

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – MARCH 20 EDITION

Reynolds Chapel UMC member shares God's love through bicycle ministry

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

The joy on a father's face, a simple promise, and a commitment to God set Jim Anderson on a path toward sobriety and launched a bicycle ministry that is now in its ninth year.

When cleaning out their garage one afternoon Anderson and his wife, Debbie, found a bike their grandson had outgrown. Not wanting to sell it, they decided to give it to a child who might not otherwise have a bike. Anderson took it to the Seminole County Division of Family and Children Services and asked that they give it to a family the following Christmas.

"It ended up going to a 7-year-old boy whose father was just overwhelmed with the gift," Anderson said. "The father broke down in tears when the folks at DFCS gave it to him to give to his son. That's what touched me the most, the father's reaction."

That one small act of giving resonated so deeply with the Andersons that they knew they had to do more.

"I was an alcoholic and spent a lot of money on alcohol," said Anderson, a member of Reynolds Chapel United Methodist Church in Donalsonville. "I made a vow to God and told him that I would buy one bicycle a month and at the end of the year I'd have 12 bicycles for Christmas to give away."

He promised to use the money he once spent on alcohol to purchase one bicycle each month and leave the rest to God. Pedals of Blessing bicycle ministry was launched, and in December 2010 Anderson gave 23 bicycles to children via the Seminole County Division of Family and Children Services. The following year Pedals of Blessing gave 32 bicycles. In 2012, 97 bikes were given to children via the ministry. Donations of new and like-new bicycles poured into the ministry from community members and members of the Reynolds Chapel UMC congregation.

"This is all God's work. I've done very, very little," Anderson said. "All I did was commit to 12 bicycles. God brought people to me."

The ministry has expanded beyond Donalsonville and Seminole County to neighboring communities. In 2014 Pedals of Blessings began partnering with the Quincy, Fla. police department to assist with their annual Bicycle Rodeo and gifted eight bikes to the event. Anderson also joined first responders and volunteers in demonstrating bicycle maintenance and safety.

Pedals of Blessing primarily gifts bicycles at Christmas, through its partnerships with the Salvation Army, local radio stations, "Santa's Helpers" gift giveaways, and Friendship United Methodist Church, but Anderson also donates well-used bikes and bicycle parts to a Columbus-area ministry that is able to refurbish bicycles before donating them.

Rev. Tammy Fincannon, pastor at Reynolds Chapel UMC, is proud of Anderson and the Reynolds Chapel UMC congregation and the way they've loved and served the community.

"It's amazing how small a church we are and how much they do," she said.

Anderson said that he has received much more from Pedals of Blessing than he has given.

"It has been such a blessing. God has amazed me with his ability. He has shown me in so many ways that he is an awesome God," Anderson said. "He has shown me and taught me that the gift of giving is the greatest gift there is."

After-school program fosters servant leadership in teenage boys

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

Andre Greene wants to be a lawyer. And a doctor.

The 13-year-old already has plans to finish high school early and start college before his peers.

His big dreams are being nurtured at the Robert Lamar Anderson Academy of Excellence, an after-school program serving at-risk minority students at Columbus' Baker Middle School.

Begun in October, the RLA Academy provides an art and music-based curriculum that includes leadership training, fine and performing arts training, individualized academic support, male mentoring, counseling, and ongoing exposure to cultural activities.

"We learn a lot of stuff like chess, piano, and drums," said Greene, an eighth-grade student at Baker Middle School who says the group has bonded so well they're like a brotherhood. "It helps us a lot in our real-life skills and we're doing stuff we never knew we could do."

Exposure to experiences the young men may not otherwise have is part of the Academy's vision, said Dr. Shae Anderson, the Academy's executive director.

The program has four core values under which all their activities fall: fine arts, mentoring, civic responsibility, and servant leadership. Anderson saw the importance these values played in her father's life and wanted to build a program that helped develop them in Columbus' young men.

