his relationships. Often, he would rather be late to work than forgo his cigarettes. He was bound captive to a smoking habit he couldn’t drop.

Simply stated, people can be bound by unchecked sin. Enticing sin seems innocent enough. It seduces people into believing it’s not a big deal – when in fact it brings death.

I want to suggest to you 1 John 3:9, “No one who is born of God will continue to sin.” Here he is not dealing with us who fail God now and then. He is talking about a life that is dominated by sin, a life controlled by sin. And, there is only One who can actually set us free, and whoever the Son sets free, is free indeed.

Jesus continues his response to his Jewish audience (v.35) through the use of a household metaphor. In a wealthy person’s household, a “slave” would work for the master. However, even as a part of “the family,” a servant’s presence was uncertain, as he or she could be sold or set free at any time.

Thus, because they are slaves, their residence in God’s family can be in jeopardy. Hence, sinners who claim to be sons of Abraham may discover that faith, and claims to blood heritage that brings spiritual privilege always stand in question (Galatians 3:6bb; Romans 9:7). Sin ruptures a relationship with God. The “son” who is secure and permanent is likely Jesus himself. If the son in such a large household sets a slave free, he will be free indeed (8:36). Imagine, then, if the Son of God sets a slave free the freedom enjoyed would be indescribable.

In verse 37, Jesus acknowledges that his audience bears the bloodline of Abraham but because of their desire to kill him and their refusal to accept his word, they betray that their lives are not guided by the Father, whose voice Jesus obeys (8:37, 38). Blood lineage does not guarantee spiritual lineage.

Jesus reminds his audience that “if you are Abraham’s children...you would do what Abraham did” (8:39). True children of Abraham follow in the faith of Abraham (see Romans 4:3, 12). As a

result, the people of God expand beyond the scope of an ethnic identification with Abraham (see Romans 9:6-8).

The desire to kill Jesus has been a constant part of the fabric of chapters 7-8 (7:1,25,30,44-45; 8:20), and Jesus now identifies that desire with the absence of any relationship to his word (8:37). The claim to relationship with Abraham must be measured against the relationship with Jesus. True discipleship will always make “room for the word” of Jesus, which bore witness to the Father who sent the Son (John 5:36-40).

Jesus pronounces a contrast in verse 38. On the one hand, Jesus’ word gives witness to his heavenly Father who sent him. On the other hand, Jesus observes that his audience is more concerned with what they “have heard from their father,” the devil (see John 8:44).

In summary, Jesus’ audience thought that their freedom was inevitable because of their ancestry. However, Jesus stated that they were deceived. As long as they refused to listen and adhere to the teaching of Jesus, they would not experience true freedom. They would not really know their heavenly Father. Thus, by failing to heed Jesus, the audience failed to listen to God.

Conclusion

Jesus spoke the truth because he spoke the words of his Father – a declaration of true freedom. Freedom that comes from the Father leads to eternal life with the Son. Consequently, those who desire this freedom seriously will seek Jesus and his Word and become disciples. And as such, they will experience the truth that will set them free.

Action Plan

1. What prevents Christians from following Jesus’ teaching and growing as his disciples?
2. How does the Son’s freedom differ from worldly ideas of freedom?
3. How will you evaluate your habits to make sure you’re living in accordance with God’s truth?

Resources for this lesson

1. “2021-2022 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching,” pages 289-296.
2. “The New Interpretation Bible IX, Luke John,” pages 636-639.
3. “The NIV Application Commentary” by Gary M. Burger, pages 259-261.
4. “An Everlasting Love,” by John G. Mitchel, pages 168-170.

Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries (halbradyministries.com).



Freedom From Sin

Spring Quarter: God Frees and Redeems

Unit 3: Liberating Letters

Sunday school lesson for the week of May 1, 2022

By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: Romans 6:1-14

Key Verse: Romans 6:5

Lesson Aims

4. State the result of dying with Christ.
5. Compare and contrast the old self with the new self.
6. Share a plan of becoming a more effective instrument of righteousness.

The Civil War ended in 1815 with a Union victory. The battle for freedom was long and bloody but ultimately victorious.

