

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – MAY 21 EDITION

Game Church grows connections, shares Jesus

By Rev. Stephanie Smith

Rev. Matt Stout, pastor of Garden City UMC, has pioneered an innovative ministry: Game Church. Born out of his love for Dungeons & Dragons, this bi-monthly gathering - meeting every other Thursday night at Savannah Game Lions in Pooler, Ga. - is a one-of-a-kind intersection where faith and gaming converge.

In Dungeons & Dragons (D&D), players explore fantasy worlds together as they take on epic quests and level up in experience. Those gathered become characters they create, battle foes, uncover secrets, and find treasure.

By using D&D as a tool for spiritual exploration, Game Church creates a space that nurtures community and encourages players to delve into moral and spiritual questions within a supportive and unique environment.

Rev. Stout's vision for Game Church extends far beyond gaming. For him, it's also about fostering a space where everyone, regardless of their background or beliefs, feels welcomed and valued. This spiritual community is built on transparency and support, with honesty being a core value.

Each Game Church gathering is an opportunity for individuals to discuss a Jesus story, share personal experiences, and offer prayers for one another. This fosters a sense of camaraderie and support that extends beyond the game itself.

“Our time of lifting up prayer concerns is what has really grown our connection to each other,” Rev. Stout said.

By meeting people where they are and inviting them into the world of D&D, Game Church creates opportunities for authentic discussions about spirituality, morality, and the human experience. Rev. Stout sees Game Church as a place where the gospel message can be shared with those who might otherwise never set foot in a church.

“Gamers attending Game Church come from diverse backgrounds,” said Rev. Stout. “What's intriguing is how those without a religious affiliation are discovering a sense of belonging among fellow enthusiasts and are open to learning about Jesus. A recent addition to our community has identified as an atheist but expresses a desire to join and participate in our Game Church gatherings.”

Through the shared experience of storytelling and adventure, Game Church demonstrates that faith can be found in unexpected places, including the realms of fantasy and imagination. This unique approach inspires hope and offers a new perspective on spirituality.

“I visited Game Church to immerse myself in their activities,” said Rev. Stephanie Smith, a South Georgia Cultivator under the umbrella of Congregational Development. “During the Jesus Story segment, I observed a young man discreetly flipping through his D&D book, seemingly disengaged. However, as the narrative shifted to the parable of the Good Samaritan, incorporating elements familiar to him like Orcs and Half-Elves, his attention was captivated.

“It was remarkable to witness the depth of connection he experienced thereafter. He actively participated in sharing personal prayer concerns and seamlessly integrated the essence of the story into the subsequent

gameplay of Dungeons & Dragons,” said Rev. Smith.

Are you interested in learning more about Game Church or starting your fresh expression ministries and how they're transforming communities? Delve deeper into this innovative approach to church by exploring resources online at Discipleship Ministries: www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/fresh-expressions. Whether you're a church leader or someone passionate about sharing Christ's love, fresh expressions offer exciting ministry opportunities in today's diverse world. Embrace the adventure of discovering how God can bring hope and transformation through these innovative approaches.

Rev. Stephanie Smith is the associate pastor at Pittman Park UMC in Statesboro and is working with district and conference communications.



Canaan Community UMC creates space to grieve through balloon release

On Saturday, March 30, 2024, Canaan Community United Methodist Church in Savannah, Ga. hosted a community-wide balloon release. They released balloons into the air in memory of loved ones – both family and friends – that have passed away. Taking place in the church parking lot on resurrection weekend, this event was an opportunity for Canaan Community UMC to connect with the community as they created space to help those who are grieving.

“This (balloon release event) allowed people that are still grieving to help them find that special place in their hearts and make some room for peace to reside,” said Carol Davis Hunt, church secretary and lay leader at Canaan Community UMC. “We felt that it was important for us to grieve together as a community and to release some of those inner hurts in our hearts that no one sees but Almighty God. We also saw an opportunity to share the story of Jesus’s resurrection and how His mother Mary also grieved for her son.”

“We wanted to let our neighbors in the community know it is also very important why we must never forget, and that we should always remember the crucifixion of Jesus Christ: that He sacrificed His life for us all,” said Hunt.

Each person in attendance was invited to represent with their special made t-shirt and wear their family colors. Event planners say this was a very heart felt and very emotional day as people shared their stories and their tears.



General Conference

It’s been a few weeks since the conclusion of the 2020 Postponed General Conference and many South Georgia United Methodist are spending much time processing and praying about what all happened there. Here is a [comprehensive General Conference Wrap-up page containing emails and videos](#). Here is a [video summary of General Conference from Bishop Graves](#).

Laity Zoom Webinar Rebroadcast

There are three opportunities this week to watch a rebroadcast of the Zoom Webinar offered to laity last week, which had nearly five hundred attendees. You can hear Bishop Graves and members of the South

Georgia delegation speak and respond to questions about General Conference outcomes. The webinar lasts an hour and a half. [Register here](#)

Tuesday, May 21 - Zoom | 6 pm - 7:30 pm
Wednesday, May 22 - Zoom | 12 pm - 1:30 pm
Thursday, May 23 - Zoom | 12 pm - 1:30 pm

Thank you for your prayers!

In this video, your South Georgia delegation takes a moment to say "Thank You" for your prayers, encouragement, text, calls, and emails. [Watch video](#)

South Georgia clergy volunteer their time at General Conference

There were five clergy from South Georgia in Charlotte, NC for the General Conference session – not to vote but to volunteer. Rev. Christy Bandy, Dr. Paula Lewis, Dr. Nita Crump, Rev. Melissa Traver, and Rev. Kathy Israel-McLeod were key volunteers representing South Georgia at General Conference. Volunteers at General Conference give up their time – being away from family and their churches - and often come at their own expense to help make the General Conference session run smoothly and efficiently. [Read more](#)

Lauri Jo Upchurch consecrated deaconess in The United Methodist Church

Lauri Jo Upchurch was consecrated as a deaconess in The United Methodist Church on Monday, April 29, 2024. Twenty-six laypersons, including three central conference members, were consecrated to a lifetime of service as deaconesses and home missionaries during Monday morning’s worship service of the 2020 postponed General Conference in Charlotte, NC. Deaconesses and home missionaries are laypeople who are called by God to be in a lifetime relationship in The United Methodist Church for engagement with a full-time vocation in ministries of love, justice, and service. Together they form a covenant community that is rooted in Scripture, informed by history, driven by mission, ecumenical in scope, and global in outreach. [Read more](#)



South Georgia prepares for 2024 Annual Conference session

[ALL ANNUAL CONFERENCE INFORMATION](#)

South Georgia United Methodists will gather June 2-4, 2024, at the [UGA Tifton Campus Conference Center](#), in Tifton, Ga. to worship, fellowship, and conduct the business of the South Georgia Conference. Conference will begin on Sunday evening, June 2 with an opening worship service. It is scheduled to conclude by 5:30 pm on Tuesday, June 4, with the fixing of appointments and sending forth service.

This year’s theme is “One Matters,” based on Luke 15.

“Making disciples and nurturing spiritual growth within our local congregations is a priority for us in South Georgia,” said Bishop David Graves, episcopal leader of the South Georgia Conference. “We recognize the transformation happening every single day across this great conference. Focusing on the fact that every ‘One Matters’ puts intentionality on our disciple-making efforts.

“I look forward to being together, to remembering our calling, and collectively looking at how we can make an even greater impact in our communities as we put emphasis on our scripture passage in Luke 15,” said Bishop Graves.