"My father is a great supporter of the arts and we want these boys to realize they can be good citizens and give back to their communities," she said.

The RLA Academy meets Monday through Thursday afternoon from 4 p.m. until 7:30 p.m. The young men receive two hours of chess instruction each week; drama coaching; and percussion, piano, and voice lessons. They also study music production and have time to play games, exercise, and study. Guest speakers come in once or twice a week to share their expertise or

teach a skill. A snack and meal are provided each afternoon, and the teenagers have begun to prepare, serve, and clean.

“It’s been amazing to watch the young men step up to pray, to lead, to prepare meals, and assume responsibility,” Anderson said. “The time after school is where trouble and problems happen, and this gives them something to do ... and gives them skills they hopefully will be able to use for the rest of their lives.”

The Robert Lamar Anderson Academy of Excellence is named for Anderson’s father, a prominent Columbus citizen and longtime member of South Columbus United Methodist Church. He also serves as lay leader of the Northwest District of the South Georgia Conference.

A former Muscogee County School Board member, Robert Anderson is a Spencer High School graduate who earned a bachelor’s degree from Fort Valley State University and a master’s in education from Georgia State University. He taught high school science for a year and a half before working in the banking industry for nearly 40 years. Passionate about education and service, he substitute teaches in retirement and works with the students in the RLA Academy.

He laughs, though, when asked about having a namesake. Serving others is a way he lives his faith and is part of his daily life.

“If you come into this world and you don’t do something for someone else, something to help them along the way, then your living might have been in vain,” he said.

While still in its infancy, Academy leaders have high hopes for the program and dream that one day it will grow to become an independent school. For now, though, they plan to continue to be part of the students’ lives throughout high school, supporting them and positively impacting their lives.

“I want the Academy to help these young men know that there are alternatives to the life they see every day,” Robert Anderson said. “I know they’re young, but I hope we are planting some good seeds on some fertile ground.”

The pilot program has about 20 young men participating. School leaders will nominate a new group of eighth-grade young men for next year’s program, which will begin in August.

“They’re realizing things they never knew they could do and learning things that are completely new to them,” Robert Anderson said. “What they’re getting now they’ll never get anywhere else. One thing’s for sure – they will never forget this experience!”

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Commission on a Way Forward to meet March 19-22 to prepare final report

The 32-member Commission on a Way Forward will meet in Los Angeles on March 19-22 to prepare a final report to be submitted to the Council of the Bishops for consideration by the bishops at their April/May meeting.

“The Commission is focused on suggesting a way forward that pays attention to our public mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, especially with those who are not yet a part of our churches,” said Bishop Ken Carter, resident bishop of the Florida Area. “We are also focused on contextuality in a global church, and our continuing call to learn from each other and listen to each other.”

Bishop Carter, who is the incoming president of the Council of Bishops, is one of the three moderators of the Commission, together with Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball of West Virginia Area and retired Bishop David Yemba from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In preparing for the final report, the Commission will continue to work with traditional, contextual and progressive values drafted in the sketches of models that were presented to the Council of Bishops at their November and February meetings.

[In the report given to the Council at the February meeting](#), the Commission shared with the bishops two sketches that carry forward many of the values and principles of the three sketches presented to the bishops at [the November meeting](#).

The bishops offered feedback but did not vote on the revised sketches, instead asking the Commission to continue working on a final report to be presented at the April/May meeting. At that meeting, the bishops, in collaboration with the collective work of the Commission, will decide on a report to be presented to the Special Session of the General Conference called for February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri.

Campers build a strong faith foundation

Camp Connect, the camping ministry of the South Georgia Conference, gives children and youth the opportunity to spend a week away from normal everyday life in the beauty of God’s creation with people who seek to share Christ in the everyday.

With a “Blueprints” theme this summer, a week at Camp Connect will teach campers what God’s design for their life looks like. Diving into scripture and sharing life stories will show them they are created in God’s image and created for a purpose.