As we know, we still experience echoes of slavery in our time. Though freedom for slaves was declared, the long process of becoming equal citizens under the law, is in many ways, an ongoing struggle. Though the parallel is certainly imperfect, some similarities exist between the fight to end slavery in the United States and Jesus' sacrifice to end slavery the world over. The lesson today focuses not so much on the moment of victory, but, instead, the work that is still to be done in the aftermath.

Lesson Context

The nature of the church in Rome was influenced by an edict issued by Emperor Claudius in about AD 49. That edict had forced Jews living in the city to leave (Acts 18:2). The Roman historian Suetonius tells us that Claudius "banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one character," the word Chrestus likely referring to Christ.

This experience most likely fostered a certain division within the Roman church between Gentile and Jewish believers, with each group contending that it had better claim on salvation in Christ than did the other (compare Romans 11:13-24). The expulsion of Jews from Rome resulted in Gentile Christians being in the majority in the church there, if they had not been the majority already. And their majority status seems to have continued even after the death of Claudius in AD 54 which allowed Jews to return to the imperial city. Much of Paul's letters to the Romans is therefore directed specifically to the Gentile believers (11:13).

Paul used this letter as an opportunity to carefully explain the gospel (and his own teaching on it) to an audience who did not know him and had never heard him preach in person. As a result, this

letter contains the most thorough and organized defense of Paul's preaching (Romans 2:16; 16:25). He argued that faith in Jesus is the only way to be justified before God. This justification comes by grace, through faith in Jesus, and not by obedience to the Old Testament law (3:21-26). Both Jew and Gentile are alike in sin, and both can be saved only through the redemption of Jesus (3:23-24).

In Romans 5, Paul again looked closely at the work of Jesus Christ. Adam was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), but gave into temptation. Consequently, through the sin of Adam, death came into the world (3:19;5:12). Jesus, however, has done what Adam could not. Jesus, God himself in the flesh, was sinless despite temptation (Hebrews 4:15). And his death and resurrection brought grace and life to the world (5:17). Now, in Roman 6, Paul turns to examine the practical effect of Jesus' work in our lives.

I. Dead to Sin (Romans 6:1-14)

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” (Romans 6:1). The two questions here are rhetorical (also see 6:2). Instead of seeking an answer from the audience, Paul primed the reader for his answer to the question “Shall we go on sinning” (compare 3:8). As we are informed, we can see in the question this flow of logic: (1) Since forgiveness of sin is a sign of God's grace to us and (2) since grace is a good thing, then (3) why not sin all the more so that we may get more “grace” from God?

Paul's purpose now is to show that being a believer makes a decisive difference in one's relationship to sin. Specifically, Paul says, “we died to sin” (v. 2). What does he mean by this? Clearly he does not mean that Christians are not tempted by sin or that we are incapable of sinning – as his commands in verses 11-14 make clear. Scholars tell us that Paul uses the imagery of “death” for two reasons. (1) it creates an obvious point of contact with the death of Christ, an important step in Paul's argument (vv.3-4). (2) It is a powerful image of a decisive shift in state. When someone becomes a Christian, Paul implies, their change of state in relationship to sin is as dramatic as a change from life to death. And he spells out the implication of their change in another rhetorical question: “How can we live in it any longer?”

This question can easily be turned into a statement: We who are Christians no longer live under the domination of sin. Therefore, we can't go on living in sin the way we used to.

The father in Charles Day's “Life with Father” does not have much interest in religion or the church, His wife is concerned that he has never been baptized, and keeps insisting that he be baptized. At one point in the story, he asks why she is so interested in his being baptized. She replies that she is determined to get him into Heaven some way. He responds, “They won't shut me out on a technicality!”

Is that what baptism is, just a technicality? We see Paul's answer in verses 3-5. Here, he shows how the transfer from the state of sin to new life in Christ has taken place. It is in baptism that we are joined to Christ and to his death and resurrection.

Paul's Roman audience had never heard him preach and so may not have been familiar with the concept of being "baptized into [Jesus'] death." Baptism was commonly understood as a ritual washing away of sins, which John linked explicitly to genuine repentance (see Matthew 3:1-2, 6, 11a; Luke 3:3). And this symbolism was not lost in emerging Christian understandings of baptism but deepened that understanding by tying baptism to faith in Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 19:1-5; 22:16; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21). Paul connected baptism to a personal identification of the believer with Christ (Galatians 3:27).

