

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – AUGUST 1 EDITION

Q & A with Dr. Scott Hagan, Coastal District and Northeast District Superintendent

ADVOCATE: Tell us a little about yourself. Where did you grow up? Have you always lived in South Georgia?

DR. HAGAN: I was born in Brunswick, Georgia, when my dad was teaching at the junior college there. We moved to Athens for him to get his doctorate and my brother Kirk was born there. Dad was hired as the first anatomy teacher of the new nursing school started at Georgia Southern the summer before I started first grade, so we moved to Statesboro. I graduated from Statesboro High School and moved away to attend college at Georgia Tech.

ADVOCATE: What's your faith journey?

DR. HAGAN: I was blessed, so richly, to be born into a family that carried my brother and me to church multiple times a week. My parents grew up the same way. My father grew up in the baptist church in Newington, Georgia. My mother grew up as the oldest child of a United Methodist pastor. Altogether, we were in worship somewhere every weekend, even when we went out of town. Kirk and I attended summer camp at Epworth by the Sea, and it was in the Nalls Auditorium that I remember walking down front to give my life to follow Jesus.

We were active in MYF at Pittman Park as teenagers, and it was in my junior year of high school that I discerned God was calling me. I just was not clear if I was being called to enter the ministry like my grandfather, or to become a college basketball coach. At the time, coaching sounded like more fun so I pursued a plan to make it happen. I ended up working as a team manager, then got promoted, and started traveling with the men's team at Georgia Tech and working for Coach Cremins. After graduating, I worked a summer for the Atlanta Hawks and another summer for the Olympic Men's Basketball 'Dream' team, while also coaching for two years. But, for all the fun I was having as a coach, I came to realize that I found the most fulfillment on Sundays as a volunteer youth counselor in the churches I attended. I prayed and asked God what I was missing, and God's response was kind but straightforward - I had been called to serve as a pastor in the local church! While I heard this calling back in high school, I had taken the long way to get there. So, I enrolled in seminary and started as a youth minister that summer.

ADVOCATE: What's your favorite Bible verse and how does it help shape your ministry philosophy and your guiding principles?

DR. HAGAN: You caught me with a great question. I have a favorite chapter of the Bible, John 4. I have loved, since I was a teenager, the back-and-forth banter between the Samaritan woman and the stranger that is later revealed to be the Savior of the World. I also have a favorite book of the Bible, the Letter to the Philippians. Paul is so honest in discussing his own mortality and his past pursuits of success that failed him. However, I cannot say I have a single favorite verse!

ADVOCATE: What are your hopes for the two districts you will be serving and for the South Georgia Conference as a whole?

DR. HAGAN: I am hopeful that every church will find some space, by the grace of God, to refocus on our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. We are all busy, but I have seen how too much time spent on the urgent and things that distract has kept me from the essential. We need to get back to asking the bigger questions of discipleship. Sure, there are committee meetings to attend, buildings to maintain, and budgets to

adopt and fund, but all of this effort should serve the greater mission - inviting people into God's unique plan for growing people by grace in the local church.

ADVOCATE: You've served as a local church pastor for 21 years. How do you anticipate serving as a District Superintendent will differ, and what similarities are there?

DR. HAGAN: I anticipate that much of it will carry over. Pastors and Superintendents both need to begin by grounding themselves in their identity as the Beloved of God. That daily pursuit of returning to our True Self should translate into our daily efforts in our ministry with others. Both roles include the need to have difficult conversations, to plan ahead, travel some, and connect with and honor people. I think the biggest difference is that the local church allows for all of that to happen with many of the same folks each week. I am already missing the rhythm of relationships that came with serving in the local church. Yet, the new people I am meeting as I travel around are incredible and their stories inspire me.

ADVOCATE: What are the things that most excite you about the local churches, clergy, and laity in the South Georgia Conference?

DR. HAGAN: Every person has a story. Every story is filled with grace. I love how faithful God is to travel with us through the struggles, the suffering, and the self-inflicted hurt that we cause ourselves and others. Every church ever started came out of a conviction that the Good News needs to be shared in this place and to these people. Then to think about how that initial answer to a call by that small group was used by God to acquire property and begin regular worship and care. Every church is a story of triumph over adversity. The same is true for every person who has answered the call to serve in pastoral ministry. The world is not for the church nor is the world for people answering God's call to serve the church. There are so many distractions and temptations that would steal people away. Yet, here we are.

ADVOCATE: Tell us about your family.

DR. HAGAN: My wife Julie and I celebrated our twenty-third wedding anniversary in June, yet again occurring during Annual Conference. We definitely did not check our future calendars when we were planning that wedding at Northbrook UMC, her home church in Roswell, Georgia. She is the daughter of Lynda and Larry. She grew up in church on Sundays and in Athens on Saturdays. Much to my consternation, she is a die-hard Georgia Bulldog and an avid follower of the Atlanta Braves. When she is not watching sports, she works as a Media Specialist at Portal Middle-High School. We have two sons, Sam and Jack. Sam is a senior at Georgia Southern who spent his summer serving on the Leadership Team at Camp Connect with Suzanne Akins. He loved it! Jack just graduated from Statesboro High and will start at Georgia Southern in a couple of weeks. Both of them love to beat their dad in anything competing, with tennis and disc golf being regular favorites.

ADVOCATE: Beyond your immediate family, share about your family connections in the South Georgia Conference.

DR. HAGAN: My grandfather, Carlton Carruth, and his identical twin brother, Edward Carruth, entered the ministry from their home church, Statesboro First, back in 1944. Because of the war and being needed as Chaplains in the US Navy, Bishop Moore ordained them as deacons one day and elders the next. They each served in South Georgia for over forty years. My grandmother, Augusta, was a Conference President of the United Methodist Women, elected to serve as a delegate to General Conference six times, and attended the World Methodist Conference three times. My mother, Miriam Carruth Hagan, served as the Director of Administrative Services for fourteen years before retiring in 2014. My brother Kirk and I are also joined by our cousin Tom Carruth, the oldest grandson of Edward, from our generation serving as pastors in South Georgia.

ADVOCATE: What’s fun for you? What do you enjoy doing when you’re not working?

DR. HAGAN: The four of us started a summer tradition of traveling around the country to watch Major League Baseball games in different cities and stadiums. My parents did something similar for Kirk and me, so it was fun to extend it. We plan a trip to see two or three games in a week, while also doing something else while in the area. We have hiked in national parks, visited incredible museums, all while checking another stadium off the list. We have been to thirteen together, so far. During the year, I play some tennis with the boys, try not to die in the Crossfit cardio classes I attend, and enjoy walking around the neighborhood listening to audiobooks.



Grovania/Snow UMC’s blanket ministry provides comfort for children during hospital stay

By Allison Lindsey

Carolyn Harrison knows it’s not just about the number of people in a church, but it’s also about the size of the heart. And for the people of the Grovania and Snow United Methodist Churches in the Hawkinsville/Unadilla area, their hearts are big.

Harrison, seeking purpose after retirement, embarked on a mission to provide warmth and comfort to those in need. Little did she know that her simple act of kindness would evolve into a beautiful blanket ministry for her congregation, touching the lives of countless children at the local Children's Hospital.

Harrison's journey began by making blankets for the homeless population in downtown Macon. It was during this time that her niece, Becky Cogburn, who was the director at the Beverly Knight Olson Children's Hospital in Macon, recognized the need for larger blankets to comfort the children admitted to the hospital. Newborn blankets were readily available, but larger blankets were scarce.

Inspired by her niece's request, Harrison rallied a group of like-minded ladies at her church, eager to make a difference. They formed a ministry with a vision to bring warmth, love, and comfort to these children facing challenging times. They began making blankets in 2013, and the first blankets were delivered in 2014.

“They look back now and say that they thought it would be a miracle if they got 50 done,” said Rev. Jamie Hill, pastor of the Grovania and Snow United Methodist Churches. “But over these 10 years 2,066 blankets have been made and delivered to the Beverly Knight Olson Children's Hospital. It has not only blessed the Children's Hospital, but it has also blessed this congregation!”

The blanket-making process involves an efficient assembly line. Church members gather materials and bring them to Harrison, who skillfully cuts them to size. Afterward, the blankets are passed on to church member Ellen Parker who punches holes along the edges before returning them back to Harrison. Finally, Harrison crochets around the edges, adding the final touch of love and care to each blanket before returning them back to the church ensuring there is a blessing in every stitch.

Before the blankets are delivered, they are lovingly laid across the altar during a church service at Grovania UMC. As a congregation, they offer prayers, dedicating these blankets to the comfort and healing of the children who will receive them. This spiritual act fills each blanket with an extra layer of warmth and serves as a reminder of the compassion and faith driving this ministry.

Though the years have brought changes, the heart of the ministry remains strong. While Carolyn Harrison’s illness made shopping for materials challenging, Charles Harrison graciously stepped in to ensure the materials could be purchased. Today, the dedicated trio of Carolyn Harrison, Ellen Parker, and Charles Harrison continues to play an active role in the making and delivery of the blankets. While they remain the core contributors, the ministry thrives due to the support of the community.