This year's Annual Conference session will be marked by daily worship services.

Bishop Graves will preach Sunday night during the Opening Worship Service at 6:30 pm. Five people will be ordained or commissioned Monday evening, June 3, at 7 pm. Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett, episcopal leader of the North Alabama and Holston Conferences, will be the preacher for the service of ordination and commissioning.

On Tuesday, June 4, Rev. Doreen Smalls, district superintendent of the Northwest and Southwest districts, will preach during the morning worship service at 8:30 am. Later in the morning, the conference will recognize those retiring and, during the Memorial Service at 2 pm, celebrate the lives of South Georgia clergy and clergy spouses who have died during the past year. Dr. Rick Lanford, Regional Vice President of the Georgia United Methodist Foundation, will be the preacher. All worship services will be live streamed.

During the 2024 Annual Conference session, South Georgia United Methodists will have the opportunity to support United Methodist colleges and Wesley Foundations of the South Georgia Conference through the Commission on Higher Education and Campus Ministry. Your gifts will help support the following South Georgia ministries: Andrew College, Coastal College of Georgia Wesley, Columbus State Wesley, Georgia Southern Wesley, Georgia Southwestern Wesley, Valdosta State Wesley, Macon Wesley (serving Mercer & Middle Georgia State University), and Wesleyan College.

Congregations are encouraged to send and present their offering during the opening worship service on June 2. [Click here for additional and information and promotional materials.](#)

In addition, attendees are encouraged to [support our conference agencies](#) by bringing items that will help them in their day-to-day operations as they show that every "One Matters." Each of the agencies listed will have a collection box near the entrance of the Conference Center, so choose one or choose several to help fill up their boxes.

"I look forward to seeing South Georgia United Methodists in just a few short weeks," said Mrs. Meredyth Earnest, Conference Secretary. "I am thankful to all those who are making plans for our time in Tifton, and I look forward to a great conference and your active participation on behalf of your local church."

For more detailed information and a daily agenda, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.



Book of Recommendations & Reports for the 2024 Annual Conference Session now available

Business items for the 2024 Annual Conference session are contained within the *Book of Recommendations and Reports* (BOR). Inside the BOR delegates will find helpful annual conference information, detailed reports from conference ministries, pension and benefits recommendations, conference budgets, and much more. One of the purposes of the BOR is to allow delegates to read the recommendations, reports and resolutions before the annual conference session. As it's always been, the BOR will be a critical resource prior to and during the Annual Conference session.

The BOR can be purchased for \$8 (plus tax and shipping) as a professionally bound book [through lulu.com](http://through.lulu.com)*

The *Book of Recommendations and Reports* is also available as [a free PDF download](#). Adobe Acrobat Reader

is required to download the file(s). If you don't already have it installed, visit www.adobe.com and follow the instructions. If you are viewing the document electronically, the page numbers have been formatted to match the printed version, enabling you to easily find a page when referenced during the Annual Conference session.

Business items that did not make the BOR printing deadline, such as the conference nominations report, will be placed on the [conference website](#) and an email sent alerting members when it is available.



Annual Conference special offering to benefit college campus ministries

Incredible things are happening on campuses across the state of Georgia! Last year the weekly student reach (discipleship+worship) averaged over 4,000 students per week. Think about that for a moment: 4,000 young adults (18-22) were part of the United Methodist movement on campus. Over 90% of those are experiencing United Methodism for the very first time!

Here's your chance to support the ministry taking place! The 2024 Annual Conference special offering will benefit the United Methodist colleges and Wesley Foundations of the South Georgia Conference through the Commission on Higher Education and Campus Ministry. The UMCommission provides support, funding, administration, and long-term vision casting for these campus ministries and United Methodist schools.

Your gifts will help support the following South Georgia Ministries:

- Andrew College
- Coastal College of Georgia Wesley
- Columbus State Wesley
- Georgia Southern Wesley
- Georgia Southwestern Wesley
- Valdosta State Wesley
- Macon Wesley (serving Mercer & Middle Georgia State University)
- Wesleyan College

For more information about the special offering and a bulletin insert to use in your local church, visit www.sgaumc.org/specialoffering. Congregations are encouraged to collect and present their offering during the annual conference's opening worship service on June 2.

[You can also give online by clicking here.](#)

Additional mission opportunity at Annual Conference:

[Mission emphasis to support our conference agencies](#)



2024 Renfro brick-and-mortar grant applications now being accepted

Connectional Ministries is accepting applications for the Southeastern Jurisdiction Renfro Trust Grant. This grant is a brick-and-mortar grant specifically for small, rural churches. Guidelines, [requirements, and applications can be found here](#). Completed applications must be submitted to Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, Conference Secretary for Global Ministries (revgarth0810@gmail.com) by August 1, 2024.

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Connectional Ministries Resource: The Learning Corner

Does learning really take place if it doesn't lead to application and transformation? Have you really taught something if no one ever puts into action what they have heard? Sometimes the emphasis in teaching and learning is on receiving information instead of the application of it. Teaching only happens when someone learns enough to apply it and be changed in some way because of the application.

In South Georgia, our goal is to provide learning and training options that do more than just give you a certificate for completion. We want to help facilitate application and transformation in our local churches and within our leaders. That is where Connectional Ministries' new [Learning Corner](#) comes in. This new resource aims at helping church leaders - both clergy and laity - equip themselves with the knowledge to lead well and incentivize application that leads to transformation.

Flexibility is built into The Learning Corner. We know you are busy. Sometimes it's hard to make time for learning when our days are so full of ministry. But we all know in order to be more effective and efficient at making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, we must take time to learn and grow so we don't just keep repeating the same things over and over.

Each of the learning modules can be done on your own time individually or with a team. The courses are structured to include learning videos, application activities, and a reporting page where you can let us know what you have learned, how you have applied it in your setting, and earn CEUs for your participation in the course.

At the launch of The Learning Corner, we are featuring four courses with more on the way:

1. **Creating a Healthy Volunteer Culture:** How healthy is the culture of your volunteer teams? Do your volunteers come excited, expectant, and ready to serve? Or do they seem to look at their service area as a "have to" instead of a "get to"? Let's spend some time learning about how to create a healthy volunteer culture, applying it through a team workbook and the Start, Stop, Continue exercise, and then let us know how what you have learned is making a difference in your context. Earn 1 CEU for completing the whole course.
2. **Small Group Leadership Basics:** Small groups are the best place for deep discipleship, care and community to happen in the life of the local church. No matter what name you give your small groups (Sunday School, Accountability Group, Life Group, Bible Study, etc.), these smaller gatherings are essential to the life of a believer. If they are so critical in our spiritual and corporate growth and development, how can we be equally intentional about creating and cultivating healthy small group environments in our churches? In this series you will learn the basics of healthy small group leaders, apply what you've learned in a leadership gathering to assess the effectiveness of your groups, and then let us know how this has made a difference in your context. Earn .5 CEU for completing the whole course.
3. **Resetting our Thinking:** We often spend a lot of time talking about challenges and problems that will lead us to creative solutions no one else has ever tried or thought of before. Often when we get to the implementation phase, we get frustrated that the solution we tried didn't give us the results we had hoped for. So we meet together again to try something else. Many times the change that needs to be made isn't a change in programming, but a change in mindset. In this series of trainings, we will learn several strategies for resetting our thinking, adjusting our mindsets, and moving from surface-level problems to root-level problems. You will be given prompts to use with your leadership teams to help you make the shift in your thinking to move your mission forward. Then fill out the form and let us

know how this has transformed and changed your ministries. Earn 1 CEU for completing the whole course.