Notice too that Paul appealed to baptism as a shared experience. The believer has not made a commitment to be carried out in a solitary way but, instead, in solidarity with them who have also taken on Christ. The body of Christ is made up of the many who call him Savior.

"Therefore" (in verse 4) is a fitting analogy for "death." "Through" baptism we are brought into Christ so that his death becomes our death. Baptized persons put sin to death and bury it when they believe, repent, and are baptized (Colossians 2:17). Note also in verse 4 that Paul does not say we were buried "like" Christ, rather, we were buried "with" him.

Most likely, in using the verb "buried," Paul is thinking of the way the Christian identified with Christ in all of the major events of his redemption work. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul rehearses these basic redemption events: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...he was buried...he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and we who believe have participated with Christ in each of these events: we died 'with him' (6:3,5,8), we were buried 'with him' (6:4), we shall be raised with him (6:5,8)." Therefore, baptism stands for our whole conversion experience. In baptism, we have been brought into union with Christ and the powerful events of his redemptive work. The effects of these events are now at work in us, meaning that we now have the ability to "live a new life" (6:4b).

Important to remember! Jesus died, but he was "raised" to life by "the Father." In the same way, our death in "Christ" is not the end but the means for having "new life." At the point of conversion (symbolized here by baptism), the believer's old life of sin ends and a new life begins (8:6-7) God's "glory" that has given Jesus new life does the same for us (8:11).

In verse 5, our sharing in Christ's "resurrection" depends on our unity with his "death." Christian baptism is a likeness of, or a demonstration or reenactment of, the central facts of the gospel messages as defined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 (the death, burial, and resurrections of Jesus). Baptism provides a grand opportunity to be like Jesus!

So when we asked in desperation, "who, in God's name am I?" As Bishop William Willimon put it, "Baptism has the water running down our faces and words saying, "You are, in God's name, royalty!"

II. Alive in Christ (Romans 6:6-14)

In the remainder of this chapter and in Romans 7-8, Paul continues to describe the ongoing battle in which we are keenly aware. As long as we live in this world, the fleshly part of us (the body ruled by sin) will be calling for attention: that will be the part of us through which Satan will work the hardest to capture our allegiance and erode our faith.

Here, however, the apostle insists that we no longer take orders from sin or from its headquarters. Paul uses the term “our old self” to describe the individual under sin’s rule (Ephesians 4:22). But now that we are new creatures in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17), we live under a new master, or by the “new self” (Ephesians 4:24). So by joining with Christ, we no longer are “slaves to sin.” Note that we are not free from temptation, but we are “free” from sin “as the controlling factor in our lives.” God has also given us his Holy Spirit to equip us for the battle, and the Holy Spirit is stronger than Satan (1 John 4:4). Sin will continue to entice, but now it has met its match.

In verse 8, Paul shows that living with Christ automatically follows dying with him. The one always includes the other. As in verse 5, many interpretations think that living with Christ is something a believer has already experienced. But the future tense again more likely refers to that Coming Day when believers will be bodily raised with Christ. But while our bodily resurrection lies in the future we enjoy even now the benefits of Christ’s resurrection.

In verse 9, Paul explains just what Christ’s own resurrection means. He now lives in a state in which death is no longer possible and has no power over him. He has conquered death and, Paul implies, we who belong to him also have the assurance of conquering death.

In verse 10, we see that Jesus’ singular sacrifice for our sin is sufficient for all time (Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:10). It never will be repeated. While Jesus’ “death was to sin,” this doesn’t mean the Christ ever sinned but instead that he submitted to death, which is the consequence of sin. But he now reigns at the right hand of the Father. His “life” is to God, as it was before he laid aside his “glory” to live among us (Ephesians 1:20; Philippians 2:6-8).

In the first half of Romans, Paul personifies three spiritual realities as being tyrants; each has dominion as it reigns over us. All this is described with a language derived from a king’s reigning over his subjects or from a master ruling over his slaves.

