

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – SEPTEMBER 19 EDITION

Mulberry Street UMC helps clear \$1 million in medical debt for middle Georgia families

By Kelly Roberson

Mulberry Street United Methodist Church in Macon, Ga. is kicking off their [annual stewardship campaign](#) in a little different fashion. For three weeks this Fall, they are sharing stories of how giving makes a difference as church members live out their mission to share the heart of God from the heart of downtown Macon by fostering healing for the broken places of life.

As part of this focus on giving, the church is turning its attention outward to its community and has launched a campaign to clear more than \$1 million in medical debt for individuals and families in Middle and South Georgia. Mulberry St. UMC is partnering with RIP Medical Debt, an organization that will secure medical debt—preventing it from going to debt collectors—and abolish it completely.

“For our stewardship campaign this year we wanted to do something that says, ‘We’re not your average church,’” said Rev. Peyton Stone, associate pastor of Mulberry St. UMC. “We wanted to do something that makes a tangible difference in our community and something worthy of our support. In order to do this, we are partnering with RIP Medical Debt to abolish medical debt in our community. This organization does life changing work, and we are excited to support them in their mission.”

According to the Survey of Income and Program Participation, people in the United States have at least \$195 billion in medical debt. The survey says 16 million Americans owe over \$1,000 while 3 million owe more than \$10,000.

[Mulberry St. UMC’s campaign](#) began September 11 and will run through September 24. With the help of RIP Medical Debt, every dollar donated will be converted to \$100 of debt relief.

“At Mulberry St. UMC, we foster healing for the broken places of life,” said Dr. Ted Goshorn, senior pastor of Mulberry St. UMC. “We are thrilled to partner with RIP Medical Debt to heal the brokenness experienced by our neighbors in Central Georgia who bear the burden of onerous medical debt. Mulberry enjoys strong community support, and we look forward to seeing not only our church, but the community of Macon, respond to this life-changing opportunity.”

With an initial goal of \$12,000, Mulberry St. UMC secured a generous donation of \$6,000 that matched the first \$6,000 in donations. Ten thousand of this will go directly to abolish medical debt in Bibb County and other counties in Middle and South Georgia, and another two thousand will support RIP Medical Debt and their administrative costs.

After just one Sunday of the campaign, Mulberry St. UMC members and other community donors met their \$12,000 goal on Sunday, September 17. With one more week left to go in their campaign, church leaders announced a “stretch goal” of \$15,000.

“This morning, Ted challenged Mulberry to meet the \$12,000 goal for our giving campaign for RIP Medical Debt, and we have now passed our original goal!” said a post on the church’s Facebook page. “We are excited for individuals and families in Middle and South Georgia to have their lives changed because of your generosity; through your giving, over \$1 million dollars of debt will be abolished! Since we have one more week left in our campaign supporting RIP Medical Debt, we are excited to announce our “stretch goal” of \$15,000!”

This outward focus comes as part of Mulberry St. UMC's new shared rhythms, a way to set high expectations of themselves as they live out who God is calling each person to be: weekly worship, weekly discipleship, monthly service, and monthly giving.

“These are rhythms that we as members adopt in order to encourage each other to grow in our faith, in our relationship with our church family, and in our capacity to serve the community,” said Dr. Goshorn. “By committing ourselves to these rhythms - these high expectations - we create space for God to make us evermore a healing presence in our community. And, after all, that’s what we are about.”

About RIP MEDICAL DEBT: Since being founded in 2014 by two former debt collectors, RIP Medical Debt has acquired — and abolished — more than \$6.7 billion of burdensome medical debt, helping over 3.6 million families and addressing a major social determinant of health. RIP partners with individuals, faith-based organizations, foundations, and corporations and empowers donors by converting every dollar contributed into \$100 of medical debt relief on average. RIP partners with hospitals and health systems and physician groups to acquire medical debt for abolishment. RIP rose to national prominence on an episode of HBO’s “Last Week Tonight” with John Oliver in which RIP facilitated the abolishment of \$15M in medical debt.

Kelly Roberson is the Director of Communications/Conference Ministries for the South Georgia Conference. She can be reached at kelly@sgaumc.com.

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Piney Mount UMC opens doors to neighbors, focuses on community

By Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed

Last month, the members of Piney Mount United Methodist Church in Tennille, Ga. gathered to participate in an intentional time of worship to pray for the needs of their community. They invited friends, family, and community neighbors to come and celebrate the unfailing grace of God.

Under the pastoral leadership of Rev. Gary Griffin, he and his congregants boldly declare that love is the answer, and that love can be found at Piney Mount UMC.

Since 1847, Piney Mount UMC has been celebrating 176 years of loving and serving Jesus Christ. But on a Sunday in August, the church hosted its first friends and family day.

Rev. Griffin acknowledges that the church is a welcoming congregation, but he believes that God is leading them to something more. He began asking his members an intentional question, “Have we ever hosted a friends and family worship celebration?” Most churches in their community celebrate Homecoming, but Rev. Griffin wanted to know when was the last time the members of Piney Mount UMC invited their neighbors to come to their church and worship with them, to join them in prayer, and to break bread together?

Friends and family celebrations are often observed in many southern, faith traditions. Since the pandemic and recent challenges within their communities, however, members of Piney Mount UMC recognized that their church, especially being a small membership church, must be intentional about everything. Therefore, members decided it was a perfect time to reset, refresh, and revive worship by sponsoring a friends and family worship service.

Church members went to work inviting everyone to come to their church and experience God’s grace and the love of neighbors. This congregation recognized and began talking about one important thing: we are all neighbors, regardless of our walks of life, our difference, or our faith.

As members began to extend the invitation to come and worship, Rev. Griffin decided to invite a few of his friends as well. He reached out to Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed, Director of Diversity and Justice Ministries for the South Georgia Conference, to come and be the guest preacher for this occasion. Rev. Lattany-Reed preached a sermon that reflected on God’s divine law and love that asks an intentional question - “Who is our neighbor?” - as noted in the gospel story about the good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37).

The results of intentional prayer leading up to the service and personal invitations to friends and neighbors in the community was a day of faith-affirming worship where nearly 100 individuals gathered at the church. The morning saw an altar response – from members and neighbors alike – of those committed to prayer, one another, and to Jesus!

While Piney Mount UMC usually has a worship attendance around 50 people, Rev. Griffin believes God honored their intentionality. He believes it’s because the congregation recognized and celebrated the fact that we are all neighbors.

“At Piney Mount, prayer is our priority and love is our best gift,” said Rev. Griffin. “Our doors are open; ‘who so ever will, let them come.’”

Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed is the Director of Diversity and Justice Ministries for the South Georgia Conference and can be reached at abra@sgaumc.com.

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Podcasters Molly Carson & Ben Gosden chosen for United Methodist Communications’ podcast-a-thon

United Methodist Communications (UMCom) has revealed the podcast lineup for their second annual United Methodist Podcast-a-thon taking place October 2nd-6th. The event will be hosted on the [ResourceUMC website](#) and [Facebook page](#) and shared across various United Methodist platforms. Among podcasts chosen is [“Faith Revisited,”](#) a podcast produced and hosted by [Mrs. Molly Carlson, lay person from Trinity UMC in Savannah, and the senior pastor of Trinity, the Rev. Dr. Ben Gosden.](#)

The [“Faith Revisited”](#) podcast is scheduled to air live at 1pm ET on Monday, October 2.

Building off the success of last year’s inaugural one-day event, listeners will be treated to fifteen live podcast episodes. The five-day event will focus on the topic of [disciple-making](#), which is also the #BeUMC United Methodist shared core value celebrated in October.

“When I first envisioned the Podcast-a-thon, it was to offer a platform for diverse voices committed to inspiring United Methodists,” says the Rev. Ryan Dunn, Minister of Online Engagement at United Methodist Communications, who hosts the agency’s [Pastoring in the Digital Parish](#) and [Compass](#) podcasts and is co-producing the event. "It's proven to be an opportunity to partner with fellow communications ministries while forming community among podcast creators and our audiences. I'm excited to be inspired along with everyone else."

The 2023 event features three podcasts daily airing live at noon ET, 1pm ET, and 2pm ET. Featured podcasts were selected from UMCCom’s call for online submissions that yielded more than 40 entries for consideration. Episodes will include a sampling of podcasts from local churches, annual conferences and United Methodist general agencies.

The [“Faith Revisited”](#) podcast is self-described as “two Millennial church leaders discussing God, faith, the Church, and what it means to be authentic and welcome ALL people.” Carlson and Gosden launched their first episode in March 2019.

"We are deeply honored to be selected for the Podcast-a-thon," said Carlson. "This isn't just an opportunity for Ben and me, but a platform to uplift and celebrate the incredible voices of our fellow podcasters. Representing both the South Georgia Conference and Trinity Church fills us with immense pride. We're excited to bring our unique ideas to a larger audience as we explore the theme of disciple-making."