4. **Transformational Teaching:** It's the desire of every leader and teacher that what they teach and communicate to learners will end up making a difference in the lives of the hearers. As church leaders, the message we communicate is transformational by the power of the Holy Spirit, but what if we could improve the way we deliver this transformational message so it could be more easily understood and applied? That is what this course is all about - Teaching to Change Lives, a book by Howard Hendrix. In this course we will explore the 7 laws of teaching, then download a reminder sheet with quick questions to help us remember and apply them to our teaching. Finally you will have the opportunity to share with us how this has transformed your teaching. Earn 1 CEU for completing the whole course.

Here's how you can be part of The Learning Corner:

1. **As a leader and learner:** Go through the courses individually or take your team through with you and use these conversations to help you change your culture and become more effective in accomplishing your mission.
2. **As an evaluator:** Let us know what was most or least helpful for you. If you would like to see a course on a particular topic, reach out and let us know.
3. **As a contributor:** If you have something you'd like to teach and share with the rest of the conference, reach out and we will work together to come up with a training course you can lead and share. We want this to be a connectional place for learning and sharing.

Check out the Learning Corner at www.sgaumc.org/thelearningcorner. Have any questions or suggestions? E-mail Anne Bosarge at abosarge@sgaumc.com.

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May 'One Matters' Resource Toolkit: How do I start a faith conversation with an unbeliever?

Connectional Ministries understands the importance of making disciples and nurturing spiritual growth within local congregations. Transformation is happening every single day across the South Georgia Conference.

We've loved hearing the feedback from our first three resource toolkits: February (Who is your one?), March (Whose burdens are you carrying?), and April (How do I bless my neighbors?), and are excited to roll out a new toolkit for May as we continue to put focus on our theme of "One Matters." These toolkits are designed to empower clergy and laity in their sacred mission of cultivating meaningful connections and fostering transformative discipleship. A single challenge question will be presented, followed by accompanying resources tailored to address that specific challenge.

May toolkit hit inboxes of clergy and lay leaders at the beginning of the month. May's challenge question is: **How do I start a faith conversation with an unbeliever?** Often, it's hard to share our faith. We don't want it to be awkward or come across judgmental. As the Bible says: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." 1 Peter 3:15

You may be in a conversation with someone and want to talk about faith, but don't know how to get there. How can you start shifting the conversation toward faith? This month, we've added a few simple ideas to help us be equipped and ready as we look for the opportunities God gives us.

To go along with the challenge question, a step-by-step resource –[7 Q's for Faith Sharing](#) – is available to use as a small group resource, as a supplement in your church bulletin, or for your own personal use. This handout shows 7 different questions that open the door to faith sharing in a relaxed, natural, non-threatening way.

In addition, a [16-minute training video led by Anne Bosarge](#), breaks down the why, the what, the where, and the how of faith sharing. The "who" comes when we ask God to show us the people and give us the courage to step into those conversations! You are also encouraged to check out this month's book recommendation: "[Turning Everyday Conversations into Gospel Conversations](#)" by Jimmy Scroggins and Steve Wright with Leslee Bennett.

[View May's Toolkit here](#) | [Sign up to receive the monthly toolkit](#)



May 26 Lesson: Who Has Believed?

Spring Quarter: Examining Our Faith
Unit 3: Standing in the Faith

Lesson 13: Week of May 26, 2024
By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scriptures: Romans 10:1-17
Key Verse: Romans 10:9

Lesson Aims

1. Identify several of the Old Testament passages that Paul quotes.
2. Summarize the meanings of the Law of Moses and the righteousness of Christ.
3. State his or her personal responsibility in light of verses 14-15.

Introduction

Preaching that does not come out of love for the people being addressed ultimately does not benefit the listening crowd. As with the Christian practice, preaching without love is worthless (see 1 Corinthians 13). The same is true for prayer. We might think of preaching as a prayer shared with an audience. The speaker presents the Good News in the hope and prayer that God will work in the hearts of those who hear. And, when we find ourselves unable to preach in words, our actions can still be a prayer that the people who interact with us will find themselves turning to God.

Lesson Context

Just how comprehensive is the Good News of Jesus the Messiah? The entire book of Romans is concerned with this question. Romans 1-3 sets forth proof of the need and extent of God's mercy available to those who trust him with their lives. God has announced salvation for all who trust (see Romans 1:16-17). The gospel of grace has come to light for all. The extension of God's offer of salvation to Gentiles does not exclude Jews. Chapters 9-11 advance the discussion in part by considering the fate of Israel. The depth of God's love extends to Israel as well as the Gentiles (Romans 11:33-36).

Romans 10 reflects on Paul's hope that the Good News that Jesus is the Messiah and Lord will also come to his fellow Jews. God promised salvation to Israel, and God keeps promises at all times. Therefore, the promises of salvation must come to Israel. The hard division between Jews and Christians did not occur until several generations after Paul's lifetime. Paul himself never used the word "Christian" in his writings, though it had begun to circulate within the church. He likely did not anticipate the centuries of hostility between the two groups or the habit of those thinking themselves to be Christians of insulting, and even persecuting, Jesus. The hard division that Paul experienced and wrote about was between Jews (whether Christ-followers or not) and Gentiles (whether God-fearers or not). The gospel of reconciliation and peace in Christ reaches all, allowing God both to keep the ancient promises to Israel and to add the Gentiles to the faithful community.

I. Paul's Prayer Romans 10:1-4

Praying for God's salvation "for the Israelites" was probably habitual for Paul. His concern for his people including family and friends was reason enough to pray for the nation. The Scriptures he long had studied modeled praying for deliverance for Israel from its various foes (examples: Psalms 79; 85:4-7; 130:7-8). And there was an expectation, found particularly in the prophets' writings, that the nation would be restored after suffering for their sins (see Isaiah 40:1-3; 49:14-25; Jeremiah 30:10-11, etc.). Paul's prayers were expanded to include that his people would turn to Christ and find eternal salvation in him.

Question! What group of people do you belong to that you long to see come to salvation?

Verses 2 and 3 summarize Paul's understanding of the state of his Jewish contemporaries. Paul did not suggest that his fellow Jews were all pursuing evil ends, because that was clearly not true. Jews who did not follow Jesus still desired to follow God. But, Paul asserts, they misunderstood the trajectory of God's work and how their own Scriptures pointed to Jesus as their Messiah (compare Luke 24:25-32).

Notice that Paul does not dismiss "zeal" for God as insignificant; he knew from personal experience that misdirected zeal could be turned to God's purposes (examples: Galatians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:6). Still, his people's zeal without "knowledge" of Christ prevented them from recognizing that God's long-anticipated provision for deliverance of his people (and indeed all nations) had finally been revealed (compare Acts 2:17-36).

Paul has argued that "the righteousness of God" consists of extending salvation to all on the basis of trust in the work of Christ (Romans 4; see lesson 11).

This verse (verse 3) echoes Romans 2:17-24, in which Paul criticized the attempt to make Jews out of Gentiles. Attempts to come to God on the basis of anything other than Christ, and especially on the basis of any human achievement, fail (compare Philippians 3:9). An approach to saving the Gentiles that tried to compel them to keep the Law of Moses (the Torah) neglected the deeper reality that the relationship to God always depends on faithful trust, not on the works themselves. The Jews simply had no idea that righteousness could be a gift.