The first of these three is death, introduced as a reigning tyrant in Romans 5:14. The second is “sin” explicitly seen as the reigning tyrant in the verse before us (6:12). The third is the “law,” spoken of extensively in chapters 2 and 3, but introduced full as having “authority” in 7:1 (also see 6:14). These three oppress us in different ways. We fear death, we suffer because of sin, and we are judged inadequately by the law (Romans 2:12).

However, Paul urges his readers not to allow the ominous spiritual tyrant of sin to exercise any sort of authority in their lives. Although we are dead to sin, we will continue to struggle against it. And Paul was not talking about abstract sins of the intellect, but about real-world acts that

involve our bodies. Such sins come from yielding to “evil desires.” But in living under Christ’s rule we have been given a path to flee from sin and escape its clutches. Resisting sin is not passive. It requires effort (2 Timothy 2:22). We have been set free from sin alright, but we must also choose to abandon sinful thoughts and behaviors.

Verse 13 makes the same point in a different way. With the words “instruments and parts of your body,” Paul brings before us a picture of all our varied capacities and abilities, which we are to withdraw from the use of our master sin and place at the disposal of our new master God. It is “righteousness,” that standard of right behavior God rewards to us, that we are now to serve.

In verse 14, Paul returns to his language of “sin” as a tyrant, insisting again that it cannot be our “master.” If we allow sin to dominate us, then we position ourselves to be subject to the law. Paul definitely had the Jewish law in mind here, but the application is broader if “under the law” is understood to mean “under the old realm.” Paul has already stated that we are under the law, then we are judged guilty (3:1; 19-20). Anyone who attempts to be righteous by rule keeping will fail (3:23). Law does not save; it points out sin. Obeying the law to the best of one’s ability is certainly wise, but that does not provide the answer for mastering sin. If we allow sin to reign over us, we are putting ourselves right back into slavery, despite the freedom given to us by Christ.

Very important! Instead, we are to be ruled by “grace.” It is not about which law or act of rules we try to keep, but about which master we serve. Apart from grace, we cannot overcome sinful desires. By grace, death has been destroyed, sin’s hold has been broken, and the law has been fulfilled through the perfect obedience of Jesus. And we are told that even when we avoid sinful behavior, we are mastered by sin, if we are doing this in an attempt to earn favor with God (the way of law). If our motivation is to serve God, then righteous behavior will follow naturally.

Conclusion

With Jesus’ resurrection, we see that both the new era of resurrection life and the old era of sin and brokenness exist side by side until Christ’s return. This time of both fulfillment of promises and expectations of future perfection can be called the “already/not yet.” This label points out the tension that exists in this present age. As we know, through faith in Jesus, believers have the beginnings of resurrection life in the Holy Spirit right now (Ephesians 1:13,14). This is our spiritual resurrection and new life in Christ (Colossians 3:1). And the followers of this new life will come with the final resurrection from physical death. For the believers, new life is both present and future.

Note again that our baptism has united us with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With his death, we are set free from slavery to sin. With his resurrection, we are given new life. However, we must make the choice of how we will live in this new freedom. If we continue to live in disobedience we will become slaves to sin all over again. But, if we choose to live in righteousness we will enjoy the new life Christ has purchased for us.

Is baptism a technicality? Not on your life! Baptism is a sacrament. God's grace coming into the life of God's church and working in that church for the saving of believers and the redeeming of God's word.

“Remember your baptism and be thankful!”

Action plan

4. How do you balance a natural fear of death with your faith that death no longer has dominion over you?
5. Reflect how you would explain the meaning of Baptism to another.
6. What change will you make in the coming week to serve Jesus in every aspect of your life?

Resources for this lesson

5. “2021-2022 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching,” pages 297-304.
6. “The NIV Application Commentary, Romans” by Douglas J. Moo, pages 194-201.
7. “The New Interpretation Bible, Volume X Romans, 1 Corinthians, pages 542-543.

Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries (halbradyministries.com).

Surely Not I

PATHWAY TO HIS PRESENCE

B.J. FUNK

I was around nine when one of our neighbors physically abused me. A couple of years older than me, she had already become a “bully.” I felt safe, however, when my sister was around. My older sister, my only sibling, always looked out for me. I had never been more grateful for her protective nature than when this neighbor tied me to a chair and left me inside her humid playhouse.

