

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – NOVEMBER 1 EDITION

‘Hands on Homerville’ brightens up a community

By Allison Lindsey, Advocate contributor

A drive through rural South Georgia where US Highways 441 and 84 intersect brings you to the heart of Homerville, Ga. in Clinch County. With a population of 2500, this town boasts of its hospitality, quality of living, and spirit of community expressed in their slogan, “There’s No Place Like Homerville.”

The residents take great pride in their town. This pride and the generosity of the people are now showcased through an event called “Hands on Homerville,” which brings this small community together to serve in big ways.

For several years, Rev. Joseph Carter, pastor of Homerville United Methodist Church, brainstormed ideas about how residents could give back to the community in tangible ways. His idea: a day of service designed for loving their town and caring for God’s creation. The inaugural launch of Hands on Homerville in 2021 was a one day event with 150 participants. But what unfolded that day took on a life of its own, displaying an energy that is nothing short of inspiring and contagious.

Fast forward to October 1, 2022, early on a Saturday morning and the parking lot of Homerville UMC begins to fill up with vehicles. Individuals of all ages stand together shoulder to shoulder - three hundred in number ranging from six years old and up - all dressed in their safety orange event t-shirts ready to roll up their sleeves and get to work.

A yellow school bus rolls into the parking lot, and, along with the head football coach, 80 Homerville Panther football players unload ready to tackle the day. The coach encouraged his players to take advantage of this opportunity to give back to the community that supports them under the Friday Night Lights, and that is exactly what they did, giving up a Saturday morning to jump in and serve. The technology department from the High School also came out flying a drone over the town capturing miles of orange t-shirts as work teams spread out in different areas.

“The registration was online, and we encouraged groups to sign-up and pick team names,” Rev. Carter explained. “Groups really had fun with this. The teams included the hospital, Board of Education, local businesses, civic groups, churches, industries, a boy scout troop, families and individuals.

“It truly brought all ages and all walks of life in Homerville together for a common purpose - to make the town they love more beautiful,” he said.

The pride in this community even extended beyond local residents. There was a mystery team named “Rhonda’s Georgia House” signed up for the event. Rev. Carter later learned this was a group from Florida who traveled each year to enjoy deer hunting in Clinch County, eventually purchasing a house, hence the name Rhonda’s Georgia Home. Joining in the energy and community spirit, these Floridians also offered themselves for this day of service.

All in a four hour time span Homerville was transformed: a Boy Scout troop - with the blessing of the Fire Chief - painted fire hydrants; a team of ladies re-stripped an entire parking lot by the Post Office; litter pick-up happened all throughout the city limits; medians were spruced up; the historic city office building, which houses the Huxford Genealogical Library, received some much needed care; and mowing, edging, and debris clean up called for some hard-core teams breaking out front-end loaders and other equipment.

Because of Hands on Homerville an overgrown city park was cleaned up by a local industry business. These business leaders, after seeing the success of the event, adopted the park and installed new playground equipment providing a revitalized place for recreation and enjoyment for all ages.

“We are all amazed by all that has been accomplished and the spirit in which it has been done,” Rev. Carter said. What did these workers receive for their labor? A free t-shirt, a boxed lunch, and the pride of accomplishing so much together for their community.

“This is an accomplishment they visually see each and every day,” he said.

Carter continues to hear stories of in-kind donations from businesses, the impact on those who served, and the appreciation from city and county employees that find it challenging at times to keep on top of all that needs to be done.

It is well known that Homerville UMC and the Main Street Program are the coordinators of this event, but if you ask around to find out who is responsible for this beautification project, you will hear simply, “Hands on Homerville.” The community has shaped, supported, and taken ownership of this event, and those spearheading this effort love that this is where the credit is given and feel the credit is due.

Plans are already underway for 2023 with anticipation of continued growth. Rev. Carter says he now has individuals sharing things they have noticed which need attention around town and want to add to the project list for the future.

Interested in coordinating an event like this in your community? For more information and best practices, reach out to Rev. Joseph Carter at jic31634@gmail.com.

Allison Lindsey is a member of St. Mark UMC in Douglas, Ga. and chairs the Conference Nurture Team.



Bishop Graves calls for special Annual Conference Session

Bishop David Graves, episcopal leader of the South Georgia Annual Conference, in accordance with ¶603.5 of the 2016 United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, calls for a special session of the annual conference on **Sunday, May 21, 2023**. The meeting will begin at 4 pm using the Zoom Webinar platform in conjunction with an online voting system.

The sole purpose of the special called session of the Annual Conference* is to complete the process of ratifying the current requests for disaffiliation of local churches who have met the requirements outlined in ¶2553 of the *Book of Discipline* and who have met the published South Georgia Conference deadlines.

The special session will consider only matters pertaining to this call; no other business can be considered.

The voting membership of the special session will consist of the clergy members of the annual conference as defined in ¶32 of the *Book of Discipline* and the lay members of the June 2022 Annual Conference (lay member or alternate, whoever was last seated in the June annual conference) in accordance with the *Book of Discipline* ¶602.5**.

Specific delegate instructions and information will be distributed by the Conference Secretary in the Spring.

According to the current [South Georgia Conference disaffiliation policy](#), the deadline for a church to disaffiliate at the Annual Conference Session is April 1 of the same year. The Bishop’s announcement of a called session does not change this timeline.

Key dates and deadlines regarding disaffiliation are posted on the South Georgia Conference website at www.sgaumc.org/disaffiliation-timeline.

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*The *Book of Discipline* ¶603.5: A special session of the annual conference may be held at such time and in such place as shall have been determined by the annual conference after consultation with the bishop, or by the bishop with the concurrence of three-fourths of the district superintendents. A special session of the annual conference shall have only such powers as are stated in the call. (See Judicial Council decision 397)

**1 - No local charge will be deprived of its lay member due to death, serious illness, or cessation of membership. Under such circumstances, another lay member may be elected by the charge conference (¶602.5). If your charge is affected, please contact the Conference Secretary. 2 - If a clergy member or lay member of the June 2022 conference has since withdrawn membership from The UMC or is a part of a church that has since disaffiliated, he or she is no longer eligible to vote. 3 - Lay members elected at charge conferences in the Fall of 2022 will be seated as voting members at the regular session of the Annual Conference meeting in June 2023 in Tifton, Ga.

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Jurisdictional Conference to elect bishops Nov. 2-4

The Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference will be November 2-4, 2022, at Lake Junaluska Conference Center in North Carolina.

The primary business of the session will be the election and assignment of bishops. There are nine nominees for bishop.

Originally set for July 15-17, 2020, the SEJ Conference was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council of Bishops has called for Jurisdictional Conferences across the U.S. to meet November 2-4, 2022.

The South Georgia Conference delegation to General Conference and Jurisdictional Conference is chaired by Rev. Robert Beckum.

More information, included information on bishop nominees, a proposed agenda, and the Advance Daily Christian Advocate can be found at www.sejumc.org/sej-conference-2022. A live stream of the conference will be available on this website beginning Nov. 2.

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South Georgia Conference seeks Chief Financial Officer

The South Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church is currently seeking a Chief Financial Officer (CFO). This role is responsible for all financial responsibilities in accordance with the appropriate sections of the *Book of Discipline* of The UMC.

The South Georgia Conference includes the geographical area of South Georgia with Columbus, Macon, and Waynesboro as the Northern boundary. In addition to overseeing the financial and benefit functions of the Conference, the CFO also supports the overall administrative office functions of the Conference. The CFO relates to the Council on Finance and Administration, Board of Pension and Health Benefits, Board of Trustees, Personnel Committee, and Equitable Compensation Commission. The CFO serves on the Extended Cabinet, as the Conference Statistician, and on other conference teams and committees when appointed or requested to do so.

This individual will succeed [Dr. Derek McAleer who will retire December 31](#).