Numerous individuals within the church contribute by donating funds, collecting materials, and delivering the blankets. Despite the difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the blankets are still delivered by a dedicated church member, ensuring that the children receive these tokens of comfort.

“Mrs. Carolyn, Mrs. Ellen, and Mr. Charles remain very active,” said Rev. Hill. “There are several people within the charge that help by donating money, picking up materials, and delivering the blankets. This has really been a full on charge ministry, and most everyone has been involved to some degree.”

Over the years, numerous stories have emerged, highlighting the profound impact of these blankets on the children who receive them. The church has received letters from grateful children and their families, expressing how these blankets provided immense comfort during their hospital stays.

“The social worker for the Children's hospital shared stories of comfort that the blankets brought to children and how they would bring them back each time they came to the hospital,” said Rev. Hill.

The ministry's impact is undeniable, and the numbers speak for themselves. In the current year alone, the ministry has delivered 326 blankets, with only a few individuals engaged in their creation. This remarkable feat is a testament to the passion and dedication of the “dedicated trio” alongside the unwavering support of the church community.



Update on district contact information & websites

A Note from Dr. Jay Harris

Dear Colleagues in Ministry & Local Church Lay Leadership,

I hope you are having a good summer and hopefully taking some vacation time for rest and renewal. The purpose of this email is to give you some information about the transition with our district offices. As you know, we have made reductions in our conference and district budgets so that we can continue to resource you and your churches while allowing more of your local church offerings to stay in the local church to fund your ministry.

A crucial part of the transition is providing you with contact information and a basic understanding of how we see the new structure flowing so that we can stay in connection with one another.

A word about the best way to reach staff so we can best support you

Email is always the best first step in contacting staff because it gets in the person’s inbox and remains there as a reminder to respond to your question or request. Of course, you can also make contact by phone during business hours. Calls that need to go to your district superintendent outside of normal working hours should be for emergency purposes only. We value margin for the purpose of everyone’s life-work balance, including for you and all members of our staff.

DISTRICT STRUCTURE

District Superintendents

As you know, the number of superintendents has been reduced from six to three, with each superintendent serving two districts. Remember that the district to which your charge belongs has not changed. The superintendents also no longer work out of a particular office. They will be working remotely - out of home offices or offices at local churches - and will be working on the road a good bit of the time. Through your superintendent, you will be connecting one-on-one for consultations and other opportunities. Know that you can connect to your DS through email to share important information, ask important questions, and share important information related to your personal life and family.

- **Doreen Smalls** (doreen@sgaumc.com) Superintendent of Northwest and Southwest Districts
- **Paula Lewis** (paulalewis@sgaumc.com) Superintendent of North Central and South Central Districts
- **Scott Hagan** (scott@sgaumc.com) Superintendent of Northeast and Coastal Districts

A full-time Administrative Assistant and a support team will work to support the work of the District Superintendents and the local church.

District Administrative Assistant

Cindy Rollins will serve as the full-time District Administrative Assistant. When you have a question that you would have normally directed to the district office, you will now contact Cindy, who will serve as the main point of contact for those questions. You can reach Cindy by email (cindy@sgaumc.com) or by phone (229-201-9998). The mailing address for all district related correspondence is P.O. Box 5326, Cordele, GA 31010. Through her years of experience as the administrative assistant for the Southwest District, she will be more than able to assist you with your questions. The office hours when Cindy can be reached are Monday through Thursday from 9:00am to 5:00pm.

SUPPORT TEAM

Clergy & District Services/Data Systems

My role has expanded as Superintendent of Clergy and District Services. In addition to continuing what I have done to assist the Board of Ordained Ministry, Bishop, and Cabinet, I will also help give additional support to the DSs and the team supporting them. My email is jharris@sgaumc.com, and the email address for **Kate Tyler**, who assists the Board of Ordained Ministry and Bishop Graves, is kate@sgaumc.com. **Meredyth Earnest** will have an expanded role as Director of Clergy & District Data Systems. She will be assisting the work of the districts in helping us streamline things such as online charge conference forms and dashboards. And, as you know, Meredyth is also instrumental in preparing for our Annual Conference Session. She can be reached at meredyth@sgaumc.com or 229-726-0634.

Administrative Services

The staff of the Administrative Services Office, under the leadership of **Suzanne Jones**, Director of Administrative Services/Conference Treasurer, will be taking on the financial aspects related to the districts (accounts, billing, reimbursements, etc.). And, as always, the staff is available to help answer your questions in specific areas: Benefits and Compensation Forms - **Eleanor Dickson** (eleanor@sgaumcadmin.com), Apportionments - **Donna Dodgen** (donna@sgaumcadmin.com), and Statistical Tables - **Laura Hatcher** (laura@sgaumcadmin.com). Remember that there is a lot of information provided on our [conference website about local church administration](#). You can also call the office number - 478-738-0048 - and our receptionist, **Stacy Mays**, will answer your call during office hours and direct you to the right person. In addition, Stacy will assist Cindy during charge conference season and other times when call volumes could be above average.

Communications/Connectional Ministries/Congregational Development

Kelly Roberson (kelly@sgaumc.com) directs communications and conference/connectional ministries and assists the bishop. She will now also help coordinate district communications with the assistance of Stephanie Smith(ssmith@sgaumc.com).

Connectional Ministries’ primary focus is to help resource the local church. The staff will be working with the District Superintendents to set priorities and look for new ways to walk alongside our local churches.

Anne Bosarge (abosarge@sgaumc.com) is in charge of leadership strategies and local church resources (leadership development, Certified Lay Ministry, Lay Servant, cohorts, trainings, etc). **Suzanne Akins** (suzanne@sgaumc.com) oversees our camping and retreat ministries and connects children and youth workers/volunteers across the conference. In part-time capacities, **Abra Lattany-Reed** leads our diversity & justice ministries, and **Daniel Medina** leads our hispanic ministries.

Anne is also working with Congregational Development efforts (new church starts, fresh expressions, host churches) and oversees three new Cultivators who are still pastoring local churches but are also working with new communities of faith throughout the Conference: **Matt Waldron** (mwaldron@sgaumc.com), **Stephanie Smith** (ssmith@sgaumc.com), and **Jeremy Alexander** (jalexander@sgaumc.com).

Our desire is to continue providing connections so that you can be supported in your work in the local church and ministry. We are all in the process of streamlining our work so that we can deliver the services you need and will continue to monitor and evaluate these things we have set in place.

We pray for you and covet your prayers for one another.

Grace and Peace,

Jay Harris

District Websites

- [Coastal District website](#)
- [North Central District website](#)
- [Northeast District website](#)
- [Northwest District website](#)
- [South Central District website](#)
- [Southwest District website](#)



2023 prayer emphasis: August prayer guide & August 21 book study

August Prayer Guide

The South Georgia Conference is centering itself around prayer in 2023. August’s prayer guide, written by Revs. Julia Norman, Teresa Edwards, Grace Guyton, and Cathy Tucker, all deacons in the South Georgia Conference, is now available at www.sgaumc.org/year-of-prayer.

Next Book Study – August 21

In addition to the prayer guides, book studies centered on prayer and hosted by Connectional Ministries, will expand our minds, challenge our hearts and encourage our prayer walks. [Click here for a synopsis and links](#)

[to register for these fruit-filled conversations.](#)

Book Three: "From Burned Out to Beloved" by Bethany Dearborn Hiser
Book talk hosted by Grace Guyton on Monday, Aug. 21, noon-1pm

Book Four: "Dynamite Prayer" by Rosario Picardo and Sue Nilson Kibbey
Book talk hosted by the author, Rosario Picardo, on Monday, Nov. 27, noon-1pm

.....

Sunshine and Spiritual Formation: Georgia Pastors School 2023

It was a week of sunshine and spiritual formation for United Methodist clergy from North and South Georgia Conferences and their families as they gathered in St. Simons for the annual Georgia Pastors' School.

"It was a wonderful Pastors' School this year; a time of reflection, refreshment, and revitalization," said Rev. Matt Murphy, chair of the Pastors School Board of Managers.

The focus was on spiritual formation. Clergy were invited to spend time answering the question John Wesley worded best, "How is it with your soul?"

Bishop Robin Dease of North Georgia and Bishop David Graves of South Georgia were preachers for the week. Speakers were Johnny Sears, director of the Academy for Spiritual Formation, and Juanita Campbell Rasmus, coach and author.

.....

August 6 Lesson: Inheriting the Kingdom

Summer Quarter 2023: The Righteous Reign of God
Unit 3: God's Eternal Reign

Sunday School Lesson for the week of August 6, 2023
By Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: Galatians 5:13-26

Key Verse:

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. (Galatians 5:13)

Lesson Aims

- To introduce Unit 3 in our summer series and how it develops the theme of God's reign
- To discover how our freedom in Christ is curtailed and how it is maximized
- To appreciate the guardrails that prevent a life of self-indulgence and living in social conflict
- To learn the tension between being free from the written law and living God's rule and reign
- To explore a life led by the Spirit in which we are not subject to the law
- To name and understand the works of the flesh

- To name and understand the fruit of the Spirit
- To learn how the passions of our flesh are crucified with Christ, so that we die to self and sin
- To explore the ways we are guided by the Holy Spirit

Introduction to Unit Three

The summer quarter's study has been devoted to "The Righteous Reign of God." In Unit 1, we explored the reign of God through the lens of some of the prophets. In Unit 2, we encountered through Matthew's gospel the way that Jesus developed the idea of the reign of God in his teachings on the kingdom of heaven. We looked particularly at the parables of the kingdom contained in Matthew 13.