I could not escape. Not only did she tie me in the chair, but she turned the chair backward at the door, pulled my long ponytail through the door, and then closed the door on my hair. I could not reach the doorknob to open the door. In fact, I could not reach anything. I simply sat there as a prisoner, my head aching from having a door slammed tightly on my hair. If anyone had passed by, they would have seen a long, brown ponytail hanging out of a playhouse door. It certainly would have caused interest. But no one saw. No one came.

I was terrified that I wouldn't be found. Never had I felt so helpless, so trapped, and so vulnerable to another's unkind act. This girl often came to our home, and we went to hers. I

remember many nights playing in her yard until after dark, chasing each other and catching lightning bugs, of which there was always an abundance.

But, why would she do this to me? One other time, she took great delight in telling me there was no Santa Claus. I was crushed. I went in my home and told my mother and sister what I had just learned.

“Who told you that?” my sister, Beverly Ann, asked.

When I said my neighbor’s name, Beverly Ann was furious! I don’t know what my sister said to her, but I am sure it wasn’t pretty! I remember feeling lost inside, aching over the terrible discovery that Santa didn’t exist. Even today, I can remember that feeling. Santa’s name had been associated with so much happiness and fun. I lost something that day, and I was devastated.

Being held captive in that playhouse seemed like forever, but it was likely only 30 minutes or so before I heard Beverly Ann calling my name. Fortunately, my mouth was not taped, so I quickly began answering her. Soon, I was set free. We walked home through the backyard of another neighbor, leaving a remnant of my loud sobs on every blade of grass.

What do I remember most? Besides the fear and helplessness, I remember my loud tears and my sister’s comforting arm around me, taking me home.

This neighbor never apologized, and I don’t know if my parents ever confronted her or her parents. All I remember is how safe it felt to walk back into my home.

In the many years that have passed since then, I have lost touch with that neighbor. Eventually, I grew up, and the disappointment over the non-existence of Santa was replaced with something much more valuable. The love and loyalty of family made Christmas swirl in my heart 12 months out of the year. Laughter at our home overshadowed a neighborhood bully. And, Grace whispered a timeless message into my heart that I never wanted to hear.

“You have the possibility of being just that mean to someone else.”

I was stunned! The pain of hearing those words was much larger than the pain of hearing there was no Santa Claus.

Me? I could actually do that to someone else? Me?

But Grace said ... the same seed of sin is in you that is in your neighbor. Yes, you are capable of that. In fact, quite capable.

I wanted to argue, to defend myself, to say that I *never ever* would do that to another person.

But, with age I have learned the horrifying truth. I can hurt others, too. I have hurt others, too. The nature of the beast of sin is that we are all capable of hurting each other. I didn’t want to hear it then, and I don’t want to hear it now.

But, it is true. Sometimes, I am so close to the reality of sin that I can almost smell the fruit tree in the Garden of Eden. I am so close to sin that I can hear the snake’s giggle when I choose wrong over right. I am painfully aware that my thoughts can bring criticism of another. I am horrifyingly aware that I sometimes choose the prettiest friend over the homely friend. I ache

inside with the reality of Adam's sin which is also my sin. I abhor this sin nature that I received from Adam!

However, I've heard that on a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, and I am beautifully aware that this cross was erected for *my* sin. Jesus hung on it and died for *my* sin. He was resurrected for *my* redemption and eternal life. And, He crushed the head of the serpent and thereby claimed that sin does not have to hold me captive! I don't have to give in to the pull of sin on my life. There is another choice. It is the choice of Resurrection Power and Redemptive Release from captivity.

Hallelujah! What a mighty God we do serve! There truly is victory in Jesus!

When I stand at the foot of the cross, I stand side by side with other sinners, each of us thankful that He would allow us the awesome privilege of coming near Him at all.

Indeed, one day I will stand side by side with that bothersome bully, that terrifying neighbor girl.

And, I will take her hand.

I will love her.

And together we will kneel before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Such is the awesome power of what He did for us at the cross. Sinners repent. Families get back together. Love flows between those torn apart through disagreements and heartaches.

And Jesus will smile as two mean girls hold hands in grateful praise that love covers all our sin.