The *Book of Discipline* gives the South Georgia Conference Council of Finance & Administration (CFA) the authority to hire this position. CFA, under the guidance of Rev. Dr. Shane Green, senior pastor of St. Paul United Methodist Church in Columbus and chair of CFA, is utilizing the services of the General Conference on Finance and Administration in the hiring process. Throughout the process, Dr. Green is also in consultation with the Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits (BOP) as this position also supports their work.

The primary roles of the Chief Financial Officer include:

- Prepares and develops the Conference budget in consultation with the Council on Finance and Administration.
- Oversees the receipt and disbursement, in accordance with the actions of the Annual Conference and the provisions of the Book of Discipline, remittances from local church treasurers for all duly authorized general, jurisdictional, annual conference, and district causes.
- Executes the policies established by CFA relating to cash flow, investments, and other financial matters.
- Provides counsel and guidance to districts, local church treasurers, financial secretaries, and committees on finance regarding their fiscal responsibility and the development of standardized financial recording.
- Calculates all Conference apportionments as approved by Annual Conference and distributes apportionments to local churches, as well as coordinates the preparation and distribution of monthly apportionment statements and bills to local churches.
- Coordinates the preparation and distribution of regular and periodic reports related to receipts and disbursements to appropriate persons, boards, and agencies.
- Collaborates with the Council on Finance and Administration on the annual audit and revising the procedures of the Finance Office according to the audit findings with consultation of CFA.
- Oversees and manages receiving, recording, and disbursing Conference funds to the appropriate recipients.
- Oversees administrative areas of the Conference office, ensuring compliance with the Book of Discipline, Conference office policies, applicable employment laws, regulations, and industry standards.
- Provides oversight of the Human Resources and Benefits functions regarding, but not limited to, the establishment of Benefit Plans, Wespeth relationships, and staffing, recruiting, and training of conference employees.
- Serves as the Conference Pension and Benefits Officer for Wespeth on all matters relating to pension benefits and services under the Clergy Retirement Security Plan (CRSP) and Comprehensive Protection Plan (CPP).
- Serves as the Conference Statistician in the preparation of the annual reports and coordinates the development of Statistical Tables for the Conference Journal.

- Collaborate with the Board of Trustees in securing adequate property and liability insurance, worker’s compensation insurance, and all other insurance needed by the Conference.
- Prepares and/or reviews, distributes, and interprets accurate and timely month-end and year-end reports for all Conference boards and agencies, local churches, and other related parties as may be required.

The position is based in Macon, Ga. and is open to lay and clergy persons.

[For more information and to apply, click here.](#) Interested applicants can also email a resume and cover letter to jobs@gcfa.org. The closing date for applications is November 21, 2022. If you have any questions about the open position, please contact Cianta Hogan, GCFA HR Manager, at 615-369-2357.



**FROM THE BISHOP
DAVID GRAVES**

Dear Friends of the South Georgia Conference,

I look forward with great joy and anticipation to what lies ahead for the South Georgia Conference in this next season: a prayer emphasis in 2023, a more focused approach to clergy mental health, conversations around disrupting and dismantling racism, rolling out relevant resources for local churches, and plans for new congregations and fresh expressions across the conference. We have much to be excited about!

I do, however, acknowledge that this has been a challenging season for so many of us. Churches - made up of clergy and laity with whom we have deep relationships with - are making decisions to explore options outside of our United Methodist connection. Rev. Grace Guyton explained so aptly what many of us are feeling in her recent Advocate column, [“Grief and Loss.”](#) She’s right, we don’t have any liturgy to turn to for these occasions or any rituals to acknowledge what we’ve lost.

I spent the month of September sharing my heart with people all across the South Georgia Conference. You know from these conversations that I will be a United Methodist bishop, and I pray each member, clergy person, and church would choose to remain in the South Georgia Conference. During these conversations, I spent time answering a lot of questions. In order to share those questions and answers with more people, we have developed a [video](#) as well as [written FAQs](#). We have also put together [a timeline for local churches](#) around disaffiliation.

The Cabinet, Conference Staff, Conference Chancellor, Conference Trustees, and so many others have spent a lot of time putting out information to help local churches. We also have task force groups working on the future of the South Georgia Conference and on fresh expressions and exciting new ministry possibilities. I am thankful for all of these individuals and their work on our behalf.

Now as we move forward, I want you to know my commitment is focusing on the people and churches of the great South Georgia Conference and moving forward in this next season of ministry together.

God is at work in great ways, and I look forward to how we, together as the South Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church, can change our corner of the world.

In Christ,

Bishop David Graves

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FAQ document, Video, & Disaffiliation Timeline

The Bishop, Cabinet, Conference Staff, Conference Chancellor, and the Conference Trustees have worked together to develop a timeline around disaffiliations to help guide local churches. [View the timeline here](#). In addition, Bishop Graves and conference leadership have put together a [video](#) as well as [written FAQs](#) based on questions received at the September gatherings across the conference with laity and clergy.

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North Katanga Partnership Highlight – Nov. 2022

With significant local effort, the construction of Lupandilo United Methodist Church is still in progress. The North Katanga Annual Conference expresses their gratitude to the South Georgia Annual Conference for supporting this ministry through the purchase of bags of cement powder. The construction of this new sanctuary is led by Rev. Odette Makonga Kyakutala, a female clergy in the North Katanga Conference.

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Encounter Youth Retreat is November 18-20

Registration is open for Encounter, the Conference's annual youth retreat for students in sixth through twelfth grades. **Encounter Youth Retreat** will take place November 18-20, 2022, at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. [More information & registration](#)

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God Picked You!

Fall Quarter: God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 3: We are God's Artwork

Lesson 10

Sunday School Lesson for the week of November 6, 2022

By Craig Rikard

Lesson Scripture: Acts 19; Ephesians 1:1-14, Revelation 2:1-7

Key Text: *Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Eph. 1:3*

Authors note: All lesson intended to serve as a supplement to the Teacher's Book. Traditional pronouns are used; however, God transcends gender and language.

Introduction

Christianity was initially understood to be a small Jewish sect. However, after the call of Paul, the faith spread into the Greek and Gentile world. At the time of Paul's death, Christianity was moving toward Europe.

Paul was reared in a Jewish home residing in a Greek city, Tarsus. A devout Pharisee, Paul was known for persecuting Christians. However, the book of Acts seems to indicate that the stoning of Stephen, and especially Stephen's words prior to his death, greatly unsettled Paul. Stephen's death is followed by Paul's conversion on the Damascus Road. He was known for hunting down Christians in the beginning; after Damascus he was known for hunting down souls for Christ.

The words God spoke to Paul after his conversion are revealing. God told Ananias in Acts 9 to go to Paul, for "I will show him how much he must suffer in my name." In our human nature, we would think that promising Paul blessing upon blessing would lead him to embrace his call. However, Paul is told from the beginning that he will suffer. The call of Paul was so personal and real that Paul did not question the adversity awaiting. Of course, Paul was blessed and lived a spiritually wealthy life; yet, he was shipwrecked and thrown in jail on several occasions. Even so, Paul's faith did not waver, nor could any act of suffering deter him from fulfilling his call.

Our text is taken from the salutation of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It is believed Paul wrote this letter while imprisoned in Rome the first time. One of the great attributes in Paul's life was his hope. Hope isn't simply "wishing" things will turn out well. Hope to Paul meant that Christ was present in every moment of his life, wasting not one second of it, and leading him toward a day of eternal glory. Thus, Paul could write in 2 Corinthians 4: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." Paul is imprisoned in Rome but filled with hope.

When we read the letters of Paul, we often fail to consider Paul's personal growth in the faith. Paul was not a completed product when God called him. There was much for Paul to see, experience, and understand. Therefore, the earlier letters of Paul are different from the later letters. The letter to the Ephesians is most certainly written near the end of Paul's life. It is filled with spirituality and a greater understanding of the will of God as it was revealed in Jesus Christ.