In all the scriptures we have studied so far, we have not merely been taught *about* God's reign, but we have been invited to participate in God's reign and rule in the world. We have been invited to see it and imagine it. Jesus invited us to live as if the kingdom is not some distant reality in time or space, but as if the kingdom has come near to us and is breaking into our lives.

In Unit 3, we continue our exploration of God's reign through the teachings of Paul. If you do a search of Paul's use of the word "kingdom," you realize that Paul refers to it far less often than Jesus did. Jesus' mission was to point people to the reality of God's reign. Paul's mission was to point people to Jesus Christ. Paul knew that with Jesus you get the kingdom.

In today's lesson from Paul's letter to the Galatians, Paul's mention of the kingdom is brief. He describes what it is like when we are prevented in life from inheriting the kingdom. Although this mention of the kingdom is brief, it forms the backdrop for the rest of what Paul teaches. The passage that we study today is known for what it teaches about the fruit of the Spirit. Pay close attention to all the verses that come before and after the actual listing of the Spirit's fruit in our lives.

God Wants the Maximum Amount of Freedom for Us

One of the important themes in Galatians 5 is the freedom we are meant to experience in Christ. In fact, the chapter begins: "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." The phrase, "for freedom Christ has set us free," sounds redundant. But don't you know of people who have used freedom as a pretext to do whatever they want? They then end up making decisions that rob them of their freedom and put them into a type of bondage.

Paul picks up this theme again beginning with verse 13, the first verse in the passage we are studying.

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.

According to Paul, one of the features of the freedom that Christ gives us is freedom from trying to live in strict obedience to the law of Moses by our own willpower. Trying to do this on our own willpower dooms us to failure. We will learn in a moment how God has provided another way to live under God's rule besides our own willpower.

At this point, Paul wants us to know that freedom from the law should not be used as a license for self-indulgence because that gets us into sinful patterns that, in turn, throw us into bondage. At the same time, freedom does not mean that we are free from all obligations. Freedom does not mean that we can become an island unto ourselves.

Paul reminds us that the law of love obligates us. Love obligates us to one another. Paul, in fact, doubles down on this idea by saying that love makes us slaves or servants of one another. This obligation of service to one another is something that we choose voluntarily.

14 For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

All of the ethical demands of life are summed up in the single command to love our neighbor as ourselves. We first see this command in Leviticus 19:18. The whole chapter in Leviticus talks about our obligations to our fellow human beings. Jesus himself told us that this command summed up all the ethical demands in the law. Jesus also took this command to a whole new level by saying that his disciples were obligated to love their enemies. In the reign and rule of God, every member of the human family is our neighbor.

Paul wants us to understand that our freedom in Christ is one of God’s best gifts to us, but there are guardrails that are designed by God to be put in place to maximize our freedom. These guardrails do not diminish our freedom, but instead expand and intensify our freedom. Paul already mentioned the guardrail preventing us from a life of self-indulgence which throws into bondage. The other guardrail prevents us from living a life free from any obligation to our fellow human beings. There are negative consequences when we live a life that ignores our obligation to our neighbor.

15 If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

The negative consequences of a life that ignores our obligation to our neighbor is the law of the jungle. The law of the jungle says “eat or get eaten.” Paul says if you submit to the law of the jungle, and you bite and devour one another, then you must accept the consequences of that lifestyle. The implicit message is, “Why do you want to live that way?”

Paul’s message is that our freedom is not curtailed but is instead truly maximized with life-giving guardrails put in place. One of the guardrails prevents us from a life of self-indulgence, and the other prevents us from living a life of selfish disregard in relation to our fellow human beings. When we say that our freedom is maximized, we mean that we will experience more freedom, more peace, more joy, more fulfillment.

In what times in your life have you chosen what you thought was more freedom only to lose some of your freedom? What do you think of the idea of guardrails that prevent us from a life of self-indulgence and a life where we bite and devour our fellow human beings? How would you explain to someone that there is more freedom to be found within the guardrails?

If We Live by the Spirit, We Are Not Subject to the Law

Paul wanted believers to know that their life in Christ was not to be spent on living in strict obedience to the law of Moses, because such an endeavor is doomed to failure. The law itself does not give us the power to live it. Trying to live according to the demands of the law is like living on a treadmill—working hard, but never getting anywhere. If the law does not give us the power to live it, then the law makes us feel condemned and defeated. The law can also be used to give us a false sense of self-righteousness, which also prevents us from fulfilling God’s laws. Yet, living in the reign of God calls us to live under God’s righteous rule. It is the path to abundant life, joy, and peace. This suggests that some means other than using our own willpower to fulfill God’s laws is required.

The prophet Jeremiah foresaw a new covenant that God was making with his people. Under the new covenant, God was promising to put his law within his people and write it on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33).

The new covenant that Jeremiah described was and is one of the most astounding announcements made in the Old Testament.

The best thing is that we don't have to just imagine what this would be like. We can experience it, because we live in the age of the new covenant. We can be empowered to live under the reign and rule of God. We were never meant to live it on our own willpower. We were never meant to live that life of constant frustration. Paul describes how we can live a life under the reign and rule of God without our main focus being on the demands of the law.

¹⁶ Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.

The alternative to trying to live in strict obedience to the law by our own willpower is to live by the Spirit. What it means to live by the Spirit requires some unpacking. Paul starts to do this by contrasting living by the Spirit and living according to the flesh. According to Paul, our willpower is affected by the flesh.

What does Paul mean by referring to the *flesh*? Obviously, on some level, *flesh* refers to our bodily existence. Our body is complex, and it should be understood as a gift from God. Everything depends upon on how we view the role that our bodies are intended to play in life. The best way to sum it up is that our bodies were meant to serve as our servant and not our master.

When our flesh becomes the master, it can lead to a life of self-indulgence and a life of unbridled ambition, selfishness, and greed that put us in conflict with our fellow human beings. When our flesh is made to be a servant, then our body, with all of its desires, becomes the gift that God intended.

In order for the body to be our servant and not our master, it requires that we consciously choose another master. We choose to live by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, working with our own spirit, becomes our master. Paul wrote that what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the desires of the flesh. He said that this inner conflict is what prevents us from doing what we want. This is why we often experience frustration rather than freedom. Paul describes this inner conflict in even more detail in Romans 7:14-25.

The good news is that when the Spirit becomes our master and our body becomes the servant, then the Spirit directs our desires. Instead of the feeling of being prevented from doing what we want, our wants become aligned with what God wants, and we are enabled and empowered to live both what we want and what God wants for us. When all of this is happening, then something else happens.

¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.

What does Paul mean by this? If the Spirit is leading us, then we are being led in the center of God's will. We are not going outside the guardrails God has set up for us. Our desires are being governed by the Holy Spirit. We are not running on our own willpower, but instead we are empowered to live God's way by the power of the Holy Spirit living within us. We are not subject to the law because we are living a life well within God's laws without thinking about God's written laws.

The Holy Spirit is both guiding us and empowering us to live according to God's laws. It is through the Holy Spirit that the law is put within us and written on our hearts, just as Jeremiah envisioned. The ability to live God's law is happening internally through the Holy Spirit living within us, instead of through some external engagement with the written law of Moses.

How would you explain the difference between the benefit of being free from the law and the benefit of living under the reign and rule of God? How would you explain that these benefits are not in conflict with one another? What does it mean to you for God's laws to be written on your heart? How would you explain to someone the role of the Holy Spirit in this?

The Works of the Flesh that Prevent Us from Inheriting the Kingdom

Paul listed the outcomes when the desires of the flesh become our master.

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Notice that the desires of the flesh are not only sexual in nature. Sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery, of course, are examples of the works of the flesh that are aligned with sexual desires and unbridled sensuality. We should remember that these works of the flesh are not benign in terms of their consequences. They have led to the ruin of marriages, families, and the exploitation of the most vulnerable members of the human family. They have also brought ruin to the witness of many believers and ended the ministries of those who had a divine calling from God.

What about idolatry and sorcery? Right now, I am praying for someone I know who is being drawn to the occult and at the same time manifesting deeply anti-social values and behaviors and harboring nihilistic thoughts. I can see how Paul would include in his list these pseudo-religious perversions in the spiritual realm. I am truly scared for this person. He has moved into a world of his own making that is as far from God as I can possibly imagine.

Unfortunately, when Paul lists enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, and envy, he is including behaviors that he has witnessed in congregations and has written about in his letters to these churches. Notice that most of the works of the flesh in his list are related to these all-too-common features of family life, congregational life, social life, and political life.

Drunkenness, carousing, and "things like these" round out the list. These works of the flesh could be seen as "fun," but compared to what God intends for us, they become desperate attempts to fill the God-shaped hole in us that only God can fill.