The Rev. B.J. Funk is associate pastor of Central UMC in Fitzgerald. Email her at bjfunk@bellsouth.net.

The way of the cross leads home

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

ANNE PACKARD

"We had another terrific day over that awful, overheated, windswept land of desolation. Through vast stretches, there are no landmarks by which the pilot can determine his course. He must depend absolutely on his compass. You fly for hours with nothing but sand beneath dust storms which sweep up and hide the sun." "The Bishop Is In A Hurry!" published by Robert E. Daniel

I have received an advanced copy of a new book compiled and edited by Robert E. Daniel titled "The Bishop Is In A Hurry!" which contains the letters from Bishop Arthur J. Moore as he traveled the world supporting and strengthening the Methodist movement to make disciples for Jesus Christ. I allow myself one chapter each morning before I begin that day's work so I may think about Bishop Moore, his travels, and experiences throughout the day. Bishop Moore never

ceases to amaze me and to speak to our present-day trials and tribulations, gifts and blessings, questions and concerns.

The piece I quoted came from his flight from Belgium to the Belgian Congo in 1936. Flights for this journey were a new, innovative way to travel and Bishop Moore must have taken a bit of criticism for this expense because he defended this decision in his writing. He had already spent seven months in the Orient, 25 days sailing to Europe, and another month visiting Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Belgium. After all this time, the Bishop really was in a hurry to get to Africa and attend the conference meetings there. However, his enthusiasm for this modern convenience cannot be hidden and he boarded that plane in Belgium with the excitement of a seven-year-old child on Christmas morning.

The plane, which also carried mail and medicine, only had a crew of three, including a pilot, co-pilot, and radio mechanic. It also only had room for three passengers, which included Bishop Moore, his friend Homer Rodeheaver, and a third, unnamed traveler. The engines, located at both the front of the plane and the back, were so loud that talking to those sitting nearby was impossible. Flying just 8,000 feet above the ground, Bishop Moore remarked that the trenches of the Argonne Forest from the World War (WWII had not yet started) could still be seen and marveled at the French Alps just a few thousand feet below him. After traveling over the Mediterranean Sea, the plane landed in northern Africa, completing the first day.

The next three days of travel would take the passengers and crew over the Sahara Desert where they would find vast stretches of sand with no landmarks in sight. The overheated air currents made their flight choppy and everyone was nauseous. The plane landed in an oasis the first night where the passengers had a hard time finding water to drink because all that was offered were whisky and wine. During the second day in the desert, the crew landed at the “loneliest spot I know anywhere in the world” where there were only two men working at a Shell Oil Company gas station. Bishop Moore ate no food in the morning due to nausea but nibbled on some dried figs and chocolate he carried with him. He filled his ears with cotton to “soften the everlasting hum of the three motors,” but his nerves were frayed. Then, on the third day (why is it always the third day with Christians), the plane encountered an African tornado. “The lightning flashed and the wind handled our huge plane like a leaf. We were blown sideways – lifted upward – and dropped into huge air pockets.”

There are times in our religious lives where we might feel like we are with Bishop Moore flying 8,000 feet above a vast, desolate sea of sand with no landmarks in sight. We are virtually alone, the noise in our ears is deafening, and we are unable to communicate with others, even those near to us. Our nerves are frayed, the air is hot and choppy, and our stomachs are nauseous. When things couldn't get any worse, we are hit with an African tornado and the lightning blinds us and reminds us how truly vulnerable we are.

What should we do? Will we never get off this plane and out of the desert?

“Leaving Bison-Sank, we were off for our longest single hop of the entire flight – from 9:05 a.m. until 4:55 p.m. without the sight of a living thing. Almost halfway the company has erected in the desert a white cross. It is the one guidepost in that wilderness of sand. Find that cross and all is well. Miss it and you are lost. I have no words to describe our thrill when we sighted it about 2:00 p.m. Our pilot made a circle about it and then took a straight course for Niamey, where we are spending night. What a parable of life! The way of the cross leads home.”

Bishop Moore wasn't yet out of the desert, but he had found the cross and that led him home. And we all say together, “Thanks be to God!”

Anne Packard serves as Conference Historian and director of the Arthur J. Moore Methodist Museum on St. Simons Island. Contact her at director@mooremuseum.org.