As Paul ministered in the Greek world, he was growing in his faith. God's truth has always been revealed in a myriad of ways in the world. The Greeks may initially not have believed in Christ. However, they did possess an understanding of the human spirit. Whereas the Jews believed the body and spirit are inseparable, the Greeks believed the body to be a "prison of the soul." Thus, at death, the soul enters into an enlightened state. In Judaism, the soul and body are one, and in Jewish Christianity, the body and spirit are resurrected. As Paul ministered in the Greek world, he recognizes those nuggets of truth God has revealed in the Greek world. Thus, his understanding of death and resurrection is slightly broadened. You will notice today that our understanding of death and resurrection is far more Greek than Jewish. We believe the spirit of that person is with God, and, still, there will come a day of resurrection.

The above paragraphs are written only to help us understand that Paul was in a constant state of growth. By the time Paul wrote Ephesians he had experienced a myriad of events that informed and illuminated his faith. Consequently, you will notice that Ephesians appears to possess far more spirituality than 1 Thessalonians, one of Paul's first letters. The initial letters of Paul addressed specific church problems. Ephesians, on the other hand, seems to be a reminder of what God has done through Christ and a celebration of the wonder and power of our faith.

The Epistle

As stated above, the Ephesian letter addresses no specific church problem. It is a letter that would bless all churches. Thus, it is one of the “circular” letters that was passed from church to church. This letter would prove very important to the developing Christian Church growing throughout Asia Minor.

Our text consists of the letter’s salutation. Paul wrote letters much like we do today. There was the opening greeting, the body, and the conclusion. The salutation was never intended to become “church doctrine.” The salutation is much akin to our writing, “I hope you are doing well and in good health.” I listened to a sermon on television while traveling. The preacher chose Paul’s salutation as his text. It read, “I pray you prosper and are in good health.” From these words of greeting, the pastor began preaching that God wants everyone to be financially prosperous and to avoid illness. I could appreciate his reverence for the Word. However, he had taken the text out of context and attempted to create a doctrinal premise that the Gospel did not support.

Certainly, we mean what we write; but the intent of our letter is not found in the salutation. If my daughter wrote me a letter she would most likely write, “I hope you and Mom are well. I miss you very much.” From there she might write, “I have run into a lot of expenses I had not expected.” At this point she has moved into the body, the main reason she is writing. She needed money! Most of Paul’s letters are written in a similar fashion. There is an affirming salutation prior to Paul moving into the body of the letter.

We can note that the salutation in the letter to the Ephesians is rather unique. The opening flows into the body and is filled with expressions of spirituality that are enlightening. Beginning with verse 4 Paul continues his salutation and begins to offer an understanding of why his readers are so blessed.

Paul Writes in Immeasurable Joy and Confidence

Before examining Paul’s words in verse 4 and forward, I want to express the overall feeling I have, as do many, when reading the opening to Ephesians. One of the beautiful attributes of Paul was his “inexpressible joy.” He almost reminds us of a person so happy they can’t stop talking. He moves from one expression of joy and gratitude to another. There never seems to be enough words. The opening to Ephesians contains the longest sentence in the New Testament. Verse 14 is a little over 200 words long! In 2 Corinthians 9:15 Paul was similarly enraptured and overjoyed over what God has done. He wrote, “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift.” The phrase “inexpressible gift” implies there are not enough words to capture the deep sense of joy Paul feels.

The best expression I can write as I read Paul’s salutation is that Paul’s words are “baptized in joy.” The joy, gratitude, and hope of Paul seem to breathe through his choice of words. Our first adopted daughter arrived six months earlier than expected. I was overwhelmed by the news, and I was so happy I felt my heart would burst. I called Gail at work and immediately said, “We have a baby girl! We are to pick her up in the morning!” Gail responded in an equally excited tone, “How old is she?” I answered, “Two weeks!” She then asked non-stop questions, “How much does she weigh; how long was she?” I couldn’t answer. I was so excited I failed to ask. Gail wanted to know so we could quickly buy clothes, formula, a crib, etc. Those first days were the most excited of our married life. We called everyone we knew and started most conversations with, “Guess what?” We were baptized in joy, indescribable joy. To this day I am truly at a loss of words to describe our joy and gratitude in those days.

Paul felt such joy in expressing how God had blessed us in Jesus Christ. He uses every word available and moves from one thought to another. I can imagine how the churches must have felt reading this letter from Paul. Times were tense and at times dangerous. Their apostle, Paul, proclaims, from jail an excited hope, an unwavering faith, and inexpressible joy to those Christians who possibly faced an uncertain future. Paul, overall, seems to joyfully proclaim to them: “Look what God has done for us in Christ!” “Consider how blessed we are!” “This is the Christ who is with us now, and always!”

Have you experienced a moment of joy - or moments of joy - that left you speechless? How did you share this moment with others in your life? As you recall your initial experience of choosing Christ and uniting with His Church, can you share how you felt?

We Are the Chosen: The Overjoyed, Blessed People of God

In the opening of the Ephesian letter Paul introduces himself as the author, reminding them he is an apostle by the will of God. If left to human factors alone, Paul most likely would never serve as an apostle. He had made the early Christians objects of scorn and ridicule. He actually believed the faster those who followed Jesus could be eradicated the better. He ordered their stoning and death. However, during the stoning of Stephen a voice must have spoken in his conscience, and it disturbed him. Consequently, his heart was fertile for that converting, transforming moment on the Damascus Road.

Can you identify a moment in your journey of faith that opened your heart to Christ? If so, in what way do you think it was related to your surrendering to Christ?

We can only image the disbelief of some early Christians when they heard Paul was a Christian. Ananias must have been uneasy when God called him to approach Paul. If left solely to their humanity, the Christian community would have run in the opposite direction from Paul. However, the will of God was at work. Historically, God has chosen the most unlikely people to become his instruments of redemption. He chose the weak nation of Israel, captives in Egypt, to proclaim to the nations there is one God only. He chose a babe placed in an ark on the Nile to later receive the decalogue. He chose judges like Deborah, a woman, to deliver Israel. He chose Gideon, the least of a small tribe, to lead his people against Midian. He chose a peasant girl and a working-class young man to bring the Messiah into the world. Jesus chose 12 regular men with feet of clay to found the future church. And, now, to proclaim the redeeming Gospel to the entire world God chose, of all people, Paul.

All of us are chosen by God to embody Jesus and to become the living expression of Jesus in the world. The Church is indeed the “body of Christ” in the world. We too quickly disqualify ourselves. We should never quickly dismiss others as unqualified to serve God and should not disqualify ourselves. The Church is chosen, and thus members of the Church are chosen! We may not be called to preach or to evangelize the entire world. However, we are called to share Jesus in our own personal world. We are called to minister to those in our path. This calling is no less important than that of a clergy person. Our calls to serve God are simply different.

When Paul writes that God has blessed us in the heavenly realm with all spiritual blessings, he is reminding the early church that our call did not originate within ourselves or the world about us. Our calling is from God. We are blessed with blessing from the realm of God, from the eternal realm of God. Thus, we are called to a “high calling” (Philippians 3).

Was there a time when you felt disqualified to serve the Lord? What were those things you thought disqualified you? Was there a moment when you realized God had a purpose for your life? How have you lived out that purpose in the life of the Church? In your daily walk?

Our Calling is of Eternal Origin

Paul excitedly shares that we were called before the foundation of the world. Paul, through faith, accepts the great mysteries of God, and, at times, never attempts to explain. What does he mean “before the foundation of the world”? For Paul, it meant that our calling did not originate in us but has always existed in the mind and will of God the Creator. Paul is not attempting to confuse his readers. He wants us to understand the

wonder and magnificence of our calling. Paul wants his readers to understand that our calling is so important and beautiful that they had to come from the mind and will of the Creator.