These "works" of the flesh are the natural outgrowth of when we are led by the desires of the flesh. Notice that these are examples of how our desires can take us beyond the guardrails God intended in order to maximize our freedom. Some of the examples show us what happens when we go beyond the guardrail that is intended to keep us from a life of self-indulgence. Some of the examples show us what happens when we go beyond the guardrail that is intended to keep us from a life where we bite and devour the very people who are supposed to be the neighbors whom we love.

Paul's warning is that those for whom these works of the flesh have become habits will not inherit the kingdom of God. There is a finality to this statement that sounds quite harsh. It helps for me to remember that the point is not to sound merely punitive and condemning, and certainly not to sound arbitrary. I believe that Paul is saying that the works of the flesh *naturally* prevent us from experiencing the reign of God. There is nothing arbitrary about this. God is not some distant and remote deity in heaven who is eager to bar us from his reign. God desires that we not be ruled by the flesh and miss the wonderful benefits of his reign and rule in our lives. In the words of Paul, God wants us to live by the Spirit, and not live solely to gratify the desires of the flesh.

To which of the works of the flesh do you feel you are the most susceptible? Why is this the case? In what ways do you feel that these works of the flesh prevent you from experiencing the kingdom of God in its fulness?

The Fruit of the Spirit Is the Key to Living Under the Reign and Rule of God

After listing the works of the flesh, Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit.

²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

No one would argue that these are good qualities that are worth valuing. What is important is that we see these nine qualities fully in their proper context. I saw a meme recently that said, “I can do all things through a Bible verse taken out of context.” This is funny, but it makes a good point. We cannot do all things through a verse of scripture taken out of context. The same is true when we take Paul’s listing of the fruit of the Spirit out of context.

We are not meant to obtain these virtues merely through human striving. This misses the point. If we were look at these virtues in terms of human striving, we are dooming ourselves to failure. These qualities are the fruit of a life in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live these qualities.

Notice that we talked about the “works” (plural) of the flesh, but we talk about the “fruit” (singular) of the Spirit. What is the distinction being made? We do not pray one week for love, and the next week for joy, and the next week for patience, and so on. When we live a life in the Spirit, all nine qualities are produced as a package deal. These virtues are outgrowths of life in the Spirit.

Jesus said that we know who the false prophets are and who the true disciples of Jesus are by their fruits (Matthew 7:20). “Fruit” also means “evidence.” Let’s explore the nine qualities that provide evidence of a life in the Spirit.

LOVE: Love begins the list because God is love. We love because God first loved us. Love centers us and fills so many voids in our life. The love of God is the greatest motivator of human behavior. Love puts us in the center of God’s will. Love puts us in proper relation to God, our fellow human beings, and ourselves. Life flows out of these relationships.

JOY: What can we say about joy? The Westminster Confession says that the chief end of humankind is to glorify God and enjoy God forever. The more we live to glorify God, the more we enjoy God, and vice versa. When we enjoy God, we experience joy in life. When we reduce the Christian life to human striving, we tend to make overworking a badge of honor, and we tend to become joyless Christians. Joyless Christians do not make a good witness. Are you experiencing enough joy in your life?

PEACE: One of my colleagues introduced me and my fellow clergy to a diagnostic tool of sorts called a Peace Index. The question to us was, “What is your peace index?” Our peace index says a lot about our life in the Spirit or perhaps a lack thereof. If we are at peace, then what is true about us that makes us feel that way? Our level of peace is an important indicator of lots of things. There is nothing like God’s peace to make us feel at home and at ease in our own skin. A sense of peace can also fill us at times like a big draw of fresh, life-giving air that we inhale and release. God’s peace is God’s shalom, which refers to a deep sense of wellbeing. In the words of the hymn, God has taught us to say, “It is well with my soul.”

PATIENCE: I believe that one of the benefits of God's peace is that it can make us a non-anxious presence in an anxiety-filled world. God's peace is key to being patient with others and patient with life. Patience is needed in our world more than ever. Are you a patient person, or do you struggle with patience? Another word for patience is long-suffering. Are you short with people?

KINDNESS: Patience and kindness are related. Kindness is therefore related to our peace index. Kindness is definitely related to love. Kindness is deeper than niceness. The loving kindness we show others are reflections of our appreciation or lack of appreciation for the loving kindness that God has shown us. I hear more and more people talk about the lack of kindness in the world. We can witness to our faith by showing kindness.

GOODNESS/GENEROSITY: Since different versions of the Bible translate this word into either goodness or generosity, I think it is best to keep both words and meanings together. You have probably noticed that there are two kinds of people in the world. There are givers, and there are takers. Those who are takers lack a generosity of spirit, and goodness is prevented from coming through their lives. Those who are givers are generous in their spirit and their actions, and their goodness comes through. One of the table blessings that children say early in life begins with the words, "God is great, God is good." God's greatness refers to God's might and majesty. God's goodness refers to his generosity toward us. All of creation is God's own self-expression, not only of God's majesty and might, but also God's deep goodness. God's goodness is reflected in all of God's creation. Do people witness God's goodness reflected in your words, actions, and countenance?

FAITHFULNESS: Faithfulness is our faith in God expressed through loyalty, fidelity, dependability, covenant, staying true and pure, unwavering consistency, and sticking closely to God. When people's faithfulness stands out in our minds, it is because their faithfulness to God permeates all their other relationships, interactions, and commitments. They also give us the impression that what we see in their public persona is only the tip of the iceberg. We know there is so much more to their faithfulness that is going on beneath the surface, which is their life hidden with Christ. Remember that our faithfulness, as in the other eight qualities of the fruit of the Spirit, is not produced through mere human striving.

GENTLENESS: Is enough said about gentleness in today's world? Do you ever come through in your interactions like a bull in a china shop? Do you ever notice when people seem to have a need to call attention to themselves that it comes through in their interactions with people? Do you ever catch this tendency in yourself? Do you come on strong to get your way? Do you feel a need to prove yourself or feel you must struggle to remain seen and remain relevant? Gentleness is related to patience and being a non-anxious presence. I notice that when we encounter gentle people, we find ourselves leaning in to listen to them. Because I am coming under conviction for needing to be gentler, I find myself wanting to focus on this quality. Looking at any of these qualities of the fruit of the Spirit in isolation misses the point. This is not about human striving. What am I lacking in my life in the Spirit that might happen to be showing up now in my struggle with gentleness? What are the deeper issues to which I need to attend with God's help?

SELF-CONTROL: Having control of our thoughts and actions is not something that we can do in our own power. The paradox is that self-control does not come from ourselves. It is a part of the fruit of the Spirit. Self-control happens through our life in the Spirit, or it does not happen. We might exercise self-control on our own power for a limited time, but when the pressure builds too much, it has got to go somewhere. Self-control is the result of the Holy Spirit satisfying deep needs within our spirit so that we stay within the guardrails that prevent us from self-indulgence, on the one hand, and from biting and devouring others, on the other hand.

Which of these nine qualities are you experiencing more than others? If it is not about human striving, what do you think may be behind the instances where you are lacking? What are your deeper issues and needs that are not being met in your spiritual life?

Diving Deeper into a Life in the Spirit

Now that Paul has named nine qualities of the fruit of the Spirit, Paul says more about what is involved in this life in the Spirit.

²⁴ And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The fruit of the Spirit cannot be obtained by wanting these virtues in our lives. There is this conflict that exists related to the desires of the flesh. The flesh, with its passions and desires, must be crucified with Christ. This idea is one that must be unpacked.

Life in the Spirit and our life in Christ are brought together through the Spirit living in us. The Holy Spirit lives to serve Christ and to bring us to Christ and bring Christ to us. Paul helps us understand how the Holy Spirit joins believers with Christ in his death so that our flesh is able to be crucified with its passions and desires. This is what happens when we choose to die with Christ to self and to sin, and we choose this every day afterward. Every day is an opportunity to die and then rise again with Christ.

According to Paul, this experience of being buried with Christ and rising again to new life is symbolized in baptism. In the baptism ritual that my tradition uses, we say that through baptism we are incorporated into God's mighty acts in Jesus Christ. According to Paul in Romans 6:1-14, we are incorporated into the death and resurrection of Jesus.

If a part of our life in the Spirit is to enable us to die with Christ to self and to sin, and rise again to new life in Christ, we must consider how we do this practically. One way that quickly comes to mind is in confession, repentance, and pardon. In our confession of sin, we are laying before God that to which we want to die. In repentance, we are praying for the strength and guidance to turn away from our sin and live the new life Christ offers. In pardon, we experience the grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ won for us by the sacrifice Jesus made willingly on the cross. This grace enables us to move on from the guilt and sense of worthlessness that weigh us down. The Holy Spirit and God's sanctifying grace empower us to continue the ongoing process of transformation so that we conform more and more to the image of Christ.

You will remember that confession, repentance, and pardon are features of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The sacrament of Holy Communion is a real means of God's grace. When we say that the flesh is being crucified with all of its passions and desires, we are talking about a process of transformation that goes beyond mere human striving. We are mystically joining with Christ in his death and resurrection through the power of the Holy Spirit.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

The role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer happens on many levels, but one of these is guiding believers in their spiritual journey. The Holy Spirit guides, directs, prompts, opens doors, and closes doors. The Spirit also activates both our conscience and our consciousness of God.