Along with [“Faith Revisited,”](#) the featured podcasts include:

- “Hey, Hey, Anybody Listening,” produced by Otterbein UMC, Lancaster, Pa.
- “Dialogic Disciple,” produced by Northside UMC
- “More than Sunday,” produced by First UMC, Richardson, Texas
- “Faith Revisited,” produced by Molly Carlson and the Rev. Ben Gosden
- “Bearded Theologians,” produced by Bozeman UMC
- “The Deconstruction Zone,” produced by The Well UMC
- “The Collective Table,” produced by San Dieguito UMC and the California-Pacific Conference of The UMC
- “Times Like These: A West Ohio Podcast,” produced by the West Ohio Conference of The UMC
- “To Be Encouraged with Bishop Julius C. Trimble,” produced by the Indiana Conference of The UMC
- “POD Strangely Warmed,” produced by the Central Texas Conference of The UMC
- “Un-Tied Methodism,” produced by the General Commission on Archives and History
- “Expanding the Table,” produced by the General Commission on Religion and Race
- “Compass,” produced by United Methodist Communications
- “Pastoring in the Digital Parish,” produced by United Methodist Communications
- “Get Your Spirit in Shape,” produced by United Methodist Communications

“Being disciple makers is core to who we are called to be as United Methodists. Sharing all the ways we can be disciple makers in the world as well as grow as disciples through the variety of voices of the Podcast-a-thon is exciting and I’m grateful to be a part of the venture,” says Crystal Caviness, Manager, Member Content Development at UMCCom, who hosts [Get Your Spirit in Shape](#) podcast and is co-producing the Podcast-a-thon.

Additional details and the full schedule for October 2nd-6th are available at ResourceUMC.org/podcast-a-thon.

In advance of the event, listeners can hear United Methodist Communications’ current podcast offerings at ResourceUMC.org/Podcasts and episodes from previous United Methodist Podcast-a-thon participants via the [event page](#).



Music and Worship in Hispanic Culture

Hispanic Heritage is September 15-October 15

By Rev. Daniel Medina

In the book of Revelation, we are told that the Song of the Redeemed will be sung at the end of times. An important part of that celebration will be listening to the “Hispanic stanza.” I imagine that this verse will surely be sung in Spanish and by all Hispanics from everywhere.

But who is Hispanic? How do Hispanics worship? Those questions have never been easy to answer. I think that in society and especially in these times, the Hispanic community and its worship are very diverse. Being Hispanic is not simply being of one race, being of one culture, eating just one kind of food, and not even speaking Spanish only.

The worship of Hispanics is as diverse as themselves, the religion they profess, or the culture that has influenced them. What we can assure is that the music, although it is also very varied, has been influenced by their beliefs, their mix of cultures, and their religious training. Religious and secular music is important in the life and worship of the Hispanic community and gives a broad and important meaning to the occasion in which it is heard, still exerting a quasi-divine influence.

In fact, music is so important and influential that there are stories in which melodies have given a message to those who have heard it. My mother approached a Methodist church when she heard the hymn “At the Cross.” The members of a Methodist church in northern Mexico are known in the community as “the people who sing.” The first Methodist preacher of Mexican origin, Alejo Hernández, took shelter from the rain in a Methodist chapel in south Texas, and he writes this in his biography:

“I felt that the Spirit of God was there, although I did not understand a single word of what was said... I had never heard an organ play so sweetly before; Never have human voices seemed more delightful to me... I left that place crying with joy.”

The liturgy and music in the worship services of Hispanics in The United Methodist Church are also very varied, ranging from the most solemn to the most vibrant (and noisy) that can exist. One way or another, music will always have a spirit of celebration and sanctity. The musical instruments used represent the diversity of their own community. Guitars and tambourines from the Spanish heritage, drums from the African heritage, and maracas from their indigenous heritage.

In the Hispanic Creed, we confess that “on the day of the Gran Fiesta... all the tongues of the universe will sing the same song.” But within that long and beautiful melody of eternal praise, the Hispanic Stanza will be heard, loud and clear.

Rev. Daniel Medina is the director of Hispanic/Latino Affairs for the South Georgia Conference. He can be reached at danmedina007@bellsouth.net.



South Georgia responds to Hurricane Idalia: ERTs still needed

Right now, there is still a need in the Lowndes County and surrounding areas for work teams. For the past three weeks teams from South Georgia, North Georgia, and South Carolina have been hard at work helping

to restore homes and give hope to the community following the destruction caused by Hurricane Idalia on August 30. Our United Methodist connectional system is at its best when we come together to help those around us! Please contact Kelly Crane (kelcrane@gmail.com), Glenn Martin (gmartin0704@gmail.com), or Luis Morales (ert@sgaumc.com) to schedule your ERT team or yourself to be part of a team. Our disaster response team is working with local officials in affected areas to coordinate with their local disaster response efforts.

Financial Gifts: Your financial gift to UMCOR is especially appreciated as our giving is flexible in application and offers high impact. Monetary donations can be given to our disaster Conference Advance Special #6796 - South Georgia Storm Relief by sending to PO Box 7227, Macon, GA 31209 or [click here to give online](#). You can also give directly to [UMCOR US Disaster Response and Recovery](#) Advance #901670.



Local church grants available for innovative ministry

Do you have an innovative idea for starting something new to reach your community? Do you have a heart for the lost and a passion for the Gospel? Do you have an idea and a person or two willing to walk with you, but you need a little financial spark and coaching to get things going? If the answer is YES, the South Georgia Conference Congregational Development Team would love to come beside you and spark that idea to life with Spark Grant funding!

New leaders are doing new things to reach new people all around the conference. There are tiny sparks of hope and life around SGA that are causing others to catch a vision for what could be in their area as well. BBQ Church is happening twice a month to encourage fellowship and connection. Game Church is telling Jesus stories in a way a gamer can understand. Ump Church is meeting the spiritual needs of baseball and softball umpires who are busy on the weekends and can't get to church. There are home churches and new church starts in various stages of development, and new things are popping up all over the place.

How are these leaders doing so many new things in the face of limited resources? What can the rest of us learn from what they are doing?

Here are a few things all of these new things have in common:

- Discipleship focused: The goal of these new things isn't to grow a church, it's to grow God's people. When you grow God's people, you will develop the church!
- Passion for the lost: Successful disciple-making comes from a heart to reach those who are unreached. Our desire to see people come to Christ must be bigger than the desire for us to have a comfortable place to worship.
- Commitment to the calling: Jesus never said the life of a disciple would be comfortable or easy! As a matter of fact, Jesus compared it to carrying a cross. Starting something new and reaching the unreached is a challenging and unpredictable endeavor. Remain committed to your calling, no matter where God leads you.
- Flexible in method, persistent in mission: The way we've always done things isn't working. This means we will need to attempt new methods to reach people with the gospel and introduce them to Jesus. Some of the things we attempt will succeed and others won't. We must be persistent in our mission of making disciples but flexible in the way in which we accomplish that mission. If we don't, we will quickly find ourselves more committed to the method than the mission.
- Think differently: If you are committed to reaching people no church is reaching you've got to think differently than the way other church leaders are thinking. The same thinking will not produce

different results. Read things that are challenging to your mindset and point of view. Learn, grow, and stretch in your understanding of what the church can be.

- Willingness to get messy: “If you’re not sweating, you’re not serving.” While serving can get us physically messy, more importantly we should also be willing to get emotionally and relationally messy. People who are far from God often find themselves in messy and sticky situations they think will disqualify them from God’s grace. Walk with them in their mess. Be Jesus to them as you listen without rescuing or solving their problem for them.
- Gospel-focused, prayer-soaked: Why should we expend all this energy starting new faith communities and helping people become disciples? It’s not to “save our church,” it’s to share the good news of the Gospel and respond to the saving work God has done in us. If Jesus isn’t the focus and prayer isn’t a priority, the new things we create will crumble like sand. We want to build on the rock, on a foundation of faith, truth, love, and the joy of being His children.

To learn more about the Spark Grants, visit www.sgaumc.org/ministryproposal1. The Congregational Development Team looks forward to seeing all God will ignite around South Georgia now and in the future. Let’s fan the flame together! Questions? Contact Anne Bosarge at abosarge@sgaumc.com.



2023 prayer emphasis: September prayer guide

The South Georgia Conference is centering itself around prayer in 2023. September’s prayer guide, written by district lay leaders John Ray (Northeast), Karen Forrester (Southwest), Denise Rooks (South Central), and Scott Cleaveland (Costal) is now available at www.sgaumc.org/year-of-prayer.



Antiracism challenge encouraged for the month of September

The United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race is holding a “30 Days of Antiracism” challenge for the month of September. Each day, participants are encouraged to engage in an activity that helps them to become more antiracist in the ways they think and act.

Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed, Conference Director of Diversity and Justice Ministries, encourages South Georgia laity and clergy to join the challenge.

“Racial justice issues are front and center within the marketplace and impact the church,” said Rev. Lattany-Reed. “This 30 days of antiracism challenge is a reflective way to not only understand the mandate of God’s divine love for all humanity, but will build capacity by promoting the promises and emerging practices that reinforce a more just and compassionate society.”

The agency has created a free, downloadable calendar with suggested antiracism activities for each day of the challenge.

“GCORR has so many resources to help individuals assess and grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ,” said Rev. Lattany-Reed. “This challenge is essential to that development. Join in and participate and share your challenge experience with us at the Office of Connectional Ministries.”

[Read more and download the resource](#)

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Communication Impact Week returns with exclusive training opportunities

Communications Impact Week returns September 18-22, 2023, with exclusive training opportunities and a celebration of the power of effective communication to drive successful ministry. The event, hosted by United Methodist Communications (UMCom), will showcase how communication resources and tools empower ministry around the globe.

UMCom is committed to helping local churches and leaders increase their missional capacity and engage in more intentional outreach. To celebrate Communications Impact Week, UMCom is hosting two new courses, available at no cost:

- **Analyzing Social Media Engagement**, which teaches participants about the importance of social media engagement, how understanding metrics can help improve engagement and data analysis using Meta Business Suite
- **Sharing Your Faith Journey**, which will provide a variety of ideas to help enrollees share their personal faith journeys as a way to connect with individuals to help them experience the love of God through your faith

The content and training classes will be available on the event [website](#) and shared via UMCom’s social media channels throughout the week.