Retired Clergy Birthdays – April 2022

4/01 – Ed Chance: PO Box 524; Wrens, GA 30833
4/01 – Danny Treadway: 1417 Peabody Dr.; Maryville, TN 37803
4/03 – Jennifer Sherling: 2447 Tuxedo Place; Albany, GA 31707
4/05 – O.C. Dean, Jr.: 265 Three Oaks Dr.; Athens, GA 30607
4/05 – Kay Stanaland: PO Box 905; Murrells Inlet, SC 29576
4/07 – Jim Hamlin: 322 S. Houston Springs Blvd.; Perry, GA 31069
4/08 – Terry DeLoach: 209 Dixie St.; Brooklet, GA 30415
4/09 – Sandra Henry: 111 Laurel Overlook; Canton, GA 30114
4/09 – Glenn McCranie: PO Box 493; Grandy, NC 27939
4/12 – Tim Bagwell: 192 Barrington Hall Dr.; Macon, GA 31220
4/12 – Gerald Goodman: 1572 Fluker Kiel Rd.; Coffeetown, AL 36524
4/15 – Leigh Ann Raynor: 212 Torrington Blvd.; Thomasville, GA 31757
4/16 – Nick Hazelton: 517 Ferncliff Terrace; Macon, GA 31204
4/16 – Wesley Kaylor: 855 Chokey Rd.; DeSoto, GA 31743
4/16 – Barbara Nelson: 1106 Merrill Dr.; Dublin, GA 31021
4/16 – Tom Nichols: 414 Cardinal St.; Pooler, GA 31322
4/16 – Jimmy Sharp: 2225 Teate Rd.; Vienna, GA 31092
4/18 – Frances Howell: PO Box 658; Midway, GA 31320
4/24 – Willie Lucas: 607 Holloway Ave.; Albany, GA 31701
4/27 – B.J. Funk: PO Box 187; Chula, GA 31733
4/28 – Bert Alexander: PO Box 964; Pine Mountain, GA 31822
4/28 – Carol Smith: 1931 4th Street Lane NW; Hickory, NC 28601
4/29 – Sam Watkins: 1937 E. DeRenne Ave., Savannah, GA 31406
4/30 – Don Kea: 5300 Zebulon Rd., Garden Home 20; Macon, GA 31210

OBITUARIES

The Reverend Grady Watson Mills II

The Reverend Grady Watson Mills II of Savannah, Georgia passed away on March 28, 2022, at St. Joseph's Hospital.

He was born in Millen, Georgia on June 17, 1943, to Ellis Willard Mills SR. and Myrtle Jenkins Mills. Raised in Waynesboro Georgia, he graduated from Waynesboro High school in 1961.

While in high school Grady was the drum major for the marching band. With such creativity and talent, he excelled at twirling the fire Baton enjoyed dancing and parades.

After high school, Grady received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Valdosta State University. He then received his Masters of Christian Education from Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. While in Atlanta he served as youth pastor at Sardis United Methodist Church. It was here he met his bride to be, Brenda Gail Cook of Atlanta. The two wed on August 23, 1968. He spent the following three years as a Lieutenant in Infantry, including a year in Vietnam with the United States Army.

Grady served full time ministry for 22 years in the South Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church: Perry United Methodist, Vineville United Methodist, and White Bluff United Methodist. He spent five years in the Florida Conference serving First United Methodist Church Winter Park, and 7.5 years in the South Carolina Conference serving St. Paul United Methodist Church, Florence.

During his time in ministry, he served as Minister of Christian Education, serving both children and adults. While at Vineville UMC he developed a senior adult program called, "The Grady Bunch". While A senior program was also begun at Winter Park. One of his favorite foreign missions was in Zimbabwe.

Someone once said of Grady, "what he does and what he contributes to a church doesn't quite fit into any neat category. Grady is sort of a presence, a catalyst, a center. An atmosphere in which creativity occurs, not always with measured organization, but invariably with excitement."