Our conscience is given to us by God, but our conscience is not perfect because it can come under other influences. I once heard the conscience being compared to a sundial. A sundial can tell the time when it is the sun's light that falls on it. But under some other light, say the moon's light, a sundial won't give the correct time. In the same way, our conscience can serve as a reliable guide when there is engagement with

the Holy Spirit, through prayer, confession, meditation, scripture reading, times of solitude, and reflection. Through these means of grace, the Spirit gives us the gift of holy discernment to guide us.

The Holy Spirit activates not only our conscience, but also our consciousness of God. As we discern our way through life, we can know where God's abiding presence is accompanying us. In the words of a benediction I use, we can know where God is going before us to guide us, behind us to guard us, beneath us to uphold us, above us to inspire us, beside us to befriend us, and in us to give us peace.

A devotional practice that I have shared before is called "Examination of Conscience" and "Examination of Consciousness." During the day at different points, and at the end of the day, we enter a moment of solitude and silence and ask the Holy Spirit to help us make an examination of our conscience. What felt good and what did not sit well with our spirit in terms of our thoughts, feelings, and actions during the day? We also ask the Holy Spirit to help us make an examination of consciousness. Where and when was I most conscious of God's presence during the day, and least conscious? What else was going on? What does this teach me?

The scripture passage we are studying ends with the following words:

²⁶ Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

When our life in the Spirit is bearing fruit as it should, then we will stay well within the guardrail that keeps us free from a life of conceit and self-indulgence on the one hand, and on the other hand, we will stay well within the guardrail that keeps us free from a life of competition and envy in relation to our fellow human beings. Through God's power and direction, we will avoid the works of the flesh and being ruled by the desires of the flesh. Instead, we will produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives in all of its manifold expressions.

The freedom that we crave is not found in a life of unbridled self-indulgence, or a life free from obligations to others, for this kind of freedom is a counterfeit freedom that ultimately leads to bondage. The freedom we crave is found in a divinely directed and empowered life, which is lived in the center of God's will. We are free from external adherence to God's written laws, because they are written on our hearts and they are being lived out through the Holy Spirit living in us.

We realize that the greatest freedom is found when we are experiencing more and more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The benefits that such a life grants us enable us to experience the reign and rule of God. We get to live a blessed life as heirs of the kingdom.

What passions of the flesh need to be joined with Christ's death on the cross and die in you? Are you praying to be guided by the Holy Spirit? Are you paying attention enough? Do any of the devotional practices that have been mentioned appeal to you? What other devotional practices are coming to your mind? What is your plan?

Prayer

Gracious, Generous, and Good God, You send your Holy Spirit to fill us, renew us, guide us, and bind us to Christ. Awaken in us a desire for more of your Spirit through the means of grace available to us, that we might experience more love, more joy, more peace, more patience, more kindness, more generosity and goodness, more faithfulness, more gentleness, and more self-control, through Christ our Lord, who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen.

Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Superintendent of Clergy and District Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at jharris@sgaumc.com. Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the "Layered Bible Journey," at www.layeredbiblejourney.com.

.....

August 13 Lesson: The Nature of the Kingdom

Summer Quarter 2023: The Righteous Reign of God
Unit 3: God's Eternal Reign

Sunday School Lesson for the week of August 13, 2023
By Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: Romans 14:10-23

Key Verse: *Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.* (Romans 14:19)

Lesson Aims

- To set our scripture in the context of Paul's emphasis on the confession "Jesus Christ is Lord"
- To take the controversy around eating meat sacrificed to idols and find applications to our time
- To hear Paul's calls for unity anticipating when we stand together around the throne of grace
- To develop empathy for those who are at an earlier stage in their journey of faith
- To understand why eating meat from the marketplace could set some back in their faith journey
- To learn how actions that are okay for us could push someone else to go against their conscience
- To distinguish non-essentials from the essential work of pursuing peace and mutual upbuilding
- To apply what we have learned in matters that are relevant to our day
- To consider our role as ethical decision-makers.

The Implications of the Confession: 'Jesus Christ is Lord'

When we started the summer quarter's study of "The Righteous Reign of God," we began viewing the reign of God through the prophets, then explored Jesus' parables of the kingdom of heaven. In last week's study, we began our exploration of God's reign through the teachings of Paul.

If you do a search of Paul's use of the word of the "kingdom," you realize that Paul uses this word rarely—far less often than Jesus did. There is a simple reason for this. How Paul talks about the reign of God is tied to the story of Jesus Christ. Paul's passion is to show how the crucified and risen Christ has become both Messiah and Lord. For Paul, the confession of faith that "Jesus Christ is Lord" is the most consequential confession a person can make. For Jews who became Christians, they were saying that their story as God's people culminates in Jesus. Through his sacrificial life and victory over death, Jesus showed that he was and is the promised Messiah of the covenant people. Gentiles came to the same confession through another story, you might say, that had to do with the fulfillment of their greatest human needs through Christ alone.

It is also important to remember that the whole Mediterranean world was a part of the Roman Empire. The empire ruled over Judea and Galilee in the east and everything between it and Rome and even areas beyond to the west. Caesar ruled over it all, and proclaimed himself to be Lord and God. The Christians, who proclaimed Jesus Christ to be Lord, did so knowing that they were living in defiance of the law of the land. They believed that although there were earthly kings and emperors whom they had to obey on many matters, they gave their heart and ultimate allegiance to Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. This conviction served as the foundation of all their other convictions. Paul's appreciation for the reign of God is therefore

much greater than the number of times he uses the phrase “kingdom of God,” as we will see through the scripture we are studying.

There is more context to consider in this study. First of all, our scripture is a part of a letter Paul wrote to the church in Rome from the city of Corinth. It was Paul’s hope to travel to Rome to strengthen the church there. Until he could travel in person, he had to rely on writing this letter which had to be delivered by someone else. In this letter, he is addressing matters that he thought were important to tackle. Since Rome was such a large city, the Church in Rome consisted of a number of smaller house churches. One of the purposes of Paul’s letter was to unite these Christians.

How can the confession “Jesus Christ is Lord” have meaning if all those who call him “Lord” are not united with each other under his reign? Caesar prided himself as the great “uniter,” although he ruled over people whose land had been conquered by Rome at some point in the past. Caesar ruled over a highly stratified society where order was maintained by everyone knowing and staying in their place. Christians were different in that they were united under the lordship of Jesus Christ and were seeking to love one another and live a life in common that spanned across social distinctions and divisions. The lordship of Jesus Christ gave them a common identity that they claimed as individuals and as fellow Christians.

Another important part of the context of this lesson is the general framework of the letter to the Romans. You could boil this letter down to a twin agenda: 1) building support for justification by faith and how Jesus Christ becomes our Lord, and 2) showing the implications of the lordship of Jesus Christ in the life of Christians. Romans 12 is the turning point that contains the big “therefore” where Paul starts laying out the implications for living under the same banner of Christ as our Lord.

Also, in the chapter just before the chapter from which our selected scripture comes, Paul reminds the members of the church of their obligation to love one another: *“The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.”* (Romans 13:8-10) You will remember from our lesson last week that Paul referred to the commandment to love our neighbor in the letter to the Galatians. (Galatians 5:14) Paul is reminding the community of believers in Rome that love of neighbor is the command that knits them together under Christ’s lordship.

When we get to our selected scripture passage in Romans 14, we will realize we are joining the middle of a conversation that started earlier. Paul started addressing a controversy in the beginning of the chapter. He began with the admonition to welcome the one who is weak in faith but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. The issue is whether or not to eat meat from the marketplace that may have been sacrificed to idols. This means that we will be getting deep into an issue that, on the face of it, does not seem to be relevant to today. The more we get into the controversy, however, the more we will realize how the principles we learn are very relevant to today.

Have you ever thought about the meaning of your confession of faith that Jesus Christ is Lord? Have you ever considered the implications of that confession in relation to the way you live out your daily life and relationships?

Anticipating our Unity at the Judgement Throne of Grace

Let’s join this conversation that is already in progress, and begin to hear the words that Paul is keen on sharing with them. This involves sorting through the issues, but not for the purpose of taking sides on the issue. Paul is helping each one in the community understand all sides. He wants them to understand the

deeply personal reasons that lie underneath the various sides each has taken. The issue of what is *eaten* around the table pales in significance to the way they regard one another around the table. How they share their common life depends on understanding what stage a person is at in their faith journey. Paul knows that if he can get them to understand their brothers and sisters in Christ in this way, then the door will open for them to show empathy and love. They will know how to treat one another so that there is unity in the body of Christ.

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

As long as people are judging each other, there will be no progress at all. When Paul refers to “you” as emphatically as he does, he is calling out each member of the community to examine their own actions. If they are so willing to enter into judgement against their brothers and sisters, don’t they on some level despise these brothers and sisters? This is a strong thing for Paul to say, but he wants them to consider this possibility.

Paul wants the community to anticipate the moment when they all stand before the judgment seat of God. Do they want their judging of one another to be on their conscience when they stand before God in the judgment? Let’s clarify what it will mean to stand before God at the judgment.