In verse 4, the word translated "culmination" has the sense of "the ultimate goal" in Greek (compare Romans 6:22; 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Peter 1:9). The coming of the "Christ" (the Hebrew Messiah) and his activity in revealing God's salvation to all human beings was always the goal "of the law." And the Law of Moses itself pointed Israel to the work of God, as opposed to the law existing for its own sake. Paul did not expect the

abolition of the Torah but the completion of God's promises (compare Matthew 5:17-20). Those who trust God's work through Jesus has fulfilled the Torah's overarching objectives.

Here's three things to remember: (1) The law leads us to Christ, (2) Christ lived the perfect life that the law required; and (3) Christ fulfilled the law and Christ's righteousness is credited to the believer's account. As Paul expressed it in Romans 6:15, "**We are not under Law but under grace.**"

II. The Word of Salvation (Romans 10:5-13)

It is stated that verses 5-13 elaborate on the two key points Paul has made in verse 4: Christ ends the era of the law, making available a righteousness that can be attained through faith (vv.5-10), and this righteousness is now available to everyone who believes (vv. 11-13).

In verses 5-6 we find the third contrast between two kinds of righteousness. The law of righteousness of Romans 9:31 and their own [righteousness] (Romans 10:3) is now described as "the righteousness that is by the law," as in Romans 9:30. "God's righteousness" (Romans 10:3) is defined as the "righteousness that is by faith." Paul then identifies each righteousness by means of the Old Testament.

The apostle cites Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5 to describe legal righteousness: "The person who does things will live by them." Paul is not suggesting here that Moses taught that one could be saved by doing the law. As we are informed, "Living in the Old Testament context refers to the enjoyment of Covenant privilege and not necessarily to eternal life. At any rate, Paul's point is that any righteousness based on the law is by definition, as Leviticus 18:5 makes clear (see also Galatians 3:12, where Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5 with similar application).

In contrast to this legal righteousness, then, is the "righteousness that is by faith." Paul uses a figure of speech putting words from Deuteronomy 9:4 and 30:10-14 on the lips of this righteousness. The general point he wants to make about the righteousness by faith is clear enough. Through Christ's being brought down to earth (his incarnation, Romans 10:6) and his being brought dead (Romans 10:7), God has made righteousness readily possible (Romans 10:8). One does not have to ascend into heaven or plumb the depths of the sea to discover it. All one needs to do to attain righteousness is to respond in faith to the gospel as it is preached.

Leonard Sweet, an American theologian, said that the most frightful thing anyone can say at my funeral is "Sweet meant well." He goes on to say, "That gets my vote for the most damning epitaph of all time." I repeat, all one needs to do to attain righteousness is to "respond" in faith to the gospel as it is preached. Not "meant to" but "respond!"

Question! How do you keep the Word in your mouth and in your heart?

The message concerning faith that comes to believers, both Jews and Gentiles, is the trustworthy message that Paul has been preaching. The end of verse 8 sets up the next several sentences.

Verse 9 says, "**If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**"

Paul links the confession of faith from one's "mouth" with the belief in one's "heart" and thus to the commitments of the whole person (compare Deuteronomy 6:5). To confess "Jesus is Lord" is a radical commitment. It was obviously so in the first century AD when the Roman emperors claimed to be sons of

their gods, and many gods were worshipped as sovereign. The confession of “Jesus is Lord” was almost certainly part of early Christian worship: it was definitely a statement used to indicate one’s ultimate allegiance (see 1 Corinthians 12:3; Philippians 2:11). Anyone who can sincerely make that statement (confession) with their mouth and heart will see a changed life over time.

To “believe” that God has “raised Jesus from the dead” also means to trust that God has overcome the power of death itself (see Revelation 1:18). Salvation involves both the present and the future. We can understand being “saved” as a shorthand for the entire relationship that the redeemed person enjoys with God. The effects begin in our Spirit-led lives now and will culminate in everlasting life in Heaven.

This 9th verse is sometimes interpreted as a description of the entry point into the Christian life. Yet, Paul’s vision goes beyond beginnings. Confession of Christ’s lordship occurs daily both in the face of opposition or hardship and in more peaceful times as well. It also involves witnesses (see 1 Timothy 6:12), making it a public commitment (Acts 19:18). The message of the Gospel connects deeply to real lives, and those who hear it must internalize it and reclaim it.

Question! What biblical examples come to mind of people who called on the Lord and were saved?

Verse 10 elaborates further verse 9, only now in reverse order, with the heart coming first and then the mouth. When the heart and the mouth align in acknowledging the saving work of Christ, it becomes possible to experience both righteousness and salvation. Heart belief leads to justification, confession with the mouth to salvation.

Verse 11 grounds verse 10 by showing from the Old Testament that putting one’s trust in Christ will bring vindication in the judgment. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 28:16 (also in Romans 9:33), which is part of a promise that God would rebuild Zion after its destruction. Paul may have read that text metaphorically—that promised “stone” laid in Zion became a reference to the Messiah (compare Acts 4:11), although Paul does not spell out this connection.

Now, the Bible often conceives of shame as a social condition, visible to all, rather than an inner, more private emotion (examples, Psalms 35:26; 132:18; Isaiah 42:17). However, Paul understands that trust in God is the opposite of public humiliation. At the final judgment, those who trust in Jesus for deliverance from sins “will never be put to shame” because our hope of salvation will be fully realized.

In verse 12 we see that the faith that leads to vindication in the judgment is open to “anyone.” Paul elaborates this in verse 12, returning to his central claim that the gospel opens the doors to salvation to all people on the same basis. As he does elsewhere in Romans, the “no difference” principle among people is to be applied, especially to the key divides created by the Old Testament between Jews and Gentiles (Romans 1:16; 2:9-11; 3:22-23). The confession “Jesus is Lord” unites both in the same faith and the same hope, for Jesus is “Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.”

Verse 13 quotes Joel 2:32 (see also Acts 2:16-21), which is part of a passage about one instance of God reviving Israel. Both Joel and Paul understand God as one who answers the sincere cries of people longing for help. Because Jesus is “Lord of all” (10:12), “everyone” may call on him.

A man named Coventry Patmore told how once as a boy of 11, he was reading a book when all of a sudden (he says), “It struck me what an exceedingly fine thing it would be if there really was a God.” In a sense, that is what some of us are needing still—something more than a vague acceptance of doctrine and beliefs—to be struck by the sudden shattering realization that these beliefs of ours are probably and everlastingly true. God lives, and God reigns. From everlasting to everlasting, He is God. And when God’s people cry to the Lord, God hears and responds. God is faithful.

III. Preaching Leads to Faith

Romans 10:14-17

How do people know to “call on” God? The answer becomes a sustaining explanation of the nature and purpose of Christian preaching. The act of proclaiming the gospel ultimately comes from the God who sends out proclaimers, not from their own concern or abilities. Paul always understood his own mission as following God’s leading (examples: Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:1). Here we see a logical progression: a preacher must be sent so that an audience can hear the gospel and come to faith.

The evidence Paul offers for God’s calling messengers to preach is a quotation from Isaiah 52:7. That text, in turn, is part of a long discussion of the “good news” to ancient Israel: God was ending the suffering of the Babylonian exile. The exiled people would soon return home and rebuild the ruined cities, especially Jerusalem. The people would experience a good life in their own land, complete with the healing of physical and social ills (see Isaiah 61:1-4).

An important characteristic of Christian preaching is the proclamation of peace between God and humanity. When one experiences reconciliation with the Lord, it becomes possible to be reconciled to other people as well. Christian preaching and teaching should, therefore, be filled with joy and hope because of the good things God wants to accomplish in us and through us.