“My prayer, as each camper registration comes through, is that everyone will have the opportunity to encounter Christ in a powerful, life-changing way during their week at camp,” said Suzanne Akins, Camp Director. “There is something so rare and unique about shutting down technology, looking eye to eye with people, sharing meals, laughing, playing, and worshipping together day after day, night after night.”

Five camps are scheduled for the summer; one week for high school students; two weeks for middle school students and two weeks for elementary students. Held at Epworth By The Sea on

St. Simons Island, the week-long camps run from June 11 through July 20. Rising fourth grade students through seniors in high school will grow in their faith through Camp Connect camps.

Each morning at camp begins with a Morning Show, an interactive high-energy gathering with music, skits, and announcements for the day. From there, each team's day is filled with swimming, marsh walks, trips to the beach, fishing, Bible studies, art, and indoor/outdoor games. Each evening is a camp-wide activity bringing out the best of competitions. Camp closes each night with a worship service of meaningful skits, powerful music, testimonies and relevant speakers.

College students who are committed to serving Christ through working with children and youth during the summer are the full-time camp counselors. Each staff member has been interviewed by the Camp Ministry Team, passed a background check, attended 10 days of training, and is supervised by Camp Director Suzanne Akins.

For more information, visit www.campconnectumc.org or call [\(912\) 638-8626](tel:9126388626).

Attend #generations seminar to learn how to reach all ages

The Southwest District of the South Georgia Conference is partnering with Next Step Ministry to offer a seminar focused on reaching all generations for Christ. This two-day seminar, set for April 26-28 at Veteran's Memorial State Park, is designed for clergy and laity. For more information, visit www.swdistrictumc.org. The early bird rate of \$219 ends soon, so register today. Contact the Southwest District office with questions: 229-273-3119 or swdistrict@sgaumc.com.

SBC21 hosts second annual leadership conference

Submitted by Rev. Earnestine Campbell

Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century (SBC21), a leadership and church development partnership between the National SBC21 and the South Georgia Conference, celebrated its second annual Leadership and Development Conference Saturday, March 10 at Grace Corner United Methodist Church in Macon.

The conference focused on several leadership laboratories facilitated by SBC21 national coaches.

The Christian Education laboratory was facilitated by Rev. Michele Morton, who was informative in sharing the topic, "Small Groups Can Meet Anywhere." Rev. Morton outlined the need to increase Christian fellowship opportunities to meet new people in new places and expand education beyond traditional methods.

Rev. Dr. Ron Bell addressed issues of outreach and was insightful on the culture and climate of the country along with its impact on the local church. Dr. Bell challenged participants on the new

role of leadership, discovering and developing ministries, offering life-skills training, and organizing and planning ways to go where the people are for mission and ministry.

Worship Laboratory was the subject matter for Rev. Ronda Kingwood. Topics included reaching all ages and all walks of life, fostering unity within congregation, building music ministry, planning teams, and spaces for worship.

Finally, the keynote speaker, Dr. James E. Salley, gave a dynamic and holistic stewardship message, “Bone Marrow Giving,” based on Mark 12:41-44.

Two of the SBC21 partnered churches each received \$1,000 scholarships to support their goals of mission and ministry. We continue to find ways to offer leadership development along with strategic planning for mission and vision in local congregations.

Thanks to Grace Corner UMC, Rev. Antonie Walker, and the entire Grace Corner UMC team for hosting and outstanding hospitality.

SBC21 is a collaborative program through Discipleship Ministries.

Rev. Earnestine Campbell serves as an associate director for Connectional Ministries and the staff liaison for the Advocacy Ministry.

Keep My Statutes and Ordinances

Sunday school lesson for the week of March 25, 2018

By Dr. Hal Brady

Spring Quarter: Acknowledging God

Unit 1: Follow in My Ways

Lesson Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:12-22

Lesson Aims

1. Summarize the promises of both blessing and discipline that the Lord spoke to Solomon.
2. Think how these promises serve to both encourage and warn Christians today.