**¹¹ For it is written,
“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall give praise to God.”**

The members of the church in Rome are being taught that standing before the judgment seat of God is not going to be an occasion for wrath and condemnation. Paul has proclaimed to them in the first verse of Romans 8: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” When they stand together at the judgment seat of God, their sins will be forgiven because of the atonement won for them through Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross, and his victory over sin and death. Paul quoted Isaiah 45:23, because this will be the moment when every knee shall bow and every tongue give praise to God. According to the Christ hymn in Philippians 2:11, this is the moment “that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

¹² So then, each one of us will be accountable to God.

Everyone will stand before a judgment throne of grace, so why would they want to have on their conscience the fact that they judged their brothers and sisters in Christ. Each of us will be accountable to God at this moment. Paul is getting the community to anticipate in their life together on earth the way it will be when they stand before the judgment throne of grace. There will be unity around the throne in the future, so why should there be anything less in the church in the present?

As you imagine what it will be like when we are at the throne of grace, lifting up Christ as Lord, does it make you less likely to judge others? If you find yourself in a situation where you might be tempted to judge others, how might you be prompted to recall that scene and interrupt that tendency welling up inside of you?

Developing Empathy at the Table

Paul began Romans 14 with the admonition to welcome the weak in faith. The NRSV says, “Welcome *those* who are weak in faith.” A more literal translation says, “Welcome the *one* who is weak in faith.” The NRSV recognizes that the segment of the church to which Paul is referring would be more than one person. Paul is also making the point that our care and concern should extend to the level of each individual. It should be that personal. We should care for the concerns of the minority in particular situations. Being a minority group in this situation does not mean that their experience can be ignored in favor of the majority. They should be extended extra care because there will be a natural tendency to overlook them, to dismiss their concerns, or gang up on them and select them to be despised.

Paul is appealing to the community’s empathy on the basis of a weakness that this minority group is experiencing. It can seem as if Paul is piling on even by calling this group weak. Let’s suspend judgment on this until we understand why they are being called weak.

¹³ Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother or sister.

Paul is urging the community to avoid tripping up their fellow members in the church. More is at stake than hurting people’s feelings. Putting a stumbling block or hindrance implies that a person is on a journey from weakness to strength. People are growing into maturity. This is true of *every* believer of course. We are all in different places on the journey. Every person starts at the beginning. Even Paul spent three years growing in the faith after his Damascus Road experience before he engaged with the leadership of the church. (Galatians 1:13-24)

If every person starts at the beginning, when we *do* grow further along in our journey, we should all have empathy for the person who is at an earlier stage in their journey. We have all been there. We should exercise particular care that we do not put any kind of a stumbling block in a person’s path that causes them to be disillusioned, insecure, or confused.

Do you ever think about where a person is on their journey of faith? Can you recall times in life where you were less mature spiritually than you are now? Do you recall ways that people gave you special care? If not, do you wish people had given you special care? What would that have looked like for you?

Learning the Issues around Food

The next verse (verse 14) is the first verse where the issue of clean and unclean food is mentioned in the scripture passage we are studying. Before we get to it, let’s remember that Paul started naming the issue and exploring it in some of the verses preceding our scripture lesson. He wrote, “*Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat, for God has welcomed them... Those who eat, eat for the Lord, since they give thanks to God, while those who abstain, abstain for the Lord and give thanks to God.*” (Romans 14:2-4, 6)

To understand Paul’s teaching, we have no choice but to get into the complex issues that surrounded food in the 1st Century Church. This issue was big enough that he also addressed it in his letters to both the Galatians and the Corinthians, in addition to the Roman Christians.

We know that one division regarding food had to do with the kosher laws handed down to Jews through the law of Moses. Jewish Christians had to grapple with whether or not those laws still applied when they became Christians. Some not only thought they should still be applied, but they thought that Gentile

Christians should also be made to adopt these restrictions. Others thought that Christ's fulfillment of the law, by the atonement he made for our sins, freed them from laws such as these.

This was such a big issue in the beginning of the Church that God gave Peter a vision in which a table cloth was lowered from heaven filled with creatures that Peter had been raised never to eat because he was taught that they were unclean. In the vision, a voice said, "Kill and eat," and when Peter protested, the voice said, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." The vision was repeated so that he saw it three times in all. God sent a certain Gentile seeker, named Cornelius, to help Peter process his vision. Peter reflected on the vision and reached the conclusion that "God shows no partiality." Peter realized that the door to the gospel was being opened to Gentiles, and he baptized Cornelius and the other Gentile seekers with him into the Christian faith. It was all very dramatic.

According to Paul's letter to the Galatians, however, Paul witnessed Peter move from a table where he was about to eat with Gentile Christians when a group of Jewish Christians came into the room. Evidently, Peter was worried about what the Jewish Christians might think about him if he was not eating at a kosher table. It was a weak moment for Peter, and Paul thought it was important enough to call Peter out. Peter was a leader, and everyone was watching Peter.

Whether or not to eat kosher may not have been Paul's concern for the church in Rome. Paul does not focus on divisions between Jewish and Gentile Christians. For the Roman church, the controversy was around eating meat that may have been sacrificed to idols. Meat that had been sacrificed to idols was sold in the marketplace afterward. It was often the only meat that some people could afford.

In verse 14, Paul reveals his own position, but we will also see how he holds himself back from trying to impose his position on others. He chooses to do this very conscientiously. He wanted to model for others what it means not to impose certain beliefs onto every other member of the body of Christ when those beliefs can be shown not to be essential for every believer.

¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.

Paul had to come to believe that not only was non-kosher food okay to eat, but it was also okay to eat meat from the marketplace that had recently been sacrificed to idols. His reasoning, that he expresses elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, is that idols represent gods that do not in fact exist. There is only one true God. Idols are empty symbols that hold absolutely no meaning. Since Paul knows this full well, the meat does not come with any baggage for him. He was persuaded that in the Lord Jesus neither this meat or any other meat was unclean in itself. The clear conscience of the mature Paul allowed him to eat meat from the marketplace. Paul considered himself to be a person who came at this issue from a position of strength.

Having said this, Paul could think of people who, for various reasons, would have considered the meat to be unclean. He said that if it *felt* unclean to them, then *for them* it really was unclean. Eating meat from the marketplace made them feel vulnerable to its effects on their conscience. Call it a weakness, but for Paul, he could not dismiss their weakness. Their weakness was not something he felt he should exploit. What was a strength for Paul was not a belief, or opinion, or position that he felt he should impose upon others in the face of their weakness.

As I said earlier, the weak and strong in this instance did not divide along lines between being a Jewish Christian or a Gentile Christian. The divisions were much more nuanced than that. Even Gentile Christians could (*and often did*) find problems with eating meat from the marketplace that had been sacrificed to idols. Many Gentile Christians had left a life of paganism and found salvation in Jesus Christ. Their lives and the lives of their families had changed dramatically for the good. If leaving that soul-killing culture involved

making a conscious break with anything associated with pagan rituals, including what they ate, then it was worth them making a conscious decision to become vegetarians, especially if they could not afford other sources of meat. Paul even made the point that for them to eat meat, when it stung their conscience, would be wrong.

¹⁵ If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.

Paul himself made a conscious decision not to injure a brother or sister by imposing his beliefs on those whose consciences did not allow them to eat meat from the marketplace. That meant choosing not to eat meat from the marketplace when he shared the table with them. His primary motivation was one of love.

Paul was telling those who had no problem eating meat from the marketplace to refrain from eating it or serving it if there were others present whose conscience did not allow them to eat meat. To do so would injure their conscience. To do so would bring them into too much contact with their former life of paganism. To willingly do this to a brother or sister in Christ is to choose not to walk in love. By bringing a brother or sister into contact with their former life of paganism, it could cause them to backslide. When a person is coerced into ignoring what their conscience tells them, it could undermine their growth from their former life to their new life in Christ. It could cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.

¹⁶ So do not let your good be spoken of as evil.

Paul recognizes that there are some actions that we can believe are good if we are only considering ourselves. If these actions, however, are causing harm to members of the body of Christ, or if our actions are forcing members of the body to sit at separate tables, then we open the door for something that we think is good to be spoken of as evil.

Distinguishing Between Essentials and Non-Essentials in the Kingdom

The next two verses stand out because in them Paul refers to the kingdom of God. It is notable because he is describing what is the essence of the kingdom and what is not.

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ The one who serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God and has human approval.

Paul told the Christians in Rome that when it comes to each individual standing before God, it was not about what they ate or drank, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The food and drink we consume is not the essential issue. The essential issue is defined relationally between members of the body of Christ and the Christ in their midst. The essential behaviors are the ones occurring *between* the members of the worshiping community and around the table of Christ. The essential beliefs are being lived out where there is righteousness, peace, and joy as evidence of the Holy Spirit present with them. Being able to discern what is essential, and what is not, is vitally important.

Jesus, in his ministry, addressed the difference between essentials and non-essentials once in a very vivid way. He said, “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!*” (Matthew 23:23-24) The kingdom of God, or reign of God, is found where we pay attention to the weightier matters.