Question! What books of the Bible most heavily informed your faith? Please explain.

There is a contrast between verses 16 and 17. Both draw on an idea from the Old Testament prophets regarding how their audience would react. Verse 16 emphasizes the negative side of unbelief, while verse 17 understands the power of “the message” to be so great that it leads people to trust “Christ.” Paul was confident that both Jews and Gentiles would learn to trust God once they understand the nature of the gospel.

Conclusion

The offer of salvation comes through the preaching of the Word as one of hope and expectation. God is “for” us and wishes to be “with” us. When we trust the reliability of that offer, we can enter into a life of joyful hope, which the Bible calls salvation. That life begins now and extends into eternity.

In Romans 10, Paul speaks of those who cry out to God, confess Jesus as Lord, and so receive salvation. The words must be sincerely uttered, but the key actor in the drama of salvation is God. Preaching connects closely to prayer as we seek to conform our desires to God’s desires. It must be full of hope, inviting listeners to trust a gracious God.

This readiness to hear comes from God’s passionate love for the creation. In truth, God created the world originally out of love, and he sustains the creation out of the same love. In an environment of love, a needy humanity crying out for help receives a willing ear.

Action Plan

1. When have you experienced zeal without knowledge?
2. How do you keep the Word in your mouth and in your heart?
3. What stands out most to you in this lesson?

Resources for this Lesson

1. “2023-2024 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, International Sunday School Lessons,” pages 329-336.
2. “The NIV New Application Commentary” by Douglas J. Moo, pages 328-333, 342-344.
3. “The Interpreter’s Bible, Acts / Romans, Volume 9,” pages 553-559.
4. “The Book of Romans the Smart Guide to the Bible Series,” by Gib Martin and Larry Richards, pages 145-152.

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).



June 2 Lesson: Glorious Riches

Summer Quarter 2024: Hope in the Lord

Unit 1: Experiencing Hope

By Dr. Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: Colossians 1:24—2:3

Key Text: *“I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”* (Colossians 2:2-3)

Lesson Aims

- To introduce the themes “Hope in the Lord” and “Experiencing Hope.”
- To become acquainted with the style and content of the Letter to the Colossians.
- To consider the viewpoint of Paul while he writes from his confinement and suffers afflictions.
- To examine Paul’s commission to make the word of God fully known.
- To ponder the connection between “word of God” and “mystery” and Christian conversion.
- To compare the experiences of Jews coming to Christ with Gentiles coming to Christ.
- To reflect on the experience of people coming to Christ and knowing these riches for the first time.
- To explore the warnings and teachings of wisdom so your appreciation of knowing Christ grows.
- To ponder how people are brought to Christ.

Introduction to the Summer Quarter Theme: Hope in the Lord

We are beginning a new quarter, and the theme for the quarter is “Hope in the Lord.” Over the course of thirteen lessons we will be exploring this theme. There is a great need for hope in our world today. I don’t think that can be stressed enough. People are desperate for hope.

At the same time, there are new counterfeit versions of hope coming out every day and circulating across social media, over the air waves, and in conversations. The danger is that the more counterfeit versions there are in circulation, the less people will be able to tell the difference between counterfeit hope and the real thing. Make no mistake, the hope that is most real is hope *in the Lord*. Hope in the Lord is the well into which we need to draw and draw deeply.

The theme for the June unit of lessons is “Experiencing Hope.” Over five lessons, we will lean into how hope in the Lord can be experienced. Experience is the best teacher. Only an experiential journey into the

meaning of hope can deliver what is needed for our parched souls. This experiential journey will not end after the five lessons. Hopefully, we will gain some tools so that this experiential journey continues for the rest of our lives in an ever-deepening way.

As you set out to learn more about “experiencing hope,” what do you long to gain? What would experiencing more hope look like in your situation?

Introduction to this Lesson from Colossians

The theme for this lesson from Colossians is “Glorious Riches.” As you can imagine, the riches we will be pondering have to do with the intangibles of faith and life. Sometimes our mind tries to tell us that only tangible riches are real, and the intangible riches are not real. This could not be further from the truth. The Bible tells us that it is the material riches that are fleeting. Material riches cannot deliver true joy and peace that lasts for eternity.

So, as we go through this lesson, keep your heart and mind open to ponder the intangible riches. Allow yourself to actually be convinced that there is something truly worth pursuing beyond what the world says we should pursue. Get ready to listen to the Apostle Paul putting it all on the line in his ministry. Prepare to consider that what is being revealed is that which the world has longed to hear, see, and experience.

The Epistle to the Colossians and the Epistle to the Ephesians share similarities in that they soar to the heights. We see the “mature” Paul at work. Paul’s content and the style that Paul uses present words and concepts that are sublime, elevated, and inspiring. Even the style of the original Greek stands out in the similarity between the two letters and makes them both stand out from among his other letters.

Read the following example where Paul soars early in the letter to the Colossians.

He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:13-20)

Notice that in these verses, we are presented with a thoroughly Christian world-view. We are being invited to inhabit this Christ-centered world of faith.

What stands out to you the most in the worldview described in the verses from Colossians 1:13-20 that are printed above?

Where Paul Was Coming From

It is good to ask where Paul was coming from when he wrote the words in this epistle. It is important to know that this letter is one of his letters that he wrote from prison.

²⁴ I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

In short, Paul was saying that the message he was giving them was more than worth the personal sacrifices he was making. The members of the congregation in Colossae would know a little bit about his sacrifices, because they knew that Paul was writing from prison. He had gotten into trouble for preaching about Christ. Imprisonment however did not keep Paul from writing letters to the churches like the church in Colossae. The church in Colossae was one of the churches on his heart and mind in his confinement. He could say that he was suffering for their sakes. That encouraged him greatly.

We need to ponder what Paul meant when he said that he was completing in his flesh what was lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the church. Usually, the New Testament goes to great lengths describing how Christ's death on the cross became a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice to atone for the sins of the whole world. Usually, the emphasis is on how nothing can be added to Christ's sacrifice, nor does anything need to be added to Christ's sacrifice to provide the means for our salvation.

We need to understand that Paul was not contradicting the notion that Christ's sacrifice provides the full, perfect, and sufficient means for our salvation. Paul meant something else entirely in his words in verse 24. Paul would agree that Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the church, provide the very foundation on which the church is founded. Christ's death is what gives life to the church.

The Church continues to be built from this foundation toward greater maturity in Christ. What Paul knew was how he and others were now making sacrifices to build up the church to grow toward greater maturity. It brought Paul comfort and hope to imagine his afflictions in confinement being added to Christ's afflictions in order to build up the church. In fact, he could rejoice in what he was going through, because he knew it was all for the sake of the church, including the church in Colossae.

Paul had been told at the beginning of his ministry that personal suffering was going to be a part of his calling. The story goes back to the account in the Book of Acts when Paul was walking on the road to Damascus. Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him and struck him blind. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" When Paul asked who the voice was, the reply was, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." (Acts 9:3-6)

What was Paul to do next? The Lord gave those special instructions to a man named Ananias. Ananias was justifiably afraid to come into contact with Paul because Paul had been persecuting Christians. The Lord told Ananias that Paul would be serving the Lord from then on. The Lord said, "*I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.*" (Acts 9:16) So when we say that Paul knew from the beginning that he would suffer afflictions for the sake of Christ, this is where it comes from. This was not Paul's punishment, so much as it was Paul's reminder of the role that sacrifice plays in the story of the gospel and the church. Paul knew that afflictions were a part of his call.

When in your life have you come to the realization that people were making sacrifices for you? How did that change your outlook or your behavior? How was meaning added to your life as a result?