Grady leaves behind his wife Brenda; two children, Jennifer Elizabeth-Mills Godwin (Bobby) of Brooklet and Christopher Lyle Mills (Allison) of Savannah; four grandchildren, Chelsea Renee' Godwin and Brandon Wesley Godwin of Brooklet, Christian Aiden Mills and Cameron Brayden Mills of Savannah; a brother, Ellis Mills (Polly) of Savannah, and sister Cynthia Mills Roberts (Woody) of Barnesville. Also 12 nieces and nephews.

The passing of Reverend Grady W. Mills II from this life is felt by the many whose lives he touched in meaningful ways. His physical presence will be deeply missed.

The family will receive friends from 10 until 11 o'clock Tuesday morning, April 5, 2022, at Asbury Memorial Church – 1008 East Henry Street.

A Celebration of Life service will be held at 11 o'clock Tuesday morning, April 5, 2022, at Asbury Memorial Church conducted by the Reverend William G. Hester. Interment will be private.

In lieu of flowers the family asks that contributions be made to Asbury Memorial Church – 1008 East Henry Street, Savannah, Georgia 31401-7128, The American Cancer Society – Suite 102, 4849 Paulsen Street, Savannah, Georgia 31405-4424, and The Savannah Theatre's Tickets for Troops – 222 Bull Street, Savannah, Georgia 31401.

Scripture Readings – April 19 edition

April 24

Second Sunday of Easter

Psalm 150 (UMH 862)

Acts 5:27-32

Revelation 1:4-8

John 20:19-31

May 1

Third Sunday of Easter

Psalm 30 (UMH 762)

Acts 9:1-6

Revelation 5:11-14

John 21:1-19

May 8

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Psalm 23 (UMH 754 or 137)

Acts 9:36-43

Revelation 7:9-17

John 10:22-30

Events in the South Georgia Conference – 4/19/2022 edition

United Methodist Men Spiritual Life Retreat – April 22-23

The South Georgia Conference's United Methodist Men will gather for their annual retreat April 22-23 at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. Bishop James Swanson, episcopal leader of the Mississippi Conference and president of the General Commission of United Methodist Men,

will be the featured speaker. The Goshen Travelers Praise Band will provide musical leadership. [Download brochure](#)

Basic ERT Training, Gray – April 30

A Basic ERT Training Course will be held Saturday, April 30 at Gray UMC. The ERT training will begin at 8 am. Lunch is included. For questions, please contact Rob Belknap at RWBelknap@cox.net or 478-397-8712.

Native American Ministries Sunday – May 1

Native American Ministries Sunday celebration is May 1, 2022. This offering funds urban ministries with Native Americans, scholarships for Native Americans attending United Methodist seminaries, and annual conference Native American ministries. [Download an UMCOR Sunday Pastor and Leader's Kit](#)

Magnolia Manor Sunday – May 8

Magnolia Manor is a South Georgia Conference ministry that serves older adults of all faiths in eight locations throughout South Georgia. On this Special Sunday, South Georgia United Methodists are asked to take up a special offering to support this vital ministry. To learn more about Magnolia Manor visit www.magnoliamanor.com.

Living Life to the Fullest: An Older Adult Retreat at Epworth By The Sea – May 16-19

This three-day retreat, held May 16-19 at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island, will be fun, informational and spiritual. [Housing Registration](#) / [Schedule](#)

Online Advanced Lay Servant Training – May 17, May 19, May 24, May 26

Lay Servant training is designed to educate those persons interested in stretching their faith to participate more fully in the ministries of the church. They have three main areas of focus: Leading, Caring, and Communicating. The advanced class, based on Cokesbury's book, "Each One a Minister," by William Carter is a study of the book of Ephesians and what it teaches us about how we are called to use our spiritual gifts. Advanced LSM Training includes learning how to put your spiritual gifts into service. This training will be offered via Zoom. You must complete all of the scheduled dates above to complete your training. To participate you will need either a cell phone that will allow you to download the Zoom app (please do so ahead of time) or a laptop, a steady wi-fi connection, and a willingness to learn in a modern way. Registration fee for the class is \$25. (Note: Basic Lay Servant class must be completed before taking Advanced Class.) For more information, contact Anne Bosarge at abosarge@sgaumc.com.

2022 Annual Conference session – June 5-8

The 2022 Annual Conference session is set for June 5-8 in Columbus, Ga.