It is important to read Paul's full statement in verse 4. Many read half the sentence and begin to question. After all, it would read, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world." Consequently, many begin to question, "Did God choose us and not others?" Their emphasis is on "us." Yet, let us read the complete sentence: "In him before the creation TO BE HOLY AND BLAMELESS IN HIS SIGHT." It wasn't individuals that God chose while neglecting others. What God chose and predestined was the redemption of the world. God chose before the creation of the world that His children would live blameless and holy lives. The emphasis is upon the end result: that his people "be blameless in his sight." It is the "end state of being" that has been determined. When human history ends and the new heaven and earth are established all will live blameless and holy. This end has never been altered or diminished. It was God's will in the beginning, in the present, and in the future to redeem and transform the world. This calling does not negate our free will. The end, towards which God desires we move, is God's predetermined holiness. Through faith, by free will, we choose to participate in God's grace in Christ and engage in a disciplined life of prayer, service, and love. As we participate in God's grace, we move toward that ultimate state of being: to be blameless and holy.

It is also important to understand that it isn't the individual that has been chosen and predetermined; it is the Church and the Church's mission! Thus, Paul uses the plural "us" when speaking of predetermination. From the beginning God has determined that his Church live out its calling to be holy in the world. We are to live a life that sets us apart in order to draw the world to Christ.

Moving into verse 5, Paul once again mentions "predestination." Again, who or what is predetermined? God predetermined that those who choose to believe and trust in Christ should be counted as sons and daughters of God. It is through Jesus Christ that we intimately enter the family of God and enter into God's redemptive history. From the beginning, especially after the fall in Genesis, God has been moving in human history, moving everything and everyone toward the final coming of the Kingdom. God's moving in our history does not mean "causing us to believe or causing us to act." God has revealed the divine will of righteousness and love throughout our history. In Christ that divine will was clearly visible. Jesus was blameless, righteous, holy, and loving. In God's perfect time Jesus joined human history and calls us to join Him as that history moves toward that day of perfection.

Has Paul's mention of predetermination puzzled you in the past? What was it that puzzled you most? What do you think of the difference between the individual being chosen before the creation of the world and the Church being chosen?

The use of the phrase "adoption to sonship" specifically addresses Paul's Gentile audience. The Jewish people understood themselves as God chosen people, and only them. However, the will of God did not emphasize the choosing of one nation over another. God chose Israel to be an instrument of his redemptive will. The proclamation of God's light, truth, and love had to involve an initial people. That nation was Israel. As a nation, they were to bring the good news of God's redemption to the world. When Paul writes that the Gentiles were adopted to sonship, he joyfully informs the Gentiles that they have been adopted into the family of God, the Church. They have been grafted into God's redemptive history, first revealed to the Jewish people. Adoption implies being brought into an already existing family. Through Christ, it was time to enlarge the family.

I proudly and joyfully adopted two daughters. Speaking for most adoptive parents, when the child is placed in your arms the term "adopted" means nothing. They were my daughters. I never even think about them adopted. I could not love a biological child any more than I do my girls.

When Paul used the term “adoption” he was in no way implying the Gentiles are “less than” the Jewish nation. The word is only used to help the Gentiles - and Jews - understand that God has taken others into the family and ultimately desires that entire world to be brought into the family. God loves all, equally. There are no original children and adopted children in the Kingdom of God. We are all children. Period.

What does it mean to you to know you have been adopted into the family of God? Do you believe the Church has a clear understanding and mission to bring all, from every station, background, and nation, into the family of God? If not, why not? What can we do better as the Church to emphasize God’s desire for one family and to live in loving unity?

The gift of Jesus Christ was an act of God’s pleasure and will. When we attempt to understand “why” God has given us such a gift we can accurately say, “Because God loves us.” God did not have to create us and certainly could have forsaken us. However, God is love. And what God has done emerges from His divine pleasure. God wanted to create us, wanted to bless us, wanted to redeem us, and wants to bring all into the divine Kingdom where holiness and love reign. I once bought a person’s lunch, and they asked me, “Why did you do that?” I answered, “Because I wanted to.” I wanted them to know I cared about them, and the lunch was a small expression of my love. However, I did so because “I wanted to do it.” Why did I want to? At this point I am without words and understanding. There is a life within us that desires to care and love without need of reason. I truly believe such actions are rooted in what it means to be made in the image of God. God is loving and good. From the very nature of God emerges acts of love and kindness. Thus, we might ask, “Why did God bring the Gentiles into the family?” My best answer is, “Because God desired it.” And he desired it because the Lord loves us. At this point, I am at a loss of words. After all, I am speaking of an “inexpressible gift.”

Have you even engaged in a “why, why, why” discussion with a child? Have you ever reached a point when you admit you really don’t know why you care so much? What do you think it means to know God has created you, redeemed you, and called you “out of His good pleasure”? Do you believe there is a point in which human language fails us in attempting to understand eternal reality?

When I teach Bible courses, I often begin by asking the students to close their eyes. I then would ask, “When you see nothing raise your hand.” After a few moments hands would rise. I would then ask, “What did nothing look like.” Almost all said, “Black empty space.” I then would respond, “But black is something. It is a color. Emptiness is a state of being. Space too is something.” The point of this lesson was to remind them that our brains can only go so far and understand only so much. Thus, there is always mystery in life. In attempting to define God’s good pleasure I feel as though my mind is attempting to describe mystery. All I can do is accept the mystery by faith. Jesus has revealed that God is love and desires the redemption of all. Therefore, I can trust the mystery.

Is there a sense of mystery in your faith? Can you express what you mean by the mystery? Have you ever stepped out in faith without knowing all the answers? In other words, have you ever asked all the questions to gain all the understanding possible before making a decision? Did you make the decision anyway? Why? How do you think faith and mystery are related?

All through Christ

Paul is determined that the Church understand God’s will involves the gift of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the revelation of God’s will to us. Furthermore, Jesus is the expression and revelation of God’s good pleasure toward us. Prior to Jesus, God’s redemptive will remained a mystery. The Old Testament contains those moments when God’s light would break into human history, revealing His nature and His desire for His people. The gift of Jesus is the ultimate breakthrough of God’s will into human history. The gift of Jesus served not only to redeem those in His path but also to create God’s holy Church. The Church then becomes

the “body of Christ.” We become the revelation in the world that God loves the world. We become the face, hands, and feet of Jesus in the world. The Church is far more than a mere expression of God’s redemptive will. We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower us as we bring Christ to the world. We then are vessels used by the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus to all.

Do you understand that the Church is truly the presence of Jesus in the world? As a member of the Church, do you realize that you can become the presence of Jesus to another? Do you believe your church possesses a clear understanding that they are the “body of Christ.” If not, what do you think can be done to help your church understand their special calling in the world?

Our ministry continues until the ultimate Day of the Lord. There is coming a day when Christ returns and establishes in all its fullness the Kingdom of God. In the Old Testament, they saw expressions of God’s kingdom in their world. In Jesus, the Kingdom of God was embodied. We could witness the Kingdom of God in the world, touching the untouchable, loving those the world rejected, and redeeming those neglected. In the crucifixion of Jesus, we witnessed the Kingdom of God as sacrificial love for the world. Through the resurrection of Christ, we witnessed the eternal nature of God’s kingdom. It is unstoppable. Not even death can conquer God’s eternal life. The Kingdom of God is eternal truth, light, and love. This is the Kingdom embodied in the Church and its mission. One day, all the attributes of the Kingdom will come to fruition and culmination. The world will live under the reign of our loving God. In the Kingdom all will live in unity under the Lordship of Christ, and we will live in unity with all of creation.

Do you have an understanding of the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God? What do you think is meant by the statement: “The Kingdom of God is moving in the world now?” Where have you witnessed the reality of the Kingdom of God?

Paul was overwhelmed over what he knew to be true in Jesus. He was sustained, nurtured, and empowered through the living Gospel. In a few short verses, while in prison, Paul attempts to remind the Church of who it is that loves her and the eternal purpose to which she’s been called.