Paul's Commission

The foreshadowing that Paul would suffer for the sake of Christ was only part of his commission. There was more to his story of calling.

²⁵ I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

In some sense, Paul's commission can be traced to his conversion story to which we just alluded. There is another story involving Paul and his mentor Barnabas at the church in Antioch where they had been serving. While the leaders of the church were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit gave the church the message, "*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul [Paul] for the work to which I have called them.*" We're told that the members of the church, after fasting and praying, "*laid their hands on them and sent them off.*" (Acts 13:2-3) This was Paul's commissioning that launched him into his first missionary journey and into a wider world of ministry. He would go on to participate in a second and third missionary journey, which brought him into contact with the church in Colossae. It is through this commission in Antioch that Paul became the minister of the church that he was to become.

The heart of the commission Paul received was "to make the word of God fully known." What does Paul mean by the "word of God"? Did it mean the Hebrew scriptures—what we call the Old Testament? The New Testament as we know it did not exist yet. Paul's letters, along with other writings produced by the Church, would eventually make their way into the New Testament. The answer to the question of what Paul meant by the word of God is provided in the next verse.

26 the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints.

The word of God is the "mystery" being revealed to the saints of the church. "Saints" is another word for the Christians who were members of the New Testament Church. The word of God for Paul was this mystery that lay hidden throughout the ages and generations within the Hebrew scriptures. It was there all the time in the message of the Hebrew scriptures, but its full significance had to be revealed through the birth, life, and ministry of Jesus, and ultimately in his death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. The unfolding of the Christian story, coupled together with the work of the Holy Spirit in believers, brings to light the full intent of God's work since the beginning.

For Paul, the revealing of this hidden mystery in the hearts of believers was responsible for the growth of the Church. Paul witnessed again and again the light switch being flipped on in the lives of people. Paul noticed more and more how people moved from not knowing to knowing. You could say he studied it. It gave him great joy and excitement. Since Paul was on the front lines, he was able to witness this and study this like no other.

Can you remember when the "aha" moment happened for you and the "mystery" was revealed as to what the Christian faith is all about? If it is hard to think of a moment, have you seen the light come on for someone else? How does it change things knowing that the Christian faith is not just learned but is instead a divine mystery that is revealed to us?

How People Are Brought to Christ

From what we learn from Paul's letters, he noticed that people came to a knowledge of Christ along two major paths depending on their starting point. The Jews who came to Christ came one way, and the Gentiles came a different way because of their very different starting points. Jews who came to Christ came to understand that Jesus continued the story of the Old Covenant and fulfilled it in the New Covenant. They could trace the story from Abraham, through Moses and the Exodus, and through David and the prophets. It was a story they knew.

Jewish Christians were committed monotheists from birth, already believing in the one true God, the Creator of the universe. You could say that they knew the God of Abraham, Jacob, and David personally. Their faith understanding was informed by the Hebrew scriptures, and the Psalms taught them how to pray and have a

personal relationship with God. Their faith was informed by the moral teachings of their faith, and they knew the folly of idols. In some ways, they had more “bread crumbs to follow” and fewer barriers for the mystery of Christ to be revealed in their hearts.

The Gentiles had a longer journey to travel in some ways. Their starting point was a polytheistic belief system. They connected to their “gods” through the worship of idols. Their gods were capricious and had to be appeased with sacrifices. Pagan rituals involving excess and sensuality led to a lifestyle that was harmful to human souls and family life. Their religion was also the official religion of the empire and therefore connected to all the systemic evils associated with the domination, oppression, and materialism of the Roman empire and pagan culture.

Knowing this background helps us understand the next verse:

²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

The majority of the members of the fledgling church in Colossae were Gentiles. Although they lacked the advantages that Jews had in knowing the Covenant story of God’s people, they were nevertheless drawn to Jesus. Paul marveled at the way that God chose to make known the mystery of the faith to the Gentiles. God moved in the hearts of the Gentiles despite the huge gaps in their knowledge and upbringing, and despite all of their baggage. God could overcome all that needed to be overcome in order for the mystery of the faith to be revealed to them and for the glorious riches of the faith to be experienced by them. The turn in their lives represented a 180 degree turn from the idolatrous culture in which they lived to a new life in Christ that differed radically from their former lives.

The glorious riches were the personal experiences of Christ living “in” them and “the hope of glory.” We don’t want to gloss over these words. Perhaps the greatest mystery a human can discover is the living Christ dwelling in him or her. This is what those who came to Christ were experiencing, whether they started as Jews or started as Gentiles.

In my pastoral ministry, I have had the awesome of privilege of sitting in living rooms and explaining the Christian faith. I have had conversations with people who had moved into the community, who were active in their faith, and needed to find their next church home. I have had conversations with other people who had lapsed in their faith and were coming back to a faith that they had once known and practiced. More needed to be said in their case because they were often in need of updating their faith. They were eager to update their faith.

What was most amazing to me, perhaps, were those who were coming to faith without any Christian upbringing. In some cases, if Christianity was acknowledged at all at home, it was canceled out by abuse and neglect. In some cases, these seekers had their own stories of brokenness to share. Yet, here they were wanting to talk to me about faith. God was moving in their hearts. God was drawing them to himself despite all the gaps in knowledge, all the baggage from their past, or wounds they had suffered. They wanted to know the basics of the faith. They wanted to know what it really meant, for instance, that Christ died on the cross for their sins. I had the privilege of explaining doctrines of the Christian faith in personal terms as they were all coming to life for them.

How would you describe your starting point in the faith, and how do you think it shaped your experience of coming to Christ? What connection do you make between this experience and the glorious riches Paul describes?

Appreciating the Glorious Riches Even More Over Time

Although our experience of coming to Christ may be something we compare to “glorious riches,” our appreciation of these riches is meant to grow over time. How does this growth in understanding happen?

²⁸ It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Christ is the one whom Paul and other leaders were proclaiming. They were also warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom. We readily understand *teaching* someone in all wisdom. What does it mean to *warn* everyone in wisdom. There was so much in the pagan culture of the Roman Empire that led down a path of self-destruction. You can imagine the people who were headed down this path and realizing how unmanageable their lives were becoming. They no doubt received wisdom as a warning and gratefully took this wisdom to heart. The wisdom of God revealed in Christ was literally “saving” their lives.

Mothers and fathers gratefully received these words of warning as means of exposing the dangers in their culture. They used this knowledge to protect their children. They took to heart these warnings and used this knowledge to make their homes a safe haven from the destructive tendencies in their culture.

The goal is to present everyone mature in Christ through warning, teaching, training, and learning. Paul loved to see the newly converted. Paul loved seeing the light come on in new believers. Paul realized early on that God had called to him to be on the frontier of the Christian movement so he could participate in the great harvest that was occurring in the lives of people whose lives were undergoing conversion, especially among the Gentiles.

In Romans 15:20-21, Paul wrote about this saying, “I make it my ambition to proclaim the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else’s foundation, but as it is written, *Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand.*”

Although Paul loved witnessing dramatic conversions, he was also greatly aware of how these converts were starting out as infants in the faith. He knew the importance of beginning to teach and train these new Christians right from the start. Constantly, he cast the vision of faith growing into maturity. The word for this is “sanctification” which is the process where we are being conformed more and more into the image of God’s Son through the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Paul saw the Holy Spirit equipping the Church and organizing it in order “*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*” He went on to say, “*We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.*” (Ephesians 4:12-16) In other words, both individuals and churches stand in need of greater spiritual maturity.