Connor Prusha, Development Officer for the United Methodist Communications Foundation, noted the timeless importance of communication in sharing God's message of love, salvation and transformation.

“Communicating this message is Christ's mission through the church,” said Prusha.

United Methodist Communications continues to build a stronger worldwide connection through a robust communication network, powered by uplifting news and information, resources, technology and trainings.

“UMCom answers the call to inspire hearts and change lives with great impact,” said Prusha.

In 2022 alone, UMCom served 1,700+ local churches, trained 2,891 church leaders, garnered 463 million advertising impressions, serviced 695,000 text messages, amassed 8.4 million social media engagements and had 16.5 million web page views.

“Changes have led to a decrease in apportionment funds available to United Methodist Communications,” said Prusha. “However, the need for meaningful and transformative communications ministry has grown exponentially.”

From [saving lives through the power of communication](#) to [resourcing local churches](#) to [building communication infrastructure globally](#), the work of UMCom is made possible in part through faithful giving that supports the agency’s mission through the Foundation for United Methodist Communications.

To celebrate and support communication ministries during Communications Impact Week, church members can make a financial gift at UMCom.org/GiveUMCom. To uncover the event’s content, visit UMCom.org/CommunicationsImpact or the United Methodist Communications [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages.

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September 24 Lesson: Jesus Prevents Two Stonings

Fall Quarter 2023: God's Law Is Love
Unit 1: Love Completes; Law Falls Short

Sunday School Lesson for the week of September 24, 2023
By Craig Rikard

Background Scripture John 8:1-11, 56-59
Key Text: John 8:11b

Lesson Aims

1. To realize the importance of geography in studying the Bible.
2. To understand the role and status of women in the biblical era.
3. The wisdom of Jesus in responding to the Pharisees.
4. To recognize Jesus' offer of forgiveness and grace.
5. To acknowledge Jesus is the great "I Am!"

Background/ Context

But Jesus Went to the Mount of Olives

Our narrative begins with the conjunction "but," which usually indicates a contrast or a "turning of direction." The Pharisees are upset and condescending. They asked the temple guards why they didn't seize Jesus and bring him to the Pharisees. They considered his teaching dangerous. The guards answered, "there was something about the way he spoke." The Pharisees were livid. They used themselves as the example of wisdom of knowledge. "Do any of us believe he is a prophet or Messiah?" They were implying that if learned men like them did not believe in Jesus, how dare the crowd believe Jesus was a prophet, or worse, Messiah.

Pride is the sin that blinds. How does the pride of the Pharisees hinder them from listening to Jesus? How can our pride dull our spiritual hearing?

Obviously, Jesus' words and actions were not going to be received by the Pharisees. From a human perspective, it would prove better if Jesus returned to the masses in Galilee. He would continue to receive criticism and suffer plots on his life from the area around Jerusalem. BUT he went to the Mount of Olives.

Why do you think John used the conjunction "but?" What was the "turn in direction" related to Jesus' travel to Jerusalem?

In holy Scripture, the Mount of Olives possesses great spiritual significance. The mount itself is a range of mounts with three peaks on the eastern side of Jerusalem. From its summit one can gain a panoramic view of Jerusalem. In Old Testament prophesy, Zachariah writes in chapter 14 that it is the place where the Messiah will arrive, splitting the mount in two. It is interesting to note that when Jesus rode into Jerusalem for the last time, he descended the Mount of Olives. The olive trees along the mount provided olive oil for hundreds of years and was used for the anointing of kings as well as other practical uses.

Several high and holy moments occurred on the Mount of Olives. Lazarus was raised from the dead by Jesus in Bethany, along the Mount of Olives. Jesus often prayed on the mount and used the Garden of Gethsemane

for a place of prayer. Here he would pray, be arrested, and be taken to Jerusalem for trial. It was a garden of temptation in that Jesus sweats drops of blood, praying, “if there is any way this cup can pass from me.” However, he finished his prayer with, “Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.” The Garden was a most fitting place for Jesus to pray. The Olive Tree is indestructible and will always grow back. As he faced his death, it was certainly a good metaphor of hope, for he too would rise again.

In what ways do you think the Mount of Olives would comfort and embolden Jesus? Do you have a place through which you find spiritual comfort, hope, and courage? Can you share what it is about the place that makes it spiritually significant to you?

In relation to Old Testament prophesy, Jesus rode down the mount as the crowds place their garments and palm branches before him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” The hope of the world prayed on the mount and descended to redeem the world!

Jesus’ choice to travel to the Mount of Olives versus returning home to Galilee reveals that he will not allow the criticisms and accusations to define him. He is the Messiah. He chooses not to run from his calling but rather to fulfill it. It reveals great trust in God for the Lord will need to protect him and cover him with providential care. Again, the use of the conjunction “but” reveals that this was a choice Jesus made. He could have returned home, but he chose to reveal truth in an area to those whose pride blinded them to the redemptive workings of God.

What do you think is meant by the phrase “people trying to define who you are”?

Walking Through the Text

Jesus in the Temple Courts

Jesus had taught earlier in the courts. Jesus usually taught in the Court of the Gentiles. Gentiles were allowed to set foot in this area. There was a lot of commerce being done in this court, such as money-changing. Sacrificial animals were also sold. One might expect Jesus to teach in the holier areas of the temple than this place of common people, foreign people, and commerce. Yet, when one considers the ministry of Jesus, it is exactly where he would be. His teachings and message were never meant solely for the Jews. He proclaimed God’s mercy and redemption of the world. Furthermore, the good news must be taken into “the highways and byways.” People in the marketplace of life need the gospel as much as those in the sacred places. The Temple was constructed in a manner in which everyone knew their place. Jesus did know his place. His place wasn’t just in the holy areas of the temple. His place was among the needy, hungry, and seeking of the world.

A group had gathered around Jesus to hear him. Suddenly, an interruption occurred. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law had caught a woman in the act of adultery. They had no interest in hearing Jesus, but they were interested in how Jesus would handle the woman. She had violated Mosaic Law. Would Jesus overlook it?

What does it mean to you that Jesus chose the Gentile Court to teach? How is Jesus’ use of the Gentile Court consistent with his ministry and proclamations?

The Adulterous Woman

We know little about the woman, not even her name. To the elite in Jewish society, she is a “non-entity.” She doesn’t matter. Jesus has journeyed down a sacred mount to a sacred place in the temple only to encounter a moment lacking compassion and care, teeming with judgement, condescension, and shame. Though we

know little about the woman there are certain dynamics in Judaism and Jewish culture that help us understand her possible background.

First, women often did not marry for love. They had little say in whom they married. Women were considered property. Notice in our traditional wedding ritual the question is asked, “Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?” There is not a question as to who gives the man to the woman. Of course, today most do not understand the ritual in that manner, but in Jesus’ day they were property. Having a daughter did not mean the family did not love her. However, one of the benefits cited for having a daughter was the dowery the family would be paid to marry her to another. The marriage was almost always arranged without her input.

Women were expected to “run the household” (cook, get water, clean, raise children, etc.). However, one of demands upon a woman was to give birth to a son. Sons carried on the family name and inherited the birthright. If a woman did not give birth to a son she could be divorced, again, without a say in the matter. A bill of divorce could be issued, and that was that. The husband could remarry; she could not. They would return to their family of origin or become a servant of another. Sadly, many were forced into prostitution in order to eat and live.

The woman in our narrative was “caught in adultery.” She was taken to the religious leaders, but they had another use for her. They would bring her before Jesus and seek to entrap him. She had violated the Mosaic Law, earning the penalty of death. Notice the choice of words on part of the Pharisees, “Moses commanded us to stone *such women*.” In the mind of the Pharisees, she was just another woman, a sinful woman, one of *those women*.

Paul was a former Pharisee prior to his conversion. How powerful and remarkable do you think Paul’s statement, “In Christ there is no male or female,” was and is? Can you name examples in which Jesus elevated the importance and worth of women in life? Do you think women still are often treated as “less than” their male counterparts? Since all are equal in Christ, what are some actions we can take today to elevate the life of women and assure them of their sacred worth?

One of the most interesting and upsetting questions the story raises is, “Where is the man?” The woman was caught, implying found with the man. Yet, he isn’t there. She is the one who will suffer. She is the one who will bear the shame. She is the one who will die. Most difficult to understand is that she will die “in the name of justice and righteousness.” There is nothing just or right about their treatment of the woman. The woman is indeed guilty, but their treatment of her tosses the Shema (Deut. 6:4) out the window. Her death will mean little or nothing to the Pharisees. From their perspective, the religious community will have one less sinner to corrupt their holy manner of living. She meant far more than that to Jesus.

How does the absence of the man say about the injustice of the moment? How do we reconcile the fact that they were acting within the confines of Mosaic Law yet breaking the Shema in Deut. 6:4? Have you recognized such moral inconsistencies in life? Have you personally been involved in a moment that appears “legally” correct but wrong as it relates to the Shema?