We Have Joined God’s Redemptive History in Christ

All of us are the sons and daughters of God. Like the early Christians, we have been grafted into the divine purposes of God. Thus, our lives have purpose and meaning. As those who are instruments of God’s redemption, and God’s dear possession, we can live in hope. As Paul wrote in Romans 8, “All things work to the good for those who love God, and are called according to his purposes.” Remember, hope is the confidence we have that we are never alone, that every moment of our life is used of God for His high and noble purposes, and that all events and experiences in our lives are leading us into that day in which God’s goodness reigns. Even those moments that lead us to feel as if God is absent are being brought into conformity with God’s will. God is using them all! There is no greater, more serene life than one anchored in this hope.

In the past, what has been your understanding of hope? Did you use the phrase “I hope” to mean “I wish”? What is the difference between Christian hope and wishing things will all work out? Do you understand how hope gives one the gift of serenity? Can you share a moment in your life when Christian hope sustained you through a difficult time?

The Seal

I’ve loved performing weddings through the years. It is a special moment to hear their vows to God and to each other. Then there is that crowning moment when the rings are slipped upon their fingers. The rings are

the “seals” of their marriage. The rings proclaim to the world that they live in a holy covenant with one they deeply love.

Paul writes, “We have been given the seal of the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit within us lives through us and reveals to the world that we live in a holy covenant with our Creator. We belong to the One who loves us more than anyone in the world. The Holy Spirit uses our gifts and graces to empower us to be the presence of Jesus in the world.

Gail and I have been married for 48 years. Our rings represent our love and commitment to each other. We are each helping the other to live their best life. The great gift of marriage is its ability to make both people a better person. The holy covenant we live with God will always mold us into our better self. As Gail and I are shaped by the personality of the other, we are being shaped by the nature of God.

Our marriage to God was made possible through Christ. Jesus was God’s wooing love personified. Jesus led us to that moment when we desire to live in union with God and others. At Pentecost the divine ring was placed upon spiritual fingers.

What do you think Paul meant when he wrote the Holy Spirit is the seal of God’s redemption in Christ upon us? Are you comforted by the reality that you are sealed to God? Can you share a moment when the Holy Spirit empowered you to be the presence of Christ for another?

Summary

I confess this lesson proved overwhelming. It contains so much and yet leaves me bowing in awe over the mystery of God’s love. All of the examples from my life, and the understanding I have of the text, fall far short. Yet, I can sense what Paul so excitedly wanted to say. God’s grace was so wonderful Paul continued one attempt after another to describe it. The will of God revealed in Jesus opened the door of heaven and allowed blessing upon blessing. For Paul, this was an inexpressible gift. And so, it is for us. Still, just because we struggle to express all that God has done for us, in us, and through us does not diminish the fact that it’s all true. Thanks be to God!

Prayer

Almighty God, we pray with hearts overflowing. We bow before you with minds that are always seeking. We serve you with all that we are, for you have given all in Christ. Thank you for the lives of meaning and purpose we enjoy. May your Holy Spirit remind us that we are your precious possession and that we live in that holy covenant that gives us our blessed hope. In Jesus name, Amen.

Dr. D. Craig Rikard is a South Georgia pastor. Email him at craigrikard169@yahoo.com.



Christ is Wisdom

Fall Quarter: God’s Exceptional Choice
Unit 3: We are God’s Artwork
Lesson 11

Sunday School Lesson for the week of November 13, 2022
By Craig Rikard

Lesson Scripture: Acts 19; Ephesians 1-15-23; Revelation 2:1-7

Key Text: *I pray that the eyes of your hearts may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. Ephesians 1:18*

Lesson Aims

1. To understand how God's gifts of wisdom and revelation help us to know God better.
2. To understand the meaning of Christian hope as it relates to God's Kingdom.
3. To explore the power that resides within every Christian through the Holy Spirit.
4. To grasp what it means to be the "body of Christ" at home and in the world.

Author's Note: Traditional pronouns are used for reading flow and ease. However, God is neither male or female. God transcends all labels and language. The lesson is intended to be a supplement to the well-done lessons in the Teacher's Manual.

Introduction: Geography, Paul, and Background/Context

Geography

Ephesus was a major city in the Roman Empire in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). It was an ancient Greek city on the Aegean Sea. It was a large city of approximately 200,000 people. A large Jewish Population lived in the city. The city consisted of many Synagogues. However, most of the language and imagery used by Paul addresses the Greek population. Whereas many Jews shunned the "new faith," large numbers of Greeks were drawn to it. Though a large number of Jews lived in Ephesus, the city contained a large temple to the goddess Diana. Much like Corinth, the city is a site of great commerce. Many goods and ideas move in and out of Ephesus. It was a great city from which to launch Christianity into the world. The church was planted by Paul, along with Priscilla and Aquila. Later, Paul's son in the faith, Timothy, will become the leader of the church at Ephesus. Timothy will later be assigned a greater responsibility when he is made bishop of Ephesus and will lose his life attempting to stop a parade in honor of the goddess Diana.

Paul

Most of us are acquainted with Paul. The stoning of Stephen unnerved Paul. Consequently, Paul meets Jesus soon thereafter on the Damascus Road. Paul was both a deeply spiritual and analytical man. You can't establish churches, organize them, raise leaders, and address Roman officials without a keen mind. It is Paul who took the story of Jesus along with his personal experience and framed it in doctrinal and theological language. The book of Romans is Paul's great theological masterpiece.

Paul's understanding of the faith grew as he answered God's call upon his life. Steeped in Judaism as a Pharisee, he was also acquainted with the Greek worldview. Paul experienced God's truth in both cultures. His initial letters addressed specific problems within a local church. As the years passed, Paul begins to include his deeper understanding of the faith. Thus, some of his letters were known as circular letters. That is, they were not just intended for the community he addressed. The content was of great value to all congregations and therefore the letters were circulated. The letter to the Ephesians was such a letter.

Background and Context

As stated in last week's lesson, Paul was almost certainly in jail when he wrote this beautiful letter. Great persecutions were beginning, and under the emperor Nero the persecutions became vicious and widespread. The hope and joy that soar from this letter take on great meaning against the backdrop of imprisonment and persecution.

As shared in last week's lesson, Paul is overwhelmed with the joy and comfort he finds in Christ. His inspired words teem with hope. Have you ever talked with someone so overwhelmed with joy they can't stop

talking? Paul's joy and faith roll of his tongue with passion. Last week's text contained one of the longest sentences of over 200 words. That is, 200 words in one sentence! Perhaps Paul is becoming aware that his life may be in jeopardy. He has so much to share and maybe feels there is so little time to say it. Whatever the underlying reason for Paul's wordy expressions, they reveal a genuine, inspired, meaningful hope and joy.

Today's text picks up where last week's study ended. It is still a part of the salutation. Again, most salutations consist of a greeting, an expression of prayer that the reader is healthy and well, followed by a lead-in to the body. However, the salutation in Ephesians contains far more theological underpinning. Again, it is almost as if Paul can't wait to get the message he seeks to impart.

A Faithful Church

As Paul stated in verses 1-14, the people have been faithful and have earned a great reputation among the churches Paul founded in Christ. After Paul reminds them that the promise of hope and a new day were guaranteed through the gift of the Holy Spirit, he writes, "For this reason, I have given thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." What was the reason for his gratitude and prayers? Paul had heard of "their faith in the Lord Jesus, and their love for all of God's people."

Few things make a pastor happier than to know a church they served is doing well, and even better since their departure. I have always prayed the churches I served would become even better in Christ under the leadership of the pastors that followed me. I pastored a church in my early years that was struggling. I was told by my District Superintendent, "If you can't get them moving, they will probably fold." That was a lot of pressure for a young preacher! Still, I found a congregation of great people, and together we grew and became Church of the Year in our area. Years later I returned for a special service. The church was far better and stronger than I left it. Like Paul, I bowed and gave thanks.

Pastors are not always responsible for a church's struggle or growth. There are always some great, loving, gifted people present. Through prayer and a covenant to grow in strength and love, a church can move forward. We often hear, "Don't care about what other people think." In many cases that is true. However, there are some moments when reputation is great gift. In 2 Thessalonians 4, Paul wrote that the people of the church should "earn the respect of those outside." Paul understood the value of a good reputation as it relates to being the body of Christ. It isn't the reputation itself for which we strive. When we engage in loving, redemptive ministry the reputation is a natural byproduct of effective ministry.