We may understand from the start the value of the glorious riches that we inherit when we come to Christ. But our appreciation of these riches can and should grow even more over time, because we are meant to grow in spiritual maturity. There is always more hope to experience in the Lord.

Can you point to a time when you began to learn that there was more for you as a believer? How did you begin heeding warnings and let your faith guide you in a path toward greater safety and wholeness? How

would you say your growth toward greater spiritual maturity is going? How might you discover even more of the glorious riches of knowing Christ?

How Paul Was Energized and How You Can Be Energized

Let's look for a moment at the Apostle Paul and the way he was engaged in his ministry. We may find clues for ourselves for living and growing in the faith.

²⁹ For this I toil and strive with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

Aren't you breathless sometimes when you think of the pace that the Apostle Paul kept? It is dizzying. We see him in the pages of the New Testament working on the front lines, bringing the gospel to new places and people, and planting new churches. Then we see him coming alongside these new Christians and new congregations to teach them, teach their pastors, build them up, and troubleshoot, because they had a lot of problems into which Paul needed to speak.

We rightly wonder where Paul got the energy. It was precisely for this work he was toiling and striving. He did not do this for the pay. In fact, Paul engaged in his trade of tent-making to help earn his way in his mission. Paul did not do it for any accolades. (Remember, Paul was in prison as he composed this letter to the church in Colossae.) Paul did all that he did because he was called to, and commissioned for, this ministry. The calling came from God, and his energy came from God. Paul felt God powerfully inspiring him in his inner being, and that gave him energy when he needed it.

¹ For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you and for those in Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face.

As Paul wrote to the church in Colossae, he also had in mind their sister cities, including Laodicea, located in the Lycus River valley in Asia Minor, which is in modern-day Turkey. Epaphras seems to be the one who planted these churches as an extension of Paul's missionary journeys. Many of those whom Paul was addressing in his letter had never seen Paul face to face. Now, his confinement was keeping him from being there in person. Through his letter, Paul wanted them to know how greatly he was striving for them. Paul did not want them to know this in order to receive praise. He wanted them to know the love behind the sacrifices that he and others were making on their behalf so they could experience the glorious riches of life in Christ.

There is a retreat that I worked with for a number of years earlier in my ministry. At this retreat, you have a few dozen retreat participants. Throughout the three days of the retreat, these participants are constantly being served snacks and great food. They are being entertained. Fifteen different speakers, laity and clergy, are teaching and giving their witness. A community of people make a surprise appearance at a couple of worship events to support the participants. Some of these people they may know, but some are strangers who are interested in them. They receive letters from people who have supported them in their faith journey.

At the end of the retreat, all the people who have been working behind the scenes during their experience come out and line the walls of the room. These include the cooks, the servers, the ones who prepared for the worship services, cleaned their lodgings, made their beds, and cleaned their sinks and toilets. They realize at this point that an army has been quietly serving them. These servants outnumber the participants perhaps three-to-one. Then, these servants sing the "Servant Song," written by Richard Gillard.

Will you let me be your servant, | Let me be as Christ to you; | Pray that I may have the grace to | Let you be my servant, too.

We are pilgrims on a journey, | We are travelers on the road; | We are here to help each other | Walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you | In the night-time of your fear; | I will hold my hand out to you, | Speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping; | When you laugh I'll laugh with you. | I will share your joy and sorrow | 'Til we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven | We shall find such harmony, | Born of all we've known together | Of Christ's love and agony.

Will you let me be your servant, | Let me be as Christ to you; | Pray that I may have the grace to | Let you be my servant, too.

One of the points of the song is to realize the grace that is not only needed to serve, but also the grace needed to let others serve us. This is how we know that we are being “loved on” by the Body of Christ. When we know that others are making sacrifices, so that we can grow in Christ and his love, we receive this ministry all the more for the rich gift it is.

² I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ himself, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

This is the key text of our lesson. Paul wanted to encourage people who had never met him face to face. Through his letter, he wanted them to have an awareness of a larger community of witnesses supporting them in their faith so that they would be united in love. He wanted them to have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery. He wanted them to know that these do indeed amount to great riches. At the heart of this mystery is Christ himself. In Christ, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Paul wanted them to treasure God’s wisdom and the knowledge of their hope in the Lord.

Another word for the verb “treasure,” in this context, is “appreciate.” To appreciate that others are making sacrifices on our behalf goes beyond being thankful or grateful. Appreciating their service and their ministry means valuing what they are serving up to us. It means savoring and making the most of the knowledge and understanding they are sharing with us. It means that we, who are the recipients of ministry, understand the intent of the ones offering ministry to us. If the intention of the ones offering ministry to us is so that we will grow in our faith and hope, then we will respond by doing all we can to make it our *own* purpose to grow to spiritual maturity. In the end, it is not just about the knowledge and wisdom they are offering, it is knowing Christ. Jesus Christ is, himself, the greatest treasure of all. It is through our relationship with Christ that we experience hope.

What appreciation do you feel for those who make sacrifices so you can grow in your faith? Do they help you appreciate the glorious riches of knowing Christ? How does their energy in offering ministry to you compare with your energy in using what you receive to grow in your faith and experience of hope?

Prayer

Gracious God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You bestow on us the riches of understanding, wisdom, warning, faith, and hope. Help us to appreciate the value of these riches and use them, so that the riches we experience increase in value to us and we find our lives being transformed and our hope growing, through Christ our Lord, who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen.

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



The Eternal Mission

What's Old Is New Again
By Anne Packard

One of the best times of the year at the Arthur J. Moore Methodist Museum is summer because 500 energetic campers descend on Epworth By The Sea for Camp Connect. These kids are hot, loud and usually a little sticky but they bring joy and laughter to our world and remind us that the best parts of life are eternal, like summertime and childhood. This year, the Museum staff has designed a program that will focus on circuit riders, including those specific to the South Georgia Conference. Campers will learn about the hardships these men faced and the successes that have lasted for over one hundred years. The program will end with a rousing game of Life: Circuit Rider Edition highlighting the uncertainties, both good and bad, these devoted Methodists handled daily.

Some of the challenges we've dreamed up for our Circuit Rider game of Life include bad weather, issues with horses, and church member disagreements. We imagine these might be some of the issues actual riders faced and want to remind the campers that despite our advancements in technology, we Methodists still face uncertainties. No matter what arises while the game is played, the goal remains the same: finish the circuit and preach to all six churches. Some of the kids will have a harder time with this than others through no fault of their own, and some of the campers will finish sooner than others. However, we will continue to play the game until everyone has completed the circuit and preached to all who gathered.

Maybe this is our eternal mission as Methodists. The game isn't finished until we have preached to everyone within our midst. Some days are easier while other days take all of our time, energy, and wisdom. Some people preach faster while others take more time. Some enjoy more immediate success while others leave breadcrumbs to be found in the future. No matter what lays in our path though, we are not done until we have finished our circuit. Like summertime and childhood, this act of reaching out to people for God is eternal.

The last few weeks have brought great changes to the Methodist movement. For some church members these changes may be seen as positive while others may view them differently. The change is not eternal, though. The mission is. No matter what lies in our path, we are to keep preaching until the end. Make a decision today to be more like John Wesley, Francis Asbury, and all of the Methodist circuit riders throughout time. Continue to ride your circuit doing all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.

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.



Conference Updates & Happenings

Small Church, Big Impact is Coming Your Way!