¹⁹ Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Paul tells us outright what is the weightier matter. It is pursuing peace and mutual upbuilding among the members of the body of Christ. Notice what Paul has not said. Paul has not thrown up his hands and said, “Can’t we just stop paying attention to what we eat?” He has not suggested that the members of the church in Rome just ignore the matter of what food is eaten. We have described the instances where members of the church should abstain from serving certain foods in certain company. The details matter, but only because of what was going on beneath, above, and around the details. Respect, empathy, peace, mutual upbuilding, care, and concern were being lived out through the details.

²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong to make someone stumble by what you eat; ²¹ it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble.

It was not just about what the members of the body of Christ were striving to do, it was about God’s work among them. God was working among them, and they needed to take special care not to undo what God was doing. It is wrong to make people stumble by coercing them to do what their conscience was telling them not to do because of their past. Paul says this course of action applies to situations beyond eating meat and drinking wine. It applies to “anything” that makes your brother or sister stumble.

We have not mentioned drinking wine. As we have mentioned the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols is not an issue that is relevant to us today. Whether or not to drink wine or other spirits is a relevant issue. People are divided on whether or not they should drink alcohol. Some people are “Tea-Total-ers” preferring not to drink alcohol at all, and others believe that drinking wine and alcohol in moderation is permissible.

In Psalm 104, a song of praise to God the Creator, the psalmist thanks God for giving us “wine to gladden the human heart.” Paul once suggested to Timothy that he mix a little wine with his water to settle his stomach. It should also be noted that wine was consumed in the Lord’s Supper.

In the Methodist tradition, which I share, we use grape juice instead of wine for Holy Communion. We do not want to cause participants in Holy Communion to stumble due to the consumption of alcohol. It was a Methodist communion steward, Dr. Thomas B. Welch, who was also a dentist, who developed pasteurized grape juice, so that a non-alcoholic alternative could be served at communion. This developed into the Welch’s grape juice we know today. Christians are divided on the matter of being free to drink alcohol in moderation or abstaining from alcohol altogether.

Applying what you have learned in this lesson, how would leave room for different perspectives on the matter of consuming alcohol? What went into your decision to drink alcohol in moderation or not to drink it at all? As you hear the perspectives of others, how might you be called to practice respect and empathy? How might the presence of alcohol being consumed cause others to stumble or suffer in any way? If you were one who sees no problem in drinking alcohol, do you see certain situations in which you would choose not to drink alcohol? If you are one who abstains from alcohol, how have you learned not to judge those who do? Is it possible to have differing opinions on alcohol and still maintain the unity of the body of Christ?

Differing Convictions, United in Love, Under One Lord

This scripture passage we have been studying demonstrates that there is such a thing as “situational ethics.” There are some ethical decisions that Christians make which are not so much situational. All Christians are called to act and behave in the same manner in many matters. There is no room for ambiguity. Then, there

are some instances in which the situation of the person making ethical choices plays a definite role. Sometimes, it is our own situation that governs our actions, and sometimes it is the situation of other persons in our presence that governs our actions.

22 The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God. Blessed are those who have no reason to condemn themselves because of what they approve.

Paul is reminding us of the responsibility we have as ethical decision-makers. Our faith understanding and our relationship with God govern our convictions. We listen to our own conscience, and we also consider the conscience of our brother and sisters when our actions affect them. We consider our brothers and sisters because we understand that God is the Father of us all. Our convictions flow from this relational understanding of who we are in Christ. We must be faithful to follow our convictions. According to Paul, we are blessed when, for the sake of a brother or sister, we have chosen not to approve a course of action for ourselves that we would normally have approved if it were only about us. We are blessed when our conscience remains clear after considering our brothers and sisters in Christ.

23 But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat because they do not act from faith, for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Paul says the reverse is also true. We are under judgment if we engage in actions our conscience is telling us not to engage. This may be for personal reasons, because we know these actions may trip *us* up. Or, this may be for reasons involving our brothers and sisters to keep them stumbling. Paul seems to say, when in doubt, refrain. When we doubt, we should think it through before acting. We should use the faith understanding we have to think of all the ethical considerations. This is our responsibility as ethical decision-makers. To fail in this responsibility is sin.

Prayer

Gracious God, You called your servant Paul to show the body of Christ the implications of living together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Teach and guide us to pursue peace and mutual upbuilding, that we may show the world what living under your reign as brothers and sisters in Christ looks like, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen.

Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Superintendent of Clergy and District Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at jharris@sgaumc.com. Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the "Layered Bible Journey," at www.layeredbiblejourney.com.



Brick-and-mortar grant helps churches

By Rev. Garth Duke-Barton

Has your church dreamed of repairing its sanctuary or remodeling the bathrooms? Have you wondered if you could fix the leaking roof but just did not know where to get the money? In the past two years, South Georgia had churches that received Renfro Grants to help with projects like these.

The first was Pinkney Chapel in Folkston. They needed assistance to finish a bathroom renovation. The Renfro Grant gave them the help they needed to complete the work. The other church was Scott's Chapel in Blackshear. Their work is ongoing to renovate their sanctuary, making it accessible for all who wish to attend.

The Renfro Grant is a fund offered to rural churches, defined as towns of 10,000 people or less, in the Southeastern Jurisdiction. This is a brick-and-mortar grant, meaning it goes for building projects, and is to be spent on the main church property (not parsonages). Each conference is offered an award of up to \$5000 towards a deserving church.

The church that is awarded the grant in South Georgia will have submitted the application, found by clicking on the page here if you are viewing the online version of this: www.sejumc.org/renfrotrust, or emailing a request to revgarth0810@gmail.com. To be eligible, all applications must be received by August 21, 2023. Completed applications may be emailed to the above address or mailed to:

Rev. Garth Duke-Barton
205 E. Cherry St
Jesup, GA 31546

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



Whisper How You Feel

by Hal Brady

Sometime back while driving to a meeting, I passed a florist truck. I couldn't help but notice the advertisement on the side of the truck. The advertisement read: "Flowers whisper how you feel."

Undoubtedly, that's true! Flowers do whisper how we feel. But perhaps even more, compassion whispers how we feel. Jesus asked, "Which of these three do you think proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed mercy upon him." And then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10: 36, 37). Thus, we come face to face with one of the most gripping stories that Jesus ever told. In fact, it has won its way into the heart of humanity as none other with the exception of the parable of the Prodigal Son.

But this story of the Good Samaritan brings us face to face with flesh and blood people like ourselves and Jesus' whole point of what it means to be a neighbor in the kingdom of God.

So, the real point of this parable is not who is my neighbor, which is anybody in need, but how I should embody being a neighbor, living under the reign of God.

First, a true neighbor knows no boundaries! In this parable before us, Jesus makes it very clear that neighborliness has no boundaries. As you know, Jesus never identifies the man by the side of the road. He is only a "man" which means anyone at all (male, female, friend, foe, anyone). Underline it! The man by the side of the road represents anyone in need. The Samaritan simply enters into the wounded man's situation. He had compassion on him. And, of course, the word compassion means to "suffer with." Billy Graham said he would never forget when a man named Redd Harper came to Christ out in Hollywood. Harper said that to him the most amazing and thrilling thing after he came to Christ was this fact: "I found that I loved everybody, no matter what race or color, or creed they might be. I just wanted to go hug the whole world."

Second, a true neighbor moves beyond generalities! Unlike the priest and the Levite in this story who passed

by on the other side of the road, the Samaritan offered his help. He bound up the victim's wounds with his own hands. In recent days, I had appendicitis, was operated on, and then spent 11 days in the hospital. Upon being dismissed I was informed that I would have a pic line inserted into my vein to allow the daily antibody to fight the infection. This would go on for 14 days. How was it going to happen? My daughter and her special friends learned the procedure and accomplished the task "hands on." Generalities simply would have come up short, as they always do.

Third, a true neighbor gives and gives and keeps on giving! A true neighbor always gives and (let it be emphasized) a true neighbor always has something to give.

The Samaritan took the wounded man to the inn. He paid the innkeeper to look after him. Note that the Samaritan was willing to look after the man as long as it took to get him well and back on his feet. James Stewart, in his book "King For Ever," tells a of a lighthouse keeper whose days were spent on an isolated reef in the sea. Someone asked him one day, "Do you not feel like a prisoner way out here?" Swift as a flash came the answer, "Not since I saved my first man!" Jesus asked, "Which of these then, do you think proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" And we reply, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus says, "Go and do likewise."

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).



Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors

By Tony Caldwell

Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors have been the expression of the United Methodist Church since 2001. With this welcoming declaration as our guide, our church takes seriously our mission to the community.

Open Hearts: At the Hinesville First UMC, we aspire to see the divine spark in every person, treating everyone with compassion, kindness, and respect. We are a Christian community that expresses the loving example of Jesus Christ through nurturing and support for one another.

Open Minds: Pursuing knowledge and understanding is essential to our faith journey.

Historically, United Methodists seek to explore, question, learn, and grow with open minds. We value diverse perspectives and welcome the opportunity to engage in thoughtful dialogue, knowing we can learn much from one another.