What do you think is your church's reputation in the community? If it doesn't have one, why not? What can be done to help a church develop a reputation as a loving, redemptive community in Christ? How can the laity and clergy work together to generate a reputation that is inviting? How do you think a good reputation helps a church's witness?

Paul implies he is overjoyed with gratitude. For me, gratitude has a deeper meaning than "being thankful." Being thankful is something I feel in a given moment in time. Gratitude for me implies living in a *state* of thanksgiving. Gratitude resides in the heart and spirit and effects our countenance, interactions, and outlook. Almost all people have been thankful at some time or another. However, not all are grateful. If Paul were only thankful, he might have struggled to express being thankful in prison. However, Paul is filled with gratitude. Gratitude defies our circumstances and can live in and through us regardless of those circumstances.

What do you think is the difference between being thankful and being filled with gratitude? How can we, through the grace of God, develop a grateful heart, a grateful state of being? What do you believe

is the great fruit and witness of a grateful heart? Can you recall a time when you were grateful in the midst of adversity?

Getting to Know God Better

As Paul moves into verse 17, he exudes a deep reverence for God. Again, it almost seems at times like Paul just doesn't have enough words to properly address our great Lord. It is for this reason that I love the amazing hymn "O, For A Thousand Tongues to Sing." When I read the text, I get a sense that Paul would love to have possessed a thousand tongues.

From this point, Paul reveals that for which he is praying. He desires that God endow the Church with a spirit of wisdom and revelation. When Paul employs the word "spirit" he is actually referring to our human spirit. He is praying that the Holy Spirit will enliven the mind to gain wisdom and the heart and spirit to receive God's revelation. Again, use of the word "spirit" implies far more than just an experience. We can have experiences that enlighten us and allow us to see what God desires we learn in a given moment. However, praying that we might receive from God a spirit of wisdom and revelation implies a sense of "permeance." Paul desires that we live with the gift of wisdom that enlightens and illumines us in every experience of life. The same is true for the gift of receiving revelation. Wisdom and revelation actually are bound together. The wisdom we gain is from the revelation we see. As Christians, we believe Christ is present in every moment of life. There is always light to see, regardless of the circumstances. When Paul records his moments of adversity and suffering, we almost always read of what he saw and learned in those moments. In Philippians 1:12-13 Paul writes, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."

Remember, our faith is based on revelation. We would know little of God apart from God revealing the divine nature and presence to us. Our faith is best described as "progressive revelation." God reveals Himself and eternal truth to us in a way we can understand at the time. As we embrace that expression of truth, we then are ready for the next. This is the progression of the Old Testament. It is also true of our spiritual walk with Jesus. In the beginning we know so little, but as we walk with Christ we see more and learn more. We learn to see God in our circumstances and the moments in our day.

It is important to differentiate "knowledge" from "wisdom." Knowledge is learned truth retained but not necessarily accompanied by experience. Knowledge describes what we know. Wisdom implies we know how to use what we know. Knowledge without experience can lead to destructive decisions. Personally, my understanding of the "other tree" in Eden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, is that it leads to destructive behavior. When people have knowledge without experience, they jump ahead of God. I often wonder if those who split the atom seriously consider all the ways this knowledge could be used. We can destroy everything through splitting the atom. The second tree is not a statement against knowledge. It is a warning that knowledge without prayerful experience can be dangerous.

I left seminary with a wealth of knowledge. However, using that knowledge in the local church without previous experience often led me to engage in decisions that were not helpful at all. Clergy often talk about a young minister going into a church like a "bull in a china shop." We mean they went into a situation with a lot of knowledge, without experience, and attempted to change everything right away. Wisdom is that beautiful, powerful gift that merges knowledge and experience.

Have you ever made a decision based on knowledge without experience? What was the result? Have there been moments when you wish you would have waited until you had greater understanding? Have you ever had the experience of being a bull in a china shop? How do you seek God and God's light in your day? How does prayer help you in your seeking? Can you attest that the longer you have walked with Christ, the greater wisdom you possess?

Why does Paul desire that we possess the spirit of wisdom and revelation? The answer is clear in this salutation: to better know God. It is biblical - and clear in Scripture - that our relationship with God through Christ involves a journey. It should be a walk in which we grow in vision, in enlightenment, in understanding, and in confidence. As stated in previous lessons, God transcends all that is related to our human experience. We begin with a simple yet profound profession of faith. From that moment forward, the new Christian needs to engage in the disciplines of the faith: worship, prayer, Bible study, and service. The more we engage in these disciplines the greater our understanding of God and God's redemption through Christ. These disciplines empower our spiritual eyes and ears. We learn to see God in human experience, in worship, in passages of Scripture that come alive to us, and in scenes of creation. Prayer is very important, especially prayer to begin our day.

In teaching a new group of Christians I often ask, "Without looking around, what did you see that is maroon in the room?" Some will mention an obvious item or two. I then would instruct them, "Ok, now look around." They begin to see maroon all about them. What was the difference? When I planted the color maroon in their minds, they began to see it. Prayer brings God into our consciousness. The person that prays continually in their day will begin to see God's presence in places they never considered.

We also hear God through the cries of people. We also hear God far more keenly in our conscience. The hymns and Christian music take on a new life. As we learn the beauty of spiritual solitude, we can actually begin to hear God's glory in the winds and flowing waters.

In your Christian journey, what helps you most to see God in life? How have the Christian disciplines helped you to know the Lord better?

In my person journey, I have gotten to know the Lord much better. God, for me, is much kinder and eager to forgive. The love of Christ knows no bounds and omits no one. One of the major things I've learned in my walk is to differentiate between what is trivial and what is vital. I cannot omit the change in my relationships. Through prayer, in each encounter I have with a person I learned that I have one task: to love them more than they love me. I want to out-love them in Christ. Each person's journey occurs at a different pace. However, the journey ends in the same place for all of us: we know God better. John records in chapter 10 Jesus saying, "I know my sheep; and my sheep hear my voice." God has already moved close to us. God is with us and in us. Now, our disciplined walk of faith helps us draw near to God.

In your walk of faith, how has your faith and prayers improved your relationships with others? Where do you most often hear the voice of God? Can you note the difference between your knowing God in the beginning and in later years? What are some of things you now understand about Christ that you did not understand earlier? How have they enriched your life?

The Great Power at Work Within Us

The power of the Holy Spirit is at work within each Christian. The Spirit empowers us to become wiser and more confident in the faith. The Spirit awakens us to the great hope God has given us. As cited previously, hope is not simply wishing things will turn out okay. Hope is the belief that Christ is with us in every moment, wasting none of them. Therefore, everything will always, in the end, be well. The gift of hope leads us toward that glorious inheritance. The inheritance is, of course, eternal life. However, we taste that life and experience the wonder of that coming life in our everyday existence. When we know Christ is with us, regardless of the circumstances, we live in confidence. We face fear with confidence in Christ. We taste our inheritance through knowing "all things are working for the good" as Paul stated in Romans 8. If all things work for the good then God has to be present in all things. We are already members of the Kingdom of God.

That kingdom is present now in the world, breaking through the clouds of suffering and doubt with the message of hope. The message of the Kingdom of God is: there is always coming a new day!

Paul reminds the Church that the great power of God, present in us through the Holy Spirit, is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead! This one truth should leave us awestruck. What kind of power does it take to breathe new life into the dead? What kind of power makes a dead heart beat again? What kind of power awakens every cell and fiber of the body? Humanly speaking, we have no human power that even comes close to the resurrection power of God.

Paul reveals what that great power accomplished. It not only raised Christ from the dead, it empowered him to take his rightful place in the Kingdom. God has a purpose for every life. We can fulfill that purpose through our yielding to the Holy Spirit and the power with which we are filled. No, we are not Christ's equal. We cannot raise a dead body and give it life. However, we are empowered to call the spiritually dead to new life in Christ. We are called to make broken hearts beat with hope again. We are empowered to help those who are spiritually blind and deaf to see and hear anew. Each of us has only employed a portion of the power God has given to us. However, as we grow in confidence and hope in our walk, we become more and more agents of change and redemption.