Small churches can think BIG! Let’s come together at one of these locations around the conference for a time of learning, leading, and dreaming. We will be at 6 locations around the conference. Join us for the one that works best for you! [Details and registration can be found here.](#)

- [June 15- Hagan UMC- Claxton, NE District](#)
- [June 22- Fair Haven- Millen, NE District](#)
- [July 6- New Hope- Brunswick, Coastal District](#)
- [August 3- Hand Memorial UMC-Pelham, SW District](#)
- [August 10- Marshallville UMC, Marshallville, NW District](#)
- [August 31- Piney Mount UMC, Tennille, NC District](#)

Dinner Church @ Annual Conference

Did you miss attending one of our Dinner Church on the Road experiences last month? Are you interested in seeing how Dinner Church might expand the impact of your church and help you move forward with our shared mission of making disciples? You have another chance to find out more! Join us for a Dinner Church at Lunch! Tuesday, June 4 at Annual Conference. Cost: \$15 per person. [Register here.](#)

Summer Camp 2024: Registration is now open for Camp Connect! There is 1 week of senior high camp, 2 weeks of junior high camp, and 2 weeks of elementary camp. [Find out more information and sign up today!](#)

Annual Conference – June 2-4: The 2024 Annual Conference Session is set for June 2-4 in Tifton. [See all the details here.](#)

Lay Servant Ministry: [Lay Servant Ministries & Certified Lay Ministry dates & registration](#)

Do you know a lay person who is ready to take their leadership to the next level? Invite them to join us for one of our Certified Lay Ministry courses coming up. Our Summer Immersion is coming up at Pittman Park in Statesboro June 24-28. We also have a fall course that meets on Saturdays if that would be better for your schedule. Certified Lay Ministry sets our laity up for success as they deepen their interaction with and leadership within the local church. [Find all the details on Certified Lay Ministry here.](#)

- Online Basic Lay Servant Ministries: August 13, 15, 20, 22
- Online Advanced Lay Servant Ministries: Sept 10, 12, 17, 19

Georgia Pastors’ School: Georgia Pastors’ School provides inspiration, education, fellowship, fun and relaxation for North and South Georgia clergy and their families. This year's retreat is set for July 15-18, 2024, at Epworth By The Sea, St. Simons Island, Georgia. 2024 speakers include Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz, Rev. Dr. Ted Goshorn, and Rev. Dr. Teresa Fry Brown. Both active and retired United Methodist clergy and their families are invited to experience continuing education and personal renewal at Georgia Pastors' School in July. [Learn more](#)

2024 Mission u: The South Georgia Conference United Methodist Women will host their annual Mission July 19-21, 2024, at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. Mission u is a transformative experience designed to recharge and refocus your faith. Offering study on biblically grounded curricula, Mission u motivates, informs, and enriches our commitment to create a more just and equitable world, locally and globally. Classes are available for adults, youth, and children. [Click here to learn more.](#)

[View Full Conference Calendar](#)



Retired Clergy Birthdays – May 2024

5/01 – Jacque Asbel: 4116 Amberley Trail; Valdosta, GA 31602
5/01 – John Beck: 1210 Tribble Rd.; Ft. Valley, GA 31030
5/01 - Rick Mitchell: 325 Providence Trace,; Statesboro, GA 30461
5/03 – Wayne Rogers: 126 Baynard St.; Pooler, GA 31322
5/06 – Eddie Morrison: 1610 Kings Way; Savannah, GA 31406
5/12 – Reese Nelson: 2804 Willow Wood Circle; Valdosta, GA 31602
5/13 – Brenda Johnson: P.O. Box 1561,; Savannah, GA 31402
5/14 – Kenneth Watkins: 170 Sanford St.; Wadley, GA 30477
5/15 – Dan Smith: 5462 Whittlesey Blvd, Apt 517.; Columbus, GA 31909
5/19 – Ronnie Howell: 32 Vanceville Co. Line Rd.; Tifton, GA 31794
5/20 – Franklin Pierce: 602 Ft. King George Dr.; Darien, GA 31305
5/22 – Steve Meguiar: 587 Hunter Road,; Baxley, GA 31513
5/23 – Jeri Pruette: 2188 Peacock Rd.; Quitman, GA 31643
5/24 – Columbus Burns: 201 East 63rd St.; Savannah, GA 31405
5/24 – Robert Beckum: 5031 Spyglass Court; Columbus, GA 31909
5/27 – Cile Mitchell: 130 Hitchiti Ridge Rd.; Juliette, GA 31046
5/28 – Richard Newton: 1823 Kaufman Circle; Lady Lake, FL 32159
5/29 – Marsha Emery: 3855 Dennis Creek Road; Talbotton, GA 31827
5/30 – Luanne Kemper: 1412 Sapling Dr.; Orange Park, FL 32073
5/31 – Mike Brown: 4444 GA Hwy 15,; Vidalia, GA 30474

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Obituary: Dr. Ellison Leroy Whitt, Sr.

Dr. Ellison Leroy Whitt, Sr., 91, of Ellaville, GA, passed away on Friday, May 10, 2024, at Phoebe-Sumter Medical Center. Funeral services were held at 2:00PM on Monday, May 13, 2024, at First Baptist Church in Americus, GA, with Rev. Keith Parks and Rev. Rusty Mauldin officiating. Burial followed the service at Tazewell Cemetery in Marion County, GA. Serving as pallbearers were Nathan Yoder, Jr., Andrew Yoder, James Whitt, Trenton Yoder, Leroy Whitt, and Ferrell Owen, Jr. Honorary pallbearers were John Griggs, Tyler Yoder, Ellison Whitt, Eric Yoder, Daniel Ward, Josh Whitt, and Joseph Kelley Owen.

Dr. Whitt was born March 6, 1933, in Seneca, SC, to Ellison Ernest and Mary Madison Whitt but grew up in Macon, GA. After high school, he went on to obtain a PhD. in Vocational Education Administration from Florida State University and worked as the Assistant Director of South Georgia Technical College for many years and was also a licensed electrician by trade. A member of First Baptist Church in Americus, Dr. Whitt was a Deacon and a Sunday School teacher. He was a Methodist minister for over 20 years, serving in Tazewell, DeSoto, and Chauncey. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his first wife, Peggy Joyce Whitt.

He is survived by his wife, Betty Whitt of Ellaville, GA; nine children, Peggy Gale Owen (Ferrell, Sr.) of Ellaville, GA, Peter Michael Whitt (Martha Anne) of Montezuma, GA, Lisa Yoder (Harley) of Montezuma, GA, Timothy Whitt (Kim) of Ellaville, GA, Marialice Yoder (Nathan, Sr.) of Montezuma, GA, Lee Whitt (Miriam) of Montezuma, GA, Julie Ward (Michael) of Lilburn, GA, Prudence Yoder (Floyd) of Montezuma, GA, Becky Whitt of Blakely, GA; four step-children, Patti Reid (Jim) of Americus, GA, Ann Beaver (John) of Americus, GA, Gary Sanders (Kim) of Montrose, GA, and Greg Sanders (Tory) of Cary, NC; 50

grandchildren and 79 great-grandchildren. His caregivers Ernestine Johnson and Monique Pickett also survive.



Scripture Readings – May 21 edition

May 26

Trinity Sunday, Year B

- Isaiah 6:1-8
- Psalm 29
- Romans 8:12-17
- John 3:1-17

June 2

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

- 1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)
- Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18
- 2 Corinthians 4:5-12
- Mark 2:23-3:6

June 9

Third Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

- 1 Samuel 8:4-20; 11:14-15
- Psalm 138
- 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1
- Mark 3:20-35