Notice, she was brought to “stand before Jesus.” It wasn’t enough to deal with this matter in private. For the Pharisees, she needed to be shamed. In the Leviticus story of the scapegoat, the goat is chosen to bear the sins of the community. A scarlet cord is wrapped about its horns so everyone will recognize that he is the scapegoat. Notice, when a child drops a ball in a baseball game and the team loses, the child is immediately “marked” by some with pointed fingers and criticism. The child becomes the scapegoat for the entire team who were just as responsible for the loss. Certainly, they believed such shame served as a deterrent. By calling attention to her sin, they avoid any attention to their own. However, their major reason for bringing her publicly before Jesus was to entrap Jesus. Jesus was teaching in a public court in front of a crowd.

Discrediting Jesus at that moment would ruin his ministry. In their minds, there was only one action Jesus should take: condemn her! However, they know of his teaching on compassion and knew of his treatment of the most needy and downcast. If Jesus acted with compassion, as usual, they could seize him for violating the Torah.

Can you identify the use of a scapegoat in today's society? Have you ever felt "marked" and shamed? How do you think we treat someone who has fallen and sinned? How should we especially treat them in public? Though the woman is guilty, what does Jesus' action reveal about love and grace?

Jesus Writes on the Ground

If you search for commentary on Jesus' "writing on the ground" you will encounter "guesses" regarding what he wrote. John, in his gospel, did not employ the word "miracle." Instead, he used the phrase "signs and wonders." Everything Jesus said and did pointed to the Kingdom of God. If what Jesus actually wrote on the ground was important, John would have recorded it. He could have written something of importance, but there is no reaction from the Pharisees to the content of his writing.

What do you think is the danger of guessing and assuming what Jesus wrote when the text does not offer such information? Do you think we often "insert ourselves and our thought" into a biblical text? Is there possibly a "slippery slope" created when we insert ourselves?

Still, the symbolism of Jesus writing on the ground contains thoughtful considerations. First, Jesus used "the pause." The accusation had been issued by the Pharisees. They are waiting for Jesus' response. The response isn't immediate. This is the moment he writes on the ground. He has shifted the thinking occurring in the moment. The words and thoughts of the Pharisees were filled with anger, judgement, and condemnation. Jesus now has changed the object of their attention. "What is he writing?" they must have wondered. Or, "What is he doing?" This pause allows those standing or sitting before him to "be on the edge of their seats." "What is he going to say?" The emphasis is not on the accusation or the woman, it is on Jesus.

As we noted in earlier lessons, silence becomes uncomfortable. Therapists usually well know how to use silence in the treatment of an individual. The Pharisees respond to Jesus' writing by continuing their onslaught of accusations. They are determined to pressure Jesus into answering. However, Jesus' silence and writing on the ground has pressured them into repeating the accusation and expected consequences over and over again. This moment leads me to think that the longer the Pharisees speak, the more their true heart of anger and intention to harm Jesus is exposed. Thus, the moment isn't basically about the woman, it's about Jesus!

Why do you think silence makes us uncomfortable? Silence is of value in meditation and prayer, but in human company it feels unnatural. Can you share a time when you were most uncomfortable in silence?

Jesus Answers

Jesus answers with a powerful, memorable challenge: "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to cast a stone." Then, he begins writing on the ground again. Jesus is letting his statement sink in. Those few words revealed compassion and love. He did not claim she wasn't guilty. He did not claim her behavior is acceptable. Instead, he claims all are guilty of sin! Now, the onus is upon the Pharisees to disagree. Are the Pharisees going to claim they are sinless? If they have sin, then they have no right to take the life of the woman. What a wise, transforming statement by Jesus!

What does Jesus' statement reveal about our judging another? Who has the right to judge? Has Jesus ever given us the role of judge and the power to make judgements about another? What is the difference between discernment and judgement?

The people began to leave. They knew Jesus' claim was true. No one could throw a stone. Notice, as they left, the older ones left first. I believe it is almost always true that with age comes wisdom. They have experienced so much life, and pretty much know the nature of the heart. They were the "elders." The judgement of the elders and elderly was most often deeply respected. Therefore, their being the first to leave spoke to those in the crowd about Jesus' statement, "Yes, we are sinners, just like her."

Do you consider our present culture respectful of its elderly? Does your church involve the elderly in decisions about ministry? Does your church care for its elderly and assure them of their sacred worth? Do you think it is possible for a church to become so "youth oriented" that ministry to the elderly is neglected?

Only Jesus and the woman were left. How powerful Jesus' question must have been! It still is! Even the angry, condescending, plotting Pharisees had left. The gospel of Jesus was never complete in just recognizing sin. He now brings the good news to completion. "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" The woman responded, "No one, sir." And then, the crowning proclamation from Jesus: "Neither do I condemn you. Go and leave your life of sin." This moment had reached the climactic moment of utter forgiveness and new beginnings. God, through our conscience, confronts us with our sinful, destructive behavior. However, we are made aware of sin for the purpose of forgiveness and redirection. We are forgiven and empowered. There are two prepositions that enlighten us regarding the death and resurrection of Jesus. We are saved *from* our sin, and saved *to* live in grace and love.

Why do you think it is important to note Jesus' entire statement to the woman? Why should the good news never stop with pointing out sin? Do you think most people are aware of their sin? Do you think their major difficulty is to know what to do with their sin and what to do about a new direction in life?

John 8:56-59

As this lesson is concluded, we are left with the very essence of Christianity. It was not a great rabbi or prophet who forgave the woman. Jesus was and is the great "I Am!" When God was asked for his name in the Old Testament he answered, "I am that I am." When Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am" he was openly claiming his divinity. He is Messiah, the Savior of the world!

Prayer

Almighty God, forgive us from creating scapegoats in life. Still our tongue when we are tempted to speak judgement against another. Empower our tongue to speak hope, love, forgiveness, and life. Give us the wisdom to leave the stones on the ground and instead pick up the fallen. In Jesus name, Amen.

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



October 1 Lesson: Inward and Outward

**Fall Quarter 2023: God's Law Is Love
Unit 2: Faith Triumphs, Law Fails
Lesson 5**

**Sunday School Lesson for the week of October 1, 2023
By Craig Rikard**

Background Scripture: Romans 2:1-29

Key Text: Romans 2:29

Lesson Aims

1. To understand the importance of historical and personal background to better understand the message of the text.
2. To understand Paul's style of writing.
3. To realize the book of Romans is unique in that it is one of the most "theological" letters of Paul.
4. To recognize the major issue in Romans: the melding together the Jew and Gentiles.
5. To understand the connection between the outer Law and the inner Heart.

Context/Background

Becoming One

Rome had become one of the most important cities in the world. Paul wanted to use Rome as a “launching place” for the Gospel. Roman roadways allowed people, such as Paul, to travel to parts of the world they had not visited. As a strong commercial center, new Christians could travel home after conducting business in Rome and spread the Gospel. Though the Church began in Jerusalem, it quickly spread to the Gentile world. Paul had not yet visited Rome, but a church had taken root. Most likely the Roman church was started by Jewish Christians. It is probable that these Jewish Christians were in Jerusalem during Pentecost. The Holy Spirit birthed the Church in the upper room, and the new converts took the good news of the resurrection to the streets of Jerusalem and beyond. Paul has heard of the Roman church and its vitality. In Romans 1:8 Paul wrote “your faith is being reported all over the world.”

The early Christians had no bible. The Jewish Christians had their Old Testament knowledge, but the Gentiles had little familiarity with it. What was it the early Christians used to share the story of Jesus? What was present in the early church that attracted its listeners, later becoming converts? How difficult do you believe it would have been to enter your home city with a “new story,” the story of Jesus Christ and preach or teach? From where did they receive the strength to share the Gospel?

There was conflict within the church as Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians attempted to follow Jesus together. Paul longs to visit to more deeply anchor them in the Gospel and bind them together in love. We often fail to consider the tensions and conflicts with which Paul dealt. One of the common, yet painful, issues in the early church was the melding together of people from totally different backgrounds. The Jewish people were strongly monotheistic; whereby the Gentiles engaged in polytheism, philosophy, and Emperor worship. For most of their life, the Jewish people had been taught that they were God’s chosen, and in their thinking God had dealings with the Gentiles only as they related to Israel.

How difficult do you believe it would have been to bring unity to a group of people who shared a history of dislike? The Jewish Christians had been taught all their life that God loved them, almost exclusively. Do you think there was a temptation to think of themselves better, or holier than the Gentiles? The Gentiles most likely resented being asked to love and become family with a group they felt looked in condescension upon them. How would you meld these two groups together?

One of the most beautiful dynamics of the Gospel is its global message. Jesus came to redeem the entire world! God loves Jew and Gentile alike! This new revelation would change the world; however, it also birthed early conflict. Most of Paul’s letters addressed conflicts experienced in churches throughout the near eastern world. Again, it was not easy for the Jewish Christians to simply “turn on a switch” and accept the Gentile world. Those of us who have lived through the slow (too slow) dismantling of racism remember the early years of integration. We were being called to a new life, a godly life of inclusion and of inclusive love.

Many of the Jewish people had been reared to look upon the Gentile world in disdain. Now, the Gospel was calling them to totally lay aside all beliefs and thinking that segregated and divided the human family. The Gentiles almost certainly had difficulties accepting the Jewish people as family. Many Gentiles understood the Jewish people as proud, arrogant people. After all, “their God” wasn’t concerned with Gentiles. However, the Gospel proclaimed that “God so loved the world.” As Paul underwent his spiritual transformation in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, he would later write, “In Christ there is no male or female, no Jew or Greek.” This was an inspired radical message! In the early church the Christians were attempting to lay aside past beliefs about their new brothers and sisters through the power of the Holy Spirit. Though born of the Spirit, our humanity is very much alive. We are walking toward perfection in love, but the road is long and, at times, difficult. The greatest battle then and now has always been within us. As Jesus said, “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). We must, with the Spirit’s help, receive those who are different from us as equal and precious in the sight of God.