What do you think it means when Paul writes the power in you is the power with which God raised Christ from the dead? What has God called to life within you through Christ that once was as though it was dead? In what areas of service have you grown in confidence? How do the Christian disciplines help you release the power God has given you?

The Church of Jesus Christ

Paul writes that Jesus is the head over everything for the Church. Though our Christian conversion is a personal experience, our membership in the Church is the instrument through which we discover our gifts and grace and the means to use them.

Paul's definition of the Church should awaken us all regarding who we are, why we are here, and what is the nature of our mission. First, we are his body. Indeed, we are to become the presence of Jesus in the world. Our gifts and graces were not intended for a solitary Christian life. They find their meaning and purpose in the Church. Our individual gifts and grace, working in love and grace with our church family, allow the Church to become the powerful, transformative presence of Jesus in the world. Paul writes, "We are the fulness of Him who fills everything in every way." Jesus Christ is present in every moment of life, in the world (especially the broken places in the world), and in all the places we rarely look. This is the mission of the Church. We are the presence of Jesus in each other's life. We are especially present in the broken places of others. We are to be present everywhere in the world. Where our bodies cannot be, our gifts and ministries reach out for those beyond our reach. Remember, the Church is not just our local congregation. Every Sunday our local church recites the Apostle's Creed and our belief in the holy, catholic church. Catholic is an adjective, a description of the Church. The Church exists everywhere, and those who believe in Christ gather together to worship and serve. Thus, our connection with others through prayer and mission help us embody Christ everywhere possible. The incredible power within all of us can accomplish what to others seems impossible.

When asked to build a church building in a poverty-stricken area of Merida, Mexico on the Yucatan, one could initially say, "It's too difficult." There is so much work to be done, so much money needed, and we can only visit every few months at best. However, our local church helped build a septic tank and installed the plumbing pipes. Another church built the walls and roof. My church went back later and laid the tiled floor. The "difficult task" had been accomplished by the Church universal, the holy catholic Church.

There is a great power at work within each of us, and when that power is at work in the church, united, difficult, and even impossible things can be accomplished. All of us became the presence of Jesus for a dear people who needed help. There is no other purpose in life that thrills me any more than embodying Christ in every moment possible and to do so in the holy catholic Church.

What is your present understanding of the Church and her mission? Does your church utilize all the gifts and graces present in her members? If not, what can we do to accomplish that task? Has your church joined with other churches in mission? What was the experience like for you and others? Do you think it helped all involved to better understand that we are the holy, catholic Church? How do you think your church can better become the presence of Jesus in every moment, especially moments of suffering and adversity? How do you think a local church can utilize the power of the Holy Spirit to call that which is dead to life? By dead we mean spiritually separated from God, those with unused gifts, or those with hearts crushed by a feeling of hopelessness. Are there other things that represent death you can add? What can we do together to call them to life through the power of God within us for the glory of Jesus?

Prayer

Almighty God, we fall to our knees, overwhelmed over what you have done for us, in awe over what you given us, and humbled by the mission to which we have been called. Forgive us for our neglect in recognizing the gifts and graces you have given. Quicken them to new life, that we might become the powerful presence of Jesus Christ in the world. In Jesus name, Amen.

Dr. D. Craig Rikard is a South Georgia pastor. Email him at craigrikard169@yahoo.com.



'Give something away every day'

By Creede Hinshaw

It's the season in the United Methodist Church when many pastors preach a stewardship sermon. United Methodists have traditionally raised the upcoming year's budget by seeking pledges in a fall campaign. At least one sermon usually comes into prominent play.

That sermon was delivered last Sunday at the church I attend; it was very well-crafted and biblically solid, leaving the listener personally challenged as to whether he/she is laying a foundation for generosity. The preacher didn't know, however, that I had already seen the sermon illustrated just a few moments before I walked into the sanctuary.

As I drove to church, I ended up following an SUV driven by another church member, although I didn't know it at the time. I was approximately one block behind this person, and could see her pull into a parking spot alongside the church building. Although I was too far away to identify this person, I had concluded, because of where she parked, that she intended to go to worship. Thus, I was surprised when I saw the woman lock her car and walk in the opposite direction of the front doors of the church.

From my vantage point through my windshield, I could see her walking toward a large magnolia tree on our church lawn. Beneath that tree, enjoying the shade, sits a group of homeless persons every Sunday morning. From afar I saw her approach those people. After a brief encounter, she retraced her steps and headed toward

the front door of the church. By then I was easing into my parking spot and could identify this church member, although she was still too far away for me to engage her in conversation.

The worship service, including the sermon, was inspiring as usual. As it turned out, the two of us sat not far apart during the service, and after the benediction I caught up with her to tell her I'd seen her having a conversation with the street people.

This single woman with grandchildren told me that when she attends church, she always brings crackers and snacks to share with these persons. She offers them lovingly and simply and then goes to worship.

My friend, who I know to be generous in other ways, became a sermon for me. She gave a gift not only to the group relaxing beneath the magnolia tree. She gave me a gift, too.

Her act of kindness took me back to a challenge I once received at a clergy conference. The speaker said, "Give something away every day." Whether it be a tangible gift or a compliment, an act of forgiveness or a handwritten letter, our world would be a far better place if each of us built foundations of generosity. I try to live this out faithfully, but often fall short.

I am a better person both because of what I heard last Sunday. I am a better person because of what I saw. Perhaps these words will be a gift for a reader of this column.

Rev. Creede Hinshaw is a retired minister in the South Georgia Conference. He can be reached at hinnie@cox.net.



JOHN WESLEY MOMENTS

Wesley and Card Playing

By Dave Hanson

As a serious bridge player, I rejoiced to learn that John Wesley enjoyed playing cards while he was a student and teacher at Oxford University. Later he sought to guide Methodists into Christian holiness and urged them to follow courses which seemed to him like worthy self-denial. Wesley sought to make abstinence from all games a sign of righteousness, though he did except card-playing on the frankly affirmed reason that his mother played cards! It is refreshing to note that little bit of insight into the life of Susanna Wesley whose life at Epworth was mostly full of dreadful duties and heavy burdens.

The Rev. Dave Hanson is a retired pastor and John Wesley scholar.



Needed: Renewed Minds

By Anne Bosarge

Have you ever thought about the process involved in doing something new? We often have the desire to do something new, but in practice the "new" thing we want to do ends up looking a lot like the old thing we did last time. And that old thing often didn't have the impact we wanted it to have in the first place. In a world

where innovation and creativity in the church is necessary, how do we change our actions and become truly innovative? We renew our minds.

Scripture has a lot to say about renewing our minds:

- Romans 12:2 - Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
- Ephesians 4:23 - And to be renewed in the spirit of your minds.
- 1 Peter 1:13 - Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
- Colossians 3:2 - Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.
- Philipians 2:5 -Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

How do we determine what thoughts need to be renewed? We must look at our mindsets and evaluate our thinking. True change and innovation is only possible with a renewed, Christ-focused, and outwardly turned perspective on ministry. We can only force ourselves to act and behave for so long if our thinking doesn't match our actions. Mere self-control isn't enough to create lasting change in our lives and in our churches. We need renewed thinking!

With that in mind, we have started something new in SGAUMC! We now have a TikTok account and our first posts are short Ministry Mindset videos that will also be featured each Monday on our Instagram and Facebook pages. These short videos will help you and your congregation renew your mind and determine whether faulty and outdated mindsets might be the cause of a lack of innovation and change happening in your church. If you have had some false starts and are wondering why, check out our ministry mindsets series. What we need in every SGAUMC church is new thinking that breaks old paradigms to reach new people with the Gospel. Let's renew our minds!

See the Ministry Mindsets videos and share them to your social media pages!