The previous two lessons were about the dedication ceremony of the newly completed temple in Jerusalem. Today’s lesson follows with a solemn warning from God to Solomon that disobedience would result in disaster to that structure. How could something like that possibly happen? Scholars remind us that a structure dedicated to God meant nothing if the people themselves were not dedicated to being God’s people. And, without doubt, that is no less true in our time.

We are told in 2 Chronicles 7:11, “Solomon had finished the temple of the Lord and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the Lord and in his own palace.” For sure, Solomon’s achievements were quite impressive and the people he ruled over were “joyful and glad.”

With his achievements, perhaps now King Solomon was tempted to rest on his laurels. However, God had much more in mind for Solomon and the Israelites than the mere construction of a building. God wanted what he has always wanted from his people and leaders: “obedience.” A magnificent building or anything else could not substitute for that.

Additionally, scholars state that as today’s text opens, the year would have been sometime after 950 BC. And there is parallel content to today’s text found in 1 Kings 9:1-9.

So in this lesson before us, we are looking at the promises of both blessing and discipline that the Lord spoke to Solomon.

Promised Blessings (2 Chronicles 7:12-18)

God says, “I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices” (7:12). Note that this is the second time the Lord has appeared to Solomon at night. It is thought that perhaps God does this deliberately to call Solomon’s mind back to the first time when the Lord said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you” (1:7). And, in response, Solomon had requested “wisdom and knowledge” for governing (1:10). To say the least, God was very pleased with Solomon’s response and promised him that and much more as well (1:11,12).

God regards it important to affirm that he has heard Solomon’s prayer. Even so, the first decision that God says he has made was not in Solomon’s prayer requests: that is, to choose “this place” (the temple) “as a temple for sacrifices.” As we recall, Solomon indeed sacrificed countless animals during the dedication ceremony and made numerous requests in his prayer of dedication (see 6:12-42). But for the temple to be known as a temple for sacrifices was not explicitly one of those requests. God’s declaration brings to mind Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 12:5,6 regarding a chosen place of sacrifice. Now, according to scholars, some five centuries later God is announcing that such a chosen site exists, and it is Solomon’s temple.

So what about our place of sacrifice? As we know, most religions have their holy places. Scholars inform us that for Hindus, it’s the Ganges River in India. Japan’s Mount Fuji is sacred to the Shinto and Buddhist religions. Muslims consider the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, a holy rite. And the Jews think of Jerusalem as their holy city since it’s the place where Solomon dedicated the first temple to God.

But what about Christians? We are informed that within the wider scope of the Christian faith there is no consensus. Some think of Jerusalem as a special place “more holy” than others. Others focus on Rome and the Vatican. Still others think of the church building where they worship each Sunday as a place in which God is especially near. And, of course, the room where Christians worship is often referred to as the “sanctuary.”

However, as Christians, we need to keep in mind that the New Testament affirms that God doesn't live in temples made with human hands (Acts 7:48, 49, quoting Isaiah 66:1,2). Therefore, Christians are themselves God's temple, individually and collectively as the body of Christ – the church. His Spirit lives in us (I Corinthians 3:16,17;6:19). Scholars state that it's even fair to say that the “temple for sacrifices” of which Solomon was told has transferred in concept to Christians personally. So, in reading Romans 12:1 in this regard, the question is, how will we apply it? A brief class discussion is in order.

Continuing on, God says in verse 13, “When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people.” This language of the three negative situations are all reflected in the wording of Solomon's dedicatory prayer (2 Chronicles 6:26-28). And Solomon has noted the cause of God's needing to take such actions as “sin” (6:26). Tracing it further back, we find these outcomes of famine and plague mentioned within the curses pronounced by Moses when he warned the Israelites of what would happen if they turned away from God (Deuteronomy 11:17;28:21,38).

It is not surprising that the key verse of today's lesson is verse 14, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive sin and will heal their land.” Scholars note that the conditional “if” statement here introduces reasons why the deadly conditions of verse 13 need not be permanent. With God there is and will be hope!