Sadly, can you identify racial and ethnic divisions in the Body of Christ? Can you share the gains we have made toward becoming one body bound together by love? Can you share what we can do further to strengthen the bonds that bind us in Christ and as the church?

Paul the Ex-Pharisee

It is always important to understand the historical time in which the author of a biblical book lived. It is also important to be acquainted with their worldview. Paul was a “Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee” (Philippians 3:5). He studied under a very influential Pharisee, Gamliel, who believed in faithful obedience to the Law; however, he taught his students to be more lenient in relation to women and later to the Christian community. Though an influential teacher of Paul, the young Paul’s behavior took another trajectory in the beginning. He persecuted Christians and most likely ordered the deaths of many. The stoning of Stephen is perhaps the most memorable of Paul’s disdain for the Jewish Christians. They were enemies of the true faith of Judaism. However, the stoning of Stephen also served as a revelatory moment concerning Paul’s heart. He had ordered the stoning death of a pious, loving young Christian. Paul even holds their cloaks, allowing them to throw unencumbered. Many believe this is the moment when the conflict ongoing in Paul’s heart came to light. As a strict Pharisee he felt himself doing the right, godly thing. However, Stephen’s words and humility deeply touched Paul. Some scholars believe this event is recorded in Acts to help the reader know that it was Stephen’s death that opened Paul’s heart to the risen Jesus. It is interesting to note that as a Christian evangelist, Gamliel’s teachings on leniency would reveal themselves. For many today, Paul’s elevation of the status of women in the world is weak. However, for this Pharisee and Hebrew of Hebrews, teaching the churches that in Jesus there is no male or female, Jew or Greek was powerful and revolutionary.

What was it about the stoning of Stephen that disturbed Paul? Do you believe his heart was pricked? Do you believe Paul’s conscience spoke loudly against the taking of Stephen’s life? What was it Stephen said that might have touched Paul deeply? Are Stephen’s words familiar with those of Jesus? In what way? What does the stoning of Stephen reveal about the power of our conscience? Can you recall a time when your conscience called you to take different action from the action culture was demanding of you?

The Conflict in Rome

Rome was experiencing great division between the Jewish people and the Gentiles. In 49 AD, Emperor Claudius drove all the Jews, not just Christian Jews, out of Rome. Historically, the Jewish people were often used as scapegoats by Roman leadership. Instead of taking responsibility for destructive actions, the emperors found a way to blame it on the Israelites. There had been conflict between Judaism and Rome many years earlier. After the death of Claudius, the Jews began to move back to Rome. One would think Rome would prove a difficult place for Gentiles and Jewish Christians to become one family.

Notice the exodus in 49 AD occurs in the early years of the church at Rome. The church at Rome had been dealing with the Jewish/Gentile issue almost from the beginning. The forced exodus did nothing to help create unity in the church. The church in Rome was most likely founded by Jewish Christians. Thus, they had been instrumental in converting Gentiles to the faith. However, some of the Jewish people who had been leaders in the early church were trying to reestablish their positions in the new church. As most of us have experienced, establishing “who is in charge?” can be a difficult issue in a church.

Consequently, the church at Rome was having difficulty “putting down its roots” and establishing a unified family of Christ. Still, to their credit and the glory of God, they persevered and earned the reputation of being a people of great faith. Paul wanted to visit to help them plant their roots in the Gospel more deeply. Always the teacher, Paul still attempts to pave the way by attempting to solve the problem through his “pre-visit” letter.

Paul had to find the means of affirming the Jewish Christians in their devotion to Mosaic Law. Though they were Christians, they still clung to many of the tenets of Judaism. Paul never disregarded the Mosaic Law. He interpreted the Law differently through enlightened eyes. He now perceived the Law as it points to Jesus. The Law, in and of itself, was insufficient apart from Christ. In Christ, however, the Law found its perfect, full, holy meaning. He also needed to assure the Gentiles that they were equal to their Jewish brothers and sisters, even if they were not reared in Law, or knew little about the Torah. When we read our text we will see Paul attempt to bring both sides together in Christ, amazingly, using the Law.

The Theological Beliefs of Paul That Relate to Our Text

As we begin to walk through our text, let’s first glean an understanding of Paul’s belief concerning the Gospel, especially in relation to grace and Law. It is important to remember Paul is “looking backward” on the Law. That is, he is Christian and is understanding the Law as it relates to Christ and the Church. The Law is not an end in and of itself. It points toward Jesus the Christ and the Body of Christ, the church. It is also important to note that Paul has no “bible.” His writing predates the Gospels. Paul’s conversion is believed to have occurred in 33-34 AD. Our earliest Gospel is Mark, which is dated from the mid-60s AD to 80 AD. He did have the Old Testament and especially the Torah. The Old Testament would inform Paul’s understanding of Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

Since Paul did not have a bible (other than the Old Testament) what inspired and informed his writing? First, the oral tradition. Though the Gospels had not been written, the stories and narratives we find in the Gospels existed in oral tradition. These were orally shared, and the speaker was careful to keep the story as intact and credible as possible. Though Paul did not have the Gospels to read, he nevertheless knew most of their content. Secondly, Paul learned from his personal experience with Jesus. Paul was taken aside for years as he was taught by the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, Paul was informed through human experience. Paul had learned to see God’s Spirit at work in the lives of men and women. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, these sources informed Paul as he addressed the early church’s difficulties in his letters and teaching. He offered them answers, prayers, and encouragement.

From Paul’s letters we glean his theological understanding and teaching. In over-simplified form, here are the basics of Paul’s belief:

1. The Mosaic Law was a gift from God, as were the other Old Testament writings. Like all Pharisees, Paul was steeped in knowledge of the Mosaic Law as it existed in the Torah.
2. As a Christian, Paul now understood the role of the Torah in one’s faith differently from the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed one found favor with God through their obedience to the Law. Disobedience led to a “cursed” life. Sadly, no one could keep the Law perfectly, though some Pharisees believed themselves to have done so or were close enough to merit God’s favor, and granting them the right to judge the masses. Paul, on the other hand, realized no one could keep the Mosaic Law or earn favor with

God. We all fall short, thus deserving judgement. Consequently, Paul believed the Mosaic Law was given by God to reveal our need of grace. The Law reveals our inability to keep it! (Read Galatians 3:24 forward.) Paul referred to the Law, in Galatians 3, as our “school teacher or school master.” Without the Law we could not realize our need of forgiveness and grace. There would exist no subjective moral standard by which we determine actions that please or displease God. Therefore, the Law revealed the moral standards of God’s Kingdom, while revealing we fall so very short of those standards.

3. Paul, through Christ, understood the importance of the Shema (Deut. 6:4). Jesus called the Shema the “Law of Love.” Jesus taught that if one keeps the Law of Love, the Shema, one keeps all the Law. For the Pharisees, the Shema meant to love God and the Law. One was to love the law with all their heart soul mind and strength. They ignored and neglected the human dimension of the Shema. We love God and one another as the Shema requires. The Shema was the new covenant written on the heart as Jeremiah prophesied in Jer. 31:33. The Shema was old, written in the book of Leviticus. Under the teaching of the Pharisees, it became a part of the outward Law one must obey. However, in Jeremiah, God prophesied a day was coming when it would be written in the heart, in the internal life of men and women. Yes, we still sin and fall short. However, rather than earning the judgement and wrath of God, we are forgiven, blessed, and receive a new beginning. The Pharisees understood life to be a walk with the Law. We spend our entire life trying to perfectly obey the Law. Jesus had revealed, Paul taught, that life is a journey of obedience to the Shema, of seeking earnest forgiveness, and a life of experiencing eternal life in the here and now. Our obedience to the Shema was to love God with our entire being and our neighbor as we love our own self. Again, we still sin and fall short. However, forgiveness offers a new start as we place one foot after another moving forward in our faith.
4. Paul believed Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. He began to read the Old Testament as it related to the coming of Christ Jesus. Jesus was God-incarnate. Thus, it was God in Christ who died for the forgiveness of sins and was resurrected to bring new and eternal life.
5. Paul believed God is the initiator of all redemption. God loved us first (as John wrote in his letter). Paul’s belief in the relationship of grace to salvation is written in Eph. 2:8-9: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith; and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.”
6. The Holy Spirit is the indwelling of God in the human heart. The Spirit is the gift that “seals” our relationship with God, much as a wedding band seals the relationship of marriage. The Spirit is the power to live a life of God’s love. Paul speaks in trinitarian terms often, but feels no need to explain the trinity. It is a spiritual mystery we accept by faith. Yet our faith isn’t a blind leap in the dark. Our belief in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are validated by what we’ve read in Scripture, witnessed in human history, and what we experience as followers of Jesus Christ.
7. It is our acceptance of Jesus and the Spirit filled life that empowers us to keep the Shema and obey it with a compassionate heart. We cannot keep the Shema on our own. However, we receive the power of the Holy Spirit to love and be the church.
8. All things are moving toward the ultimate triumph of goodness and love. All things are moving toward the reign of God and God’s Kingdom in all its fullness. (Romans 8)

Of course, Paul’s beliefs included far more than these few gleanings. However, the above beliefs are helpful in understanding Paul’s writing, and our text in particular. The major thrust of Paul’s belief was the insufficiency of the Law to save yet the importance of the Law to help us understand our sins and shortcomings. Thus, pointing us toward the only one who can forgive, save, and offer a journey in love.