Open Doors: We open our doors wide at the Hinesville First UMC, welcoming everyone. We actively work towards dismantling barriers that exclude or marginalize anyone. With open doors, we create a sanctuary where all are welcome, finding the loving example of Jesus Christ, comfort, belonging, and a sense of purpose.

Rev. Tony Caldwell is senior pastor of Hinesville First United Methodist Church.

.....

Conference Updates

Renfro Grant Applications now being accepted; deadline is August 21

Connectional Ministries is accepting applications for the Southeastern Jurisdiction Renfro Trust Grant. This grant is a brick-and-mortar grant specifically for small, rural churches. Guidelines, [requirements, and applications can be found here](#). Completed applications must be submitted to Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, Conference Secretary for Global Ministries (revgarth0810@gmail.com) by our conference deadline: Monday, August 21, 2023. (Note: application will say August 1)

.....

Conference Happenings

2023 Lay Servant Ministries & Certified Lay Ministry

Check out the [dates & registration for the 2023 classes](#).

Reset Cohorts - 2023-2024

Do you remember how church used to be? Do you talk about going back to the way things were before the pandemic? Or do your “good old days” go even further back than that? Maybe you’d rather go back to what church was like 40 years ago when you regularly added new members and your Wednesday night dinners were the talk of the town. It’s good to remember what was, but only if that reflection leads you toward resetting your energy and resources toward your mission. The Office of Connectional Ministries is gearing up for year 2 of its "Reset Cohort." In this 7-month cohort, clergy and laity will spend time refocusing on the mission to which we’ve been called, “Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” If you’re longing for more than a return to the “good old days” and are ready to reset your church for missional engagement, Gospel energy, and a passion for people, this cohort is for you! [Learn more and register](#)

Lay Planter’s Training - Fall 2023

Here in South Georgia, we are seizing the opportunity to start new things for new people in new places. We are seeing a resurgence of grassroots efforts among our laity to dive deeply into disciple-making using new models for church planting like home churches, fresh expressions and more. Can you imagine what it will be like in a few years when laity across the conference will be engaged in leading discipleship efforts across the conference? These discipleship groups and home churches will be able to meet in all kinds of places, made up of all kinds of people. Coming up on July 22, we will have an informational zoom session to find out more about an online Lay Planter’s Course we will be offering this Fall to interested laity. Coming to the meeting doesn’t commit you to the course; it’s an opportunity to hear more about it. [Learn more](#)

Annual Eagles Retreat - Oct. 16-18

The Eagles, the retired ministers and spouses of South Georgia, have set their annual retreat for October 16-18, 2023, at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons. This year’s program and presentations will focus on World War II. Participants will hear interesting and informative presentations about the beginning and the end of the war in the Pacific from a guest speaker traveling from Orlando, FL. Registration and room check-in begins on Monday, October 16 at 4:00 pm. Dinner will be served between 5:30-7:00 pm. The retreat will conclude on Wednesday, October 18 with lunch. Register by calling Epworth at (912) 638-8688 (ask to speak to Trice Roberts). Invite a friend or family member to come with you for this retreat for good food,

fellowship, and fun. If you have questions, please contact David Tart at 229-300-8805 or revdtart@bellsouth.net.



Resource Roundup – August 2023

5 Tips for Writing Letters that Inspire Generosity

It is hard to find one of our churches that doesn't have any anxiety about the future, both in terms of membership and financial support for local mission and ministry. [Read about how a simple handwritten letter can inspire generosity within your congregation.](#)

Save time and multiply your marketing creativity with ChatGPT

(UMCom) ChatGPT is all the rage at the moment, with many people giving it funny prompts, such as requesting responses in Shakespearean dialect, while marketers use it to craft content that would often take half a day to write. Jeremy Steele, UMCom's resident tech guru, guides us on how to use ChatGPT to check off tasks and give us time that can be better used elsewhere. [Read more](#) | [Watch a screencast](#)

Using tech safely in kids' ministry

Technology is everywhere, and tomorrow's generation won't know a world without it. Here are three ways to use technology in your kids' ministry safely and effectively. This article covers topics such as obtaining parental permission, teaching students about online safety and using digital tools to make children's ministry easier. Discover how digital tools can make Bible study and Scripture memorization fun for kids, and how social media can build a stronger sense of community among families in your ministry. [Read more](#)

Bring real people into real church with social media

Have you ever considered how churches can leverage the power of social media recommendations to reach a wider audience? Here are seven practical ways to encourage congregants to share their positive experiences with their social networks, from asking them to check in and post during services to creating tweetable quotes and Instagrammable slides. [Read more](#)

Make your next fundraiser a hit!

Raising money can be challenging at times. However you set up your fundraising activity, it is important that you develop a solid strategy and put plenty of effort into marketing to maximize impact. [Read more](#)

Grants available for ethnic churches

The deadline is Sept. 10 for local ethnic United Methodist churches to apply for grants of up to \$10,000. Racial Ethnic Local Church Concerns grants may be used for leadership training, small groups, worship, stewardship and spiritual formation. New programs will be given priority in the selection process. [Read press release](#)

United Methodist Publishing House Resources for the South Georgia Conference!

Whether there are faithful people in the South Georgia Conference who are beginning again, continuing their journey after a season of disorientation, grief, and loss, or just want to strengthen their commitment to our tradition, Amplify Media (a streaming resource from Cokesbury) is offering free resources for you and all continuing United Methodists at <https://amplifymedia.com/amplify-your-commitment-to-beumc/>.



Retired Clergy Birthdays – August 2023

- 8/05 – Gordon Dukes: 126 Nelson Ave.; Garden City, GA 31408
8/05 – Joe Romigh: 3055 Cabernet Court; Cumming, GA 30041
8/06 – Rick Holt: 286 Knoll Rd.; Thomasville, GA 31757
8/07 – Wayne Anthony: 5830 Wiltshire Dr.; Columbus, GA 31909
8/07 – Ricky Varnell: 11025 Sunbury Rd.; Claxton, GA 30417
8/08 – Jim Nelson: 3584 Hidden Acres Dr.; Atlanta, GA 30340
8/09 – Creede Hinshaw: 2924 Hillandale Circle S; Macon, GA 31204
8/15 – Nathan Godley: 322 E. Oglethorpe Ave.; Savannah, GA 31401
8/15 – Charles Houston, Jr.: 505 Fort King George Dr.; Darien, GA 31305
8/16 – Dick Reese: 6593 Patriot Dr.; Columbus, GA 31909
8/17 – D. Eugene Pollett: 30 Branson Mill Dr. NW; Cartersville, GA 30120
8/19 – Jim Giddens: 4 Cottenham Circle; Savannah, GA 31411
8/19 – Jeffery Seeley: 3301 Stinsonville Rd.; Macon, GA 31204
8/19 – John H. Stephens: 881 Nesbitt Rd.; Pavo, GA 31778
8/20 – Cleo Gilchrist: 108 Easy St.; Dublin, GA 31021
8/20 – Dave Hanson: 106 George T. Morris Cir.; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
8/20 – Bev King: 140 Long Pines Circle; East Dublin, GA 31027
8/21 – John Eckert: 237 Bartholomew Blvd.; Jeffersonville, IN 47130
8/22 – Jesse France: 514 I.G. Lanier Rd.; Pembroke, GA 31321
8/22 – John Powell: 3016 Gin House Rd.; Sylvania, GA 30467
8/22 – Steve Vinson: 3212 Norcrest Dr.; Oklahoma City, OK 73121-1842
8/23 – Derek Hobbs: 1708 Sisters Ferry Rd.; Clyn, GA 31303
8/23 – Joe Johnston: 2109 W. Gramercy Dr.; Green Valley, AZ 85622
8/24 – Jim Burgess, III: 661 East Plum St.; Jesup, GA 31546
8/24 – Sam Lamback, Jr.: 821 Wesleyan Dr.; Macon, GA 31210
8/25 – Charles Puryear: 106 Sandra St.; Thomasville, GA 31792
8/25 – Elliott Sams: 6400 Poplar Ave.; Memphis, TN 38197
8/26 – Ashley Randall: 801 Silver Leaf Dr.; Winston-Salem, NC 27103
8/28 – David Carter: 102 Rivoli Oaks Circle; Macon, GA 31210
8/28 – Robert Clark: 2022 E Pinetree Blvd.; Thomasville, GA 31792
8/30 – Jenny Jackson-Adams: 17 Lands End Dr.; Greensboro, NC 27408
8/30 – Hall Grimmett: 6625 Seminole Road; Richland, GA 31825
8/31 – Willie Beasley: 4451 Mahan Dr.; Valdosta, GA 31632

.....

Obituary: Becky Reinheld

Becky Eileen Reinheld, 77, of St. Simons Island, passed away at Hospice of the Golden Isles on July 21, Becky is the wife of [Rev. Bill Reinheld](#) (Retired – Coastal District).

.....

Scripture Readings – August 1 edition

August 6

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

- [Genesis 32:22-31](#)
- [Psalm 17:1-7, 15](#)
- [Romans 9:1-5](#)
- [Matthew 14:13-21](#)

August 13

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

- [Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28](#)
- [Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b](#)
- [Romans 10:5-15](#)
- [Matthew 14:22-33](#)