TikTok: www.tiktok.com/@sgaumc
Facebook: www.facebook.com/sgaumc
Instagram: www.instagram.com/sgaumc/

Anne Bosarge serves as the Director of Leadership Strategies and Local Church Resources for the South Georgia Conference. Email her at abosarge@sgaumc.com.



UMCOR is there

By Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, *Conference Secretary for Global Ministries*

While it did not directly affect us, Hurricane Ian did have an indirect effect on people in my church. Thankfully their loved ones in Ft. Myers are safe. We wondered what can we do to help those who lost everything? What did we do before? We gave – and can give - to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR)!

Where do the funds go? Just a few examples: In 2006 Katrina caused extensive damage along the Gulf Coast. UMCOR was there with relief supplies, grants, and work teams until 2013. After Hurricane Michael raced across the Panhandle of Florida and devastated parts of Alabama and Georgia, UMCOR was there for

two years. The same could be said of every named hurricane that has hit the US in the last 40 plus years. Every time there was a disaster UMCOR was there to help and stayed until the work was done.

In 2019, Hurricane Dorian threatened the East coast of the United States and Canada. It came ashore in North Carolina and again in Nova Scotia. The worst damage happened in the Bahamas. The United Methodist Church does not have a church in the Bahamas but UMCOR responded. Dorian left people without jobs, food, clothing, or shelter. The Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA) formed a partnership with UMCOR to help those in need. Together they helped to rebuild and repair homes for people where possible. In places where it was not immediately possible to rebuild homes, the residents were temporarily relocated to less affected islands. UMCOR also worked with the local people to prepare a shelter for evacuees of future storms.

UMCOR quietly continues to work in places like the Bahamas and the Gulf Coast and Kentucky and Southwest Georgia and now Southwest Florida, too. UMCOR is already working in Southwest Florida through individuals needed to assess the damage and organize the relief efforts and work teams. In addition, The United Methodist Church is represented by others with unique skill sets. One of my church members, retired from Georgia Power, sent me a text saying he was on his way to the area to restore power.

Give to UMCOR so they can continue to be there for the long term in these and other places across the world.

For more on US disasters go to umcmission.org/united-states-disaster-response/. To give to those in need send checks to the conference marked for the Advance # 901670.

For more on international disasters go to umcmission.org/international-disaster-response/. To give to those in need send checks to the conference marked for the Advance # 982450.

Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, pastor of Epworth United Methodist Church in Jesup, also serves as Conference Secretary for Global Ministries.



Retired Clergy Birthdays – November 2022

- 11/01 – Thomas Maddox: 5938 State Route 7 South; Gallipolis, OH 45631
- 11/03 – Loretta Dunbar: 7552 Edgewater Dr.; Columbus, GA 31904
- 11/03 – Edwin Smith: 305 Grindstone Creek Dr.; Clarkesville, GA 30523
- 11/04 – Russell Edwards, Jr.: 1660 Jennings Mill Rd.; Watkinsville, GA 30677
- 11/07 – Eve Tomberlin: 137 Aston Hall; Macon, GA 31078
- 11/08 – Gary Carter: 400 Hill Manning Rd.; Cochran, GA 31014
- 11/08 – Mary Ann Traver: PO Box 1934; Richmond Hill, GA 31324
- 11/09 – Douglas Force: PO Box 1938; Hinesville, GA 31313
- 11/09 – Joe Flowers, Jr.: 390 Brook Hollow Dr.; McDonough, GA 30252
- 11/11 – David Johnson: 916 Watermelon Run; Charleston, SC 29412
- 11/12 – James E. Davis: 170 Caney Branch Dr.; Homerville, GA 31634
- 11/12 – John Mitchell: 123 Lundy Court; Macon, GA 31210
- 11/14 – Woody Roberts: 1259 Hwy. 36 E.; Barnesville, GA 30204
- 11/14 – David Tart, III: 312 Knob Hill Rd.; Valdosta, GA 31602
- 11/14 – Donald Youmans: 287 Pacolet Ridge Lane; Tryon, NC 28782
- 11/20 – Lynn Roberts: 1209 Loblolly Lane; Bainbridge, GA 39817

11/21 – Robert Hall: 4221 Stone Mill Ct.; Martinez, GA 30907
11/21 – Kitty Newton: 187 Newbridge Rd.; Sylvania, GA 30467
11/22 – John McGowan: #1 Ramblewood Circle; Valdosta, GA 31602
11/23 – Jack Atkinson: 3530 Cottonville Rd.; Grant, AL 35747
11/25 – Rex Odom: 4062 Vineville Ave.; Macon, GA 31210
11/27 – Gordon Goodwill: 2911 Charlie Lane; Statesboro, GA 30461
11/28 – Richard Turnipseed: 12420 Clubhouse Court; Tavares, FL 32778
11/30 – Enoch Hendry: 306 E. 54th St.; Savannah, GA 31405

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Scripture Readings – November 1 edition

November 6

Twenty-second Sunday After Pentecost, Year C

[Haggai 1:15b-2:9](#)

[Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21](#)

[2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17](#)

[Luke 20:27-38](#)

November 13

Twenty-third Sunday After Pentecost, Year C

[Isaiah 12](#)

[Isaiah 65:17-25](#)

[2 Thessalonians 3:6-13](#)

[Luke 21:5-19](#)

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Advent Resource Roundup – Nov. Advocate

As you begin preparations for the Advent and Christmas seasons, consider the following resources for new ideas.

Nurture:

- [An Advent Songs of Ascents](#) - 2022 worship series from Discipleship Ministries
- [Advent Candle Lighting Liturgy](#)
- [Cokesbury Advent Studies/Resources](#)
- [Advent study comparison chart](#) from Cokesbury to help you decide what Advent study to use with your church or small group this year.
- [Ways to Celebrate Advent with Kids](#)
- [Youth Lessons “An Advent Song of Ascents”](#)
- [Advent Prayer Stations](#)
- [Sharing the Christmas Story, Sharing Our Faith](#) Webinar - Three authors - Adam Hamilton, Matt Rawle and Lacey Warner - discuss with host Rachel Billups about their Advent studies and what inspires them at Christmas.

Outreach:

- [4 Great Advent Outreach Ideas](#)
- [Christmas is not your Birthday](#) - Pastor Mike Slaughter inspires readers to approach Christmas differently, and be transformed in the process.
- [Creative Christmas Outreach](#) - Discover ways to engage your congregation in fun, meaningful efforts that will extend a personal word of welcome to people in your community who are searching for connection.
- [Giving Tuesday](#) - Giving Tuesday, a global generosity movement unleashing the power of radical generosity, is November 29. Giving Tuesday was created in 2012 as a simple idea: a day that encourages people to do good. Since then, it has grown into a year-round global movement that inspires hundreds of millions of people to give, collaborate, and celebrate generosity.

Witness:

- [Advent Communication graphics](#) from United Methodist Communications
- [Seeker-Friendly Christmas events](#) - Discover tips to make your event a success from Resource UMC.
- [Roll out the welcome mat](#) - For some people, Christmas and Easter are the only times they go to church. Visitors seeking a church to call home—even a temporary home— want to feel welcomed. That is why it is critical for congregations to have a strategic plan for welcoming visitors, especially during holiday services.
- [Invite Christmas Eve guests to return](#) - Find tips for inviting Christmas Eve visitors to return the next Sunday or in January.

Advocacy:

- [God's Unimaginable Surprises](#) - This Advent resource, developed by the Commission on Religion and Race, includes sermon starters & children's sermons for each week of Advent, focusing on the Isaiah lectionary texts.
- [Engaging Advent](#) - How do we see past the tinsel, the shiny wrapping, the Christmas songs that have been playing since October and the Black Friday specials that were announced well before Thanksgiving, to see where Light is already breaking through?
- [Greening Christmas](#) - Find practical tips for “going green” for a more satisfying and less stressful Advent season.
- [Alternative Giving](#) - This article shares ideas on fair trade markets for churches to offer as gift-giving opportunities that make a difference.