Paul’s Style of Writing

Paul’s writings can often prove difficult to understand. In my early ministry I referred to Paul as the master of the run on sentence. Actually, Paul’s mind is akin to a teacher, attempting to explain the eternal in human

language and has more to say than can be said. In writing, Paul moves from his major subject to other passages or events that enlighten his subject and back to his major subject. The following is a verse from our text that serves as an example of Paul's "migratory" style of writing. In 2:17 forward: "Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth – you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself?"

This sentence may appear to be rambling from our perception. We have to first understand the larger paragraph or passage in which this sentence is found. We ask, "What is Paul's main message in the passage?" Then, "How does this sentence relate to that main message?" This one sentence has several "ifs": "If you call yourself a Jew." "If you rely on the law and boast in God." "If you know his will and approve of what is superior." "If you are convinced you are a guide to the blind." At this point you can sense Paul attempting to explain his point with as much light as possible. At this point in the same sentence, Paul launches into "who we believe ourselves to be." He writes, "are we convinced we are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth ..." All of the "ifs" and the "who we think we are" passages are contained in one sentence. So, Paul's letters need to be read prayerfully and slowly. We need to pray to recognize the subject that connects all of the phrases. Then, we need to seek to recognize how this subject relates to the entire passage.

We must never forget that Paul can also write poetically and beautifully. I Cor. 13 is one of most beautiful poems about the most beautiful subject of love. There are other passages where Paul writes like a tender father. In others he is a man aware his end is near and writes as one looking behind to grasp all that God has done in and through him as he prepares to be with Jesus in the life to come.

The Epistle to the Roman is one of his most theological letters. He seeks to impart inspired truth that will liberate, encourage, and anchor the church at Rome. Therefore, the reading of this letter is more difficult than other Pauline letters. However, it speaks truth! His audience in Rome would have been able to grasp it, and what they did not understand they could ask when Paul arrived. This isn't a passage of rambling thoughts; it is the writing of an inspired man who understands more than he can share. For almost 2,000 years, this theological epistle has blessed, informed, and transformed the life of those who read and study it. It has shaped Christian theology in a remarkable manner.

Walking through The Text

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the Law

Remember, Paul believed and taught the value of the Law as being our school master. The Law teaches us the high bar of morality, which we should meet, while teaching us that we continually fail to meet it. The school master must teach the student they have failed or fallen short. However, the intent of the Law, our school master, is to point us toward grace, forgiveness, mercy, and new beginnings. Thus, the purpose of the Law is to not only reveal that we fall short, but to reveal our need for forgiveness and empowerment as they are offered in Jesus Christ.

All people have some degree of morality. However, those born without the Law (the Gentiles) do not have the "school teacher." They are unaware of the deepest and most righteous morality. When most keep the law, they are keeping the social laws of the community in which they live. The law is a series of expectations and requirements that establish social order, and, in many cases, keep their gods happy. They are unaccustomed to the written Shema and the Laws that establish the way we are to live with each other as well as God. They also do not understand the way we are to live with each other is the way we live with God.

“If you cannot love your brother whom you have seen, how can you love your brother whom you cannot” (I John 4:20). Since they do not have the Mosaic Law they do not realize their own shortcomings and sin. Consequently, those living “apart” from the Law will perish without it. The moral Law of Moses has always pointed to the Shema, and, from there, the Shema embodied in Jesus Christ. To step outside the Law and live separated from it is to live outside the redemptive flow of God’s grace and mercy.

All who sin under the law will be judged by the law

The pious and devoted people live under the law and are judged by the law. Without Jesus the Messiah, well-intended men and women are left to believe their hope of favor with God totally depends upon their obedience to the Law. Since they cannot obey the Law, where do they go once they realize that though their intent is pure they do not have the inner power to perfectly keep the Law? They are left to “try harder” to keep all facets of the Law and participate in the rituals of the temple that offer forgiveness. The forgiveness offered in the temple, however, is “time-limited.” On the day of Atonement, the priest enters the holy place, pouring the blood of the sacrificial animal over the mercy seat, and thus ensuring the people are forgiven for the year. The following year and every year beyond must be repeated. Read the narrative of the scapegoat in Leviticus 16. The people’s sin is cast upon the goat, with its horns wrapped in scarlet cord, and sent *out of the camp* into the wilderness facing certain death. Still, this was repeated yearly. Was it possible to receive forgiveness for all time? Could we receive forgiveness outside of ritual through earnest prayer?

Jesus was the Old Testament scapegoat. He was perfect, chosen, and “marked” as the sinful one by the religious leaders. Hebrews records he was “*crucified outside the gate*” of Jerusalem, dying for our sin. However, the forgiveness in Christ is for all sin and for all of life. When we stray, we can immediately pray for forgiveness with earnest hearts and walk again in the fullness of Law. Jesus taught the Shema is “The Law of Love.” He claimed he did not come to do away with the Law of Prophets, but rather to fulfill them. He fulfilled both for he was the embodiment of the Shema. To keep the Shema was to be faithful to the Law and Prophets. To keep the Shema was to accept and follow Jesus.

For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who are declared righteous

For Paul, it wasn’t enough to gain God’s favor through hearing the Law alone. One’s inner life must be in harmony with what we hear and say. Again, even when we hear and obey the Law, we fall short. We always stand in need of forgiveness and grace for all are guilty of moral inconsistency and spiritual inconsistency.

It sounds as though Paul has written a contradiction by writing “those who obey the law are declared righteous.” Repeatedly, Paul has taught that obedience cannot save us any more than simply hearing the reading of the Law. However, one word in this verse clears the inconsistency and fulfills what Paul has taught. The word is “declared.” The verse reads again, “those who obey the law are declared righteousness.” We do not earn righteousness. In Eph. 2 Paul wrote, “By grace we are saved through faith, it is the gift of God, lest anyone should boast.” We can’t earn righteousness and therefore cannot boast about our salvation. Our righteousness is a gift from God, and thus Paul writes we are “declared righteous.”

The word as it is used by Paul is a legal term that would be used in a court of law. A person can be declared righteous even if they are a sinner or guilty. The “judge,” for reason of mercy, declares the person forgiven and declares them newly innocent. The person who sincerely desires to keep God’s law, who diligently attempts to live the law in their everyday life will be drawn to Jesus Christ. Jesus offers them the love of God, forgiveness, and the one law that will allow them to live in the Law and be truly righteous. This Law is: “Though shalt love the Lord your God, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and thy neighbor as thyself.” Their life has been transformed and redirected. No longer do they believe they have pleased God by meticulously keeping all of the Law (some 612 laws). They realize they please God when they love God and others.

Judging the Gentiles

People even to this day ask about those who never heard of Jesus, who had no Bible or witness. How can they enter the family of God without realities we enjoy as Christians? Paul, inspired, taught that though Gentiles did not have the scrolls of the Mosaic Law, they nevertheless possessed the law in the hearts. Many of the God's laws that govern a community and arouse spiritual curiosity in their hearts that leads them to seek have been revealed to them in life, and revealed within their own heart. They may be unaware of Jesus asking us to love God and one another, yet they do love. Their love might be limited and misdirected, nevertheless love does exist in their hearts. A basic sense of right and wrong also dwells in the hearts. They, also like all people, own a conscience. They feel guilty and are aware when they have violated love or community customs and norms. When all stand before God, those who know Scripture and Jesus stand before God with those who have the law and love within them though they are unaware for from where law and love in their hearts came.

Perhaps few illustrations from literature illustrate the above teaching of Paul better than when C.S. Lewis wrote a remarkable "fairy tale" filled with Christian truth, "The Chronicles of Narnia." I will offer a synopsis, though I encourage you to read this fascinating book. The dialogue is from memory but consist of the meaning. In the story Jesus is represented by a lion named Aslan. At the end of the world all creation runs toward Aslan. The Christians are sheep, and non-Christians the goats. As both near Aslan, the Christians are comforted. They know Aslan. They have a relationship with Aslan; thus, Aslan directs them to the right. The goats are afraid. They don't know him, for they never sought to know him. In their fear they run to the left. This is the dividing of the sheep from the goats. However, there is a goat that stands confused. He is not afraid. He is not led to flee to the left. He asks Aslan, "Why am I not afraid, I don't know you." Aslan answers, "O, yes you know me." "When you loved unselfishly, you knew me." "You may not have known my name, but you know who I am."

C.S. Lewis goes on in his story to claim many know Jesus by a different name. The question arises, "Is it knowing the name of Jesus, or knowing the person of Jesus that saves us?" History is filled with people who used Scripture and invoked the name of God, yet their behavior does not reflect the life of Jesus at all. Then there are those from cultures in which the name of Jesus was never spoken. The name of Jesus might have been forbidden to speak. Still, there are some with limited understanding who have a strong awareness of right and wrong and especially a knowledge of selfless love. In embracing the truth they know and living the life they know, are they following Jesus?

Paul, in attempting to reveal the spiritual value of the Law, feels compelled to address those Gentiles who have never heard of Jesus and the Law of Moses. Fully grasping Paul's intent may require studying such texts as this for a long time during our walk. Still, we must continue to read it and seek understanding.

Many people are quick to rush those who do not know the "spiritual language" Christians use. They do not understand much of what they hear. However, they do know selfless love. They seek to live a righteous life that treats others with dignity in love. Do you feel they know Jesus? Do you think it is impossible to know the "person of Jesus" without ever hearing the name? If we answer yes, what does this say about "faith vs. works?" Did they earn their salvation? Where do you see grace at work in such a person's encounter with Jesus? What do you think Paul is attempting to say to the church at Rome and why?

Arrogance and Hypocrisy

As noted in the introduction, the church at Rome was founded most likely by Jewish Christian who left Jerusalem after Pentecost. All Jews were expelled in 49 AD from Rome. Thus, they lost their leadership roles in the new expanding church. They were certainly welcomed back after Claudius died and the expulsion was over. However, many were not welcomed back to their previous positions of leadership. Still, many moved into leadership, especially as teachers. Being Jewish, they did possess a great appreciation for

the Mosaic Law, and it was rather easy for their past legalism to seep into their teaching. Paul recognized the subtle presence of hypocrisy in their teaching and instruction. Paul also learned that the teachers were violating the very law to which they demanded obedience. Paul's question was direct and to the point, "Why don't you teach yourself?" He goes further with the stinging charge of blasphemy against God. To speak obvious truth and then intentionally violate that truth is to have desecrated the name of God.

Without doubt, some of the Jews felt themselves greater in stature than the Gentiles. In Judaism, the Law of God was an inspired gift, revealing the nature of God; obedience to the Law could still bless your life. However, when hubris fills the heart and seeing others as "less than" can lead to a shameful witness. In the local church today, are there those who seem to enjoy knowing more than another, though they are Christians? What harm is done when arrogance is present in a classroom? Have you witnessed some though the years some who feel they were "owed" position or status? In your humble estimation, who do you think can help to establish a spirit of unity? Read John 17. What did Jesus pray about the unity of the church?

Circumcision: Outer versus Inner

The act of circumcision predated Abraham. God chose circumcision as the mark of the Hebrews being his people. Later in Jewish law, a male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day. This act physically marked the child as a member to the tribe, clan, and family. The child was unaware of what was being done. Circumcision marked the child as a member of the Jewish family. They would always belong to a people and to their God. Jesus himself was circumcised.

As Gentiles entered the Christian community many of the men were not circumcised. Some of the Judaizers demanded Gentiles become Jews before they became Christians. In other words, the Judaizers felt the Gentiles should become Jewish Christians to be legitimate. Circumcision did not mark a child as a Christian. It did mark them as members of the family of Abram. In the New Testament, baptism took the place of circumcision. It was the mark of the new covenant. We were becoming part of Jesus' family. Thus, infant baptism was not the child becoming a Christian. The child was becoming a preparatory member of God's family. For the ensuing years, the circumcised child would be reared at home and in Jewish community in the Jewish faith. At the age of bar or bat mitzvah, they became accountable for their own faith. In the Christian church, we baptize the child in the family of a church, and the child is reared at home and in the church family until at confirmation they make their baptism and faith their own.

Though baptism is ritually and spiritually important, it is not the outward act that makes us a child of God. We must accept the meaning of that baptism within our own heart. All outer ritual is to point to the inward heart and spirit.

How have you understood baptism as a member of the Christian years? Do you now understand why Methodists baptize infants? Do you understand how circumcision was related to the inner heart in Old Testament Judaism? Can you relate to how baptism is the new circumcision. How are these two rituals connected together?

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for the gift of our moral standard in the Law. And especially thank you that Jesus desired to birth that moral standard into our personal heart. Thank you for the liberation we find as we embrace the truth of Jesus. May the law of love indwell our hearts, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, embrace the world about us with the love of Jesus. In Jesus, name, Amen.

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



Rich Women

What's Old Is New Again

By Anne Packard

"Let our rich women arouse themselves to consider the greatest problems of the time."

--Belle Harris Bennett, [Christian Advocate](#), April 4, 1895

How could the younger daughter of a prominent family in southeastern Kentucky born a decade prior to the Civil War fulfill her dream of educating women for the betterment of God's kingdom? The answer is simple – prayer.

Belle Harris Bennett was born the daughter of eight children to Samuel and Elizabeth Chenault in Madison County, Kentucky and named for her paternal grandmother who was the wife of a Methodist circuit rider. She became a church member at 23 years and soon noticed the poor preparation of Methodist missionaries, especially female mission workers. After being elected president of the Kentucky Women's Missionary Society, she began raising funds from throughout the south to establish a school for female missionaries. Within a year, she secured a site and enough funding to create the Scarritt Bible and Missionary Training School, which opened with three students in Kansas City, Missouri in the Fall of 1892. Thousands were trained there in the next thirty years, including our own Mary Culler White.

After her sister's death in 1892, Bennett continued to work with missionary education fulfilling her sister's dream of creating a training school in southeastern Kentucky from where the Bennet family hailed. Working with [Dr. Walter Russell Lambuth](#), Secretary of Foreign Missions for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the Sue Bennett Memorial College - consisting of eight cottages and a dormitory - was established on twenty-two acres in New London, Kentucky.

In 1896, Belle Bennett was elected president of the Woman's Parsonage and Home Mission Society where she reorganized the society so that it would no longer answer to the all-male Southern Methodist Board of Church Extension but to a Woman's Board with corresponding secretaries from each Conference Society. The new society then organized night schools and Korean and Japanese Southern Methodist Churches for outreach to the new immigrants arriving on the West Coast and settlement houses in the southeast where unmarried, working women could live cooperatively and safely.

In 1911, the Mission Home Society and the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society merged to form the Woman's Missionary Council, and Belle Bennett served as its founding president. While she led this new organization for the next twelve years, membership tripled, donations neared one million dollars annually, mission work began in Africa, and mission work in Japan was accepted and enlarged.

In 1910, Belle Bennett was the first woman allowed to speak in session before the General Conference of the Southern Methodist Church, campaigning male leaders to grant women the full rights and privileges of the laity. The measure was defeated in 1910 and again at the 1914 General Conference where women from both sides of this issue were able to speak during the session. But it is believed that the work done by Southern Methodist women during WWI may have swayed delegates' minds because in 1918, at the General Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, the delegates voted 265 in favor and 57 against women's laity rights. The battle had not yet been won, though, because the Council of Bishops vetoed this decision shortly after the meeting. The General Conference then sent the question to each of the Annual Conferences (approximately 40 Conferences constituted the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, at that time). The measure passed with a good majority, and women's laity rights were won by 1919.

Among her many accomplishments is a small, often unnoticed detail. Early in her years of devoted service to the Southern Methodist Church, Belle Bennett created a Prayer Calendar which was sent nationwide. In the very beginning of her immense work for the Methodist Church and women's rights, she prayed. She joined her prayer to the prayers of other Southern Methodist women, regardless of what side of what issue was in the daily news at the time, and those powerful prayers changed the world.

At this time of societal change, what could prayer do for us?

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



Love Large Enough

by Hal Brady

Not long ago an associate pastor gave a children's message to a large crowd of children at an 11:00 worship service. Children were packed into every corner of the chancel area. She ended the brief homily by saying, "And God loves you and you and you," pointing as she spoke in three different directions. Then she paused a moment to let the message sink in. During the silence, a child down at the far end of the chancel behind the baptismal font, toward which she had not pointed, said in a wee small voice, "What about me?"

Now, undoubtedly, that child represents a category of people that is larger than most of us imagine. I'm talking about those on the margin: the oppressed, the insignificant, the unnoticed, the obscene, and the different.

In an attempt to be inclusive, this article is about how God loves us all and how God calls us to love all other people. I am calling this writing, "LOVE LARGE ENOUGH," and I want to point out a few characteristics of that kind of love.

First, love large enough is a different kind of love! Grace, undeserved love, isn't picky. It doesn't look for what is deserved. It doesn't necessarily expect a response. It is love without regard to shifting circumstances, emotional states, or personal conscience. Grace is one-sided!

Diane was every parent's worst fear. By her own testimony, she grew up in a good and loving home. There were family outings, birthday celebrations, softball, dance classes, and even church. But for some reason Diane never felt quite okay, and somewhere in high school things got out of hand. There were drugs, stealing, alcohol, staying out late, and jail time. The family suffered much social embarrassment and was seemingly always in crisis. There was counseling, rehabilitation, tough love, tears, and prayers. But later when all these efforts had finally paid off and Diane was much better, she gave her own personal testimony to grace. She said, "When I look back on those difficult times what amazes me most of all is that my worst could not destroy my parents love for me." Love large enough is a different kind of love.

Second, love large enough is a personal love! We simply cannot love in general nor can we love by categories. We cannot love by legislation or decree. We can love only a named person who has a past, a present, and a future. To me, one of the greatest verses in the Bible includes this phrase, "...and he calls his own sheep by name..." (John 10:3). It almost makes chills run down my spine when I think that God knows my name. God also knows your name. And God wants us to love each other by name.

It is reported that when Alexander Fleming, the man who discovered penicillin, planted bulbs in his garden he planted them in such a way that when they bloomed, they spelled the name of his friends. When the flowers came out, he invited his friends to visit him and see their name growing in colors in his garden. Imagine their joy at seeing that. What a unique way to remember a friend! Love large enough is a personal love.

Third, love large enough is a content love! We are not talking here about greeting card sentiment, as nice as that may be. A woman visited a newspaper editor's office one morning hoping to sell some poems she had written. "What are your poems about?" the editor asked. "They are about love," gushed the poet. "Well, read me one," said the editor. "This world could certainly use a lot more love." The poem she read was filled with starlight and roses and other sticky sentiments, and it was more than the crusty old editor could take. "I'm sorry," he said. "But in all honesty, you are really missing the boat on what real love is about. It's not moonlight and roses. It's sitting up all night at a sickbed, or working extra hours so the kids can have new shoes. The world doesn't need poetic love. It needs some good old-fashioned, practical love."

Or as I would say: it needs love with content. Content means "whatever is contained in anything." And the greatest example of content love is God's love expressed in Jesus Christ. We see this content love most vividly in Jesus' dying on the cross – a love that is attentive, accepting, practical, generous, extravagant, uncalculating, forgiving, liberating, reconciling, and persistent! Jesus put it like this, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34). So is God's love, and I pray so is ours – a love large enough!

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).

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Events for Clergy

Discussion: Practicing Compassion in a World of Conflict

South Georgia clergy are invited to join in a worldwide discussion around Resilience, Practicing Compassion in a World of Conflict. The online event will take place Sept. 29-30.

Change, confrontation, and division are all around us, making it easy to feel ungrounded and alone. The challenge of finding places to be heard and accepted is real. In times like these, how are we to live fully and faithfully as followers of Jesus Christ? When our communities are in conflict, how do we find the support of sustaining relationships?

Many of us long for relationships that offer space wide enough to envision together what God's creative and love-filled imagination might reveal for our own lives and those of our neighbors. The early followers of Jesus dreamed together of a new way even as they grieved losses, feared for their lives, and deeply disagreed with each other. Today, we are called to do the same. Practices of compassion open the space for resilient relationships—the kind of relationships that weather conflict and division with strength.

RESILIENCE is designed to equip us to live compassionately amid conflict. Join The Upper Room and Africa Upper Room Ministries (AURM) as we engage in storytelling, time for personal reflection and conversation, guided spiritual practice, and worship. This gathering offers time for centering, interaction, and spiritual practices to help you cultivate relationships that endure even in the face of profound disagreement and division.

To register go here: <https://loom.ly/fA-HuIk>. Use code LSM25 for 25% off your ticket price. If you would like to receive a \$50 scholarship reimbursement to offset the cost of your registration, register and send your receipt to assistant@sgaumc.com.

Workshop: 'The cost of care in your calling'

The South Georgia Conference Clergy Mental Health Task Force is sponsoring a one-day workshop for clergy focused on “Care to the Caregiver: The Cost of Caring in Your Calling.” Led by Rev. Thomas Waynick, LMFT, the workshop is set for **October 12, 2023, from 10am – 2pm** at the Pastoral Institute in Columbus, Ga.

Galatians 6:2 reminds us to carry each other’s burdens and in this way, you fulfill the law of Christ. This workshop, sponsored by the Conference Clergy Mental Health Task Force, will address the following:

- Effects of prolonged exposure to suffering and on-going demands
- Understanding and providing protection regarding risks
- The symptoms of carrying others burdens for a prolonged time

God commands that we love our neighbor as ourselves but we cannot give what we do not have. We invite you to this workshop to learn to give yourselves the same grace and compassion that you so often give to others in your ministries. The cost for this event is \$25 (lunch is included). [Click here to register](#).



Conference Updates & Happenings

Rural Church Rising conference focuses on rural context

Rural Church Rising is a two-day conference - **October 27-28, 2023** - for lay and clergy people serving in rural contexts across the country. This conference takes place at the Warren Willis Camp and Conference Center (4990 Picciola Rd, Fruitland Park, FL 3473) in the North Central District of the Florida Annual Conference, one of the most established rural districts participating in Fresh Expressions of church. For more information about the two day event, visit www.freshexpressionsfl.org/rural-church-rising-2023. The South Georgia Conference is offering scholarships for lay and clergy to attend making the cost to the participant \$50 per person (mileage and meals on your own). [Register here](#). If you have questions or need more information, please contact Anne Bosarge at abosarge@sgaumc.com.

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](#)

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.

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Resource Roundup – September 2023

World Communion Sunday is Oct. 1

On World Communion Sunday, United Methodists will join Christians of different traditions to recognize our ecumenical oneness in Christ and to bring Christians together in a spirit of unity and peace. We have resources to inspire your community to fully embrace this Special Sunday. In the pastor and leader kit, find offertory talks, children's messages, age-level resources, social media graphics and more. Core resources will be available in multiple languages. Start planning today! [View resources](#)

Five things to do to take better photos and videos with your smartphone

While smartphones are capable of capturing fairly high-quality photos and video, you can achieve more-professional results by paying attention to a handful of details. Don't miss out on transforming your mobile device into a powerful tool for visual storytelling. Discover the secrets that will elevate your photography and videography skills to a whole new level. [Read more](#)

11 mistakes to avoid in church website design

Your church website is one of your most important tools for reaching people. But if it's not well-designed, you could be making some big mistakes. Look at these 11 common mistakes that churches make with their websites and see tips for avoiding these mistakes and creating a website that will help you reach more people. [Read more](#)

United Methodist/Wesleyan Small-Group Resources

(Discipleship Ministries) In a recent webinar, the most requested resources had to do with identity - what it means to be United Methodist. This response highlights a collective desire to understand and embrace our unique identity as United Methodists. The United Methodist Publishing House gave great suggestions for small groups and Bible studies. [Click here to read more and to see the full list of suggestions.](#)

5 Factors That Affected Your Church's Income in 2022

(Discipleship Ministries) Were your church's offering totals down in 2022? Maybe not, depending on how well you were receiving income during the days of the COVID pandemic. If you did start 2023 in a deficit, you may wish to place blame: your members, the finance committee, the folks who manage your church's endowment funds, or maybe the pastor for not preaching stewardship enough. Before we start pointing fingers, it might be helpful to examine some hard data. [Read more](#)

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/>.

UMCOR Mustard Seed Migration Grants Program Accepting Applications for 2023

United Methodist churches have the opportunity to help immigrants, migrants and refugees living in their local communities, thanks to the Mustard Seed Migration Grants program from the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis until October 1, 2023, and grant monies will be awarded within four weeks of grant application approval. The grants program, now in its third year, continues the agency's 80-year tradition of helping refugees, immigrants and migrants seeking to build new lives. [Learn more here.](#)

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Retired Clergy Birthdays – September 2023

- 9/04 – Earl James: 310 Avondale Circle; Warner Robins, GA 31088
- 9/05 – Gene Yelverton: 6345 Concord Church Rd.; Ellaville, GA 31086
- 9/06 – Sanford Wills: 1021 Sunrise Rd.; Preston, GA 31824
- 9/09 – Richard Soper: 102 Ingham St.; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
- 9/13 – Bernie Khaw: 344 S. Old Middletown Rd., Media, PA 19063
- 9/14 – Tom Johnson, Sr.: PO Box 127; Oxford, GA 30054
- 9/15 – Elick Bullington, Jr.: Lakeside Senior Care; 1025 N. Chester Ave., No. 11; Douglas, GA 31533
- 9/16 – Henry Bass: 404 Clyde Ave.; Valdosta, GA 31602
- 9/16 – Bob Norwood: 946 Old Wadley Rd.; Swainsboro, GA 30401
- 9/16 – Ray Youngblood: 214 Lee St.; North Augusta, SC 29841
- 9/18 – Burns Willis: 1815 E. Washington St.; Thomasville, GA 31792
- 9/19 – Wayne Moseley: 29 William E. Moseley Rd.; Collins, GA 30421
- 9/19 – Dan Pegram: 112 Tahoe Dr.; Pooler, GA 31323
- 9/21 – Virgil Lee: 208 Yorkshire Crescent; Thomasville, GA 31792
- 9/22 – Edwin Chase: 70 Shipwatch Rd.; Savannah, GA 31410
- 9/26 – Larry Sauls: 206 Westview Dr.; Dublin, GA 31321
- 9/27 – Andy Brownley: 34 South Broad St.; Alamo, GA 30411
- 9/28 – Donna Jordan: 404 Brentwood Dr.; Dublin, GA 31021
- 9/28 – William Ryan: 2138 Red Bank Circle; Sevierville

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Obituary: Rev. Edward “Eddie” T. Braswell, Sr.

On Saturday the 9th of September, the Rev. Edward T. Braswell, Sr. passed on quietly and comfortably to join his Lord and Savior.

He was born January 12, 1948, in Crisp County, Georgia to Jess and Mary Evelyn. He is preceded in death by his parents, his brother Willard, and his sister Joyce.

He is survived by his loving wife Sandra, who has served the Lord by his side for over 56 years; his two children: Jennifer and Edward (Kaylee); his two grandsons: Keegan and Rohne, and his sister Brenda (Roger).

Eddie faithfully served the United Methodist Church in many capacities for over 50 years, 45 of those as a full-time minister of many churches and charges across South Georgia. Even after retiring, he worked to help train others coming into the ministry, attended many mission trips, and was a faithful servant of God.

There will be a private graveside service for the family.

In lieu of flowers, the family is requesting donations be made to Magnolia Manor in the name of Rev. Edward T. Braswell Sr., to The League of Good Samaritan's Magnolia Manor Development Office, 2001 S. Lee Street, Americus, GA 31709.

Online condolences may be left at www.hughesandwright.com.



Scripture Readings – September 19 edition

September 24

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

- [Exodus 16:2-15](#)
- [Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45](#)
- [Philippians 1:21-30](#)
- [Matthew 20:1-16](#)

October 1

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

- [Exodus 17:1-7](#)
- [Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16](#)
- [Philippians 2:1-13](#)
- [Matthew 21:23-32](#)