God's disciplinary actions must be recognized as such by his people, and they must respond to it in the way God directs in this verse before us. God sets out here the four steps of repentance.

First, the wayward people are to humble themselves. Humility acknowledges one's need for God and dependence on him (2 Chronicles 12:6).

Second, is to pray. As this scripture verse makes clear, prayer is a must when turning away from sin. We see this both in David: prayer of earnest repentance in Psalm 51 and in the simple prayer of the tax collector in the parable: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

Third, to seek the Lord's face implies a desire for the closest kind of relationship. Jeremiah's promise to wayward people is the following: “When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13).

And fourth, scholars remind us that it will do no good to take the first three steps of repentance without taking the fourth: “sinners must turn from their wicked ways.” Repentance in the biblical sense is more than simply a change of mind or the feeling of regret or remorse. It’s a decisive turning away from sin and back to God. In driving terms, it’s a U-turn! Words of contrition must be followed by actions that match.

The second part of verse 14 is full of hope. God says, “...then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” God’s response to such determination on the part of the people is total as well. Forgiveness of sin will go hand in hand with healing of the land. Of course, this suggests a reversal of whatever conditions have been part of God’s disciplinary action. As scholars point out, if rain has been withheld, it will now fall freely. The effects of any locust plague or any pestilence will be replaced by God’s blessings.

In his dedicatory prayer, Solomon had asked God to keep his eyes open and his ears attentive to the prayers offered in the temple. God now indicates that he intends to do just that.

Verse 16 points out the fullness of God’s identification with the temple. The fact that God has consecrated this temple suggests its being set apart for a divine purpose. And although God states that his Name, eyes and heart will be there forever and always, the promise is not unconditional, as will be made clear.

As we approach verse 17 and 18, we see that God’s message transitions from a focus on the temple and people to Solomon himself. The message begins with another conditional “if-statement” that focuses on behavior. And that behavior is based on David’s walk as an example for Solomon to follow.

The evidence of a right walk with God will be seen in obedience to God’s “decrees and laws.” Without doubt, Solomon’s responsibility before God is not fulfilled simply because the temple is complete.

Now, to walk as David did does not imply perfection; we are aware of his sin with Bathsheba and his deep remorse. But the overall direction of his life was pleasing to God, who calls him “a man after my own heart” (Acts 13:22).

In verse 17, we would expect the “if-statement” to be followed by a “then statement” and it is. The promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7:13,16 can also be Solomon’s as well.

Promised Discipline (2 Chronicles 7:19-22)

We begin to view the discipline of the Lord toward the people and the temple in three verses before us. That discipline against the people is seen in verses 19 and 20a.

Scholars inform us that the pronouns “you” in verse 19 are plural in the Hebrew text and the warning that follows there apply to the “my people” of 2 Chronicles 7:13,14. These warnings also apply to Solomon as the leader of God’s people. He is responsible to set the example of observing the Lord’s “decrees and commands.”

More specifically, we are told that the primary warning given in this segment of the text concerns idolatry – the decision to go off to serve other gods and worship them. As we know, this violates the very first of the Ten Commandments. And the prohibition against other gods is first because it is foundational to keeping the other nine.

Needless to say, the consequence of forsaking God and following other gods will be disastrous. If God’s people reverse their loyalty to him and turn from him, then he will reverse his loyalty to them and turn from them.

And, of course, this eventually happened with Israel (the northern kingdom), falling to the Assyrians, and later Judah (the southern kingdom) being conquered by the Babylonians.

Next, we view God’s discipline against the Temple in verses 20b-22. Disaster will also come upon the temple, Solomon’s temple. Instead of God’s eyes being on the temple (2 Chronicles 7:16), he promises to reject it. Scholars point out that this passage clearly shows (as does the entirety of Scripture), the two sides of God’s promises. For sure, God will bless those who turn to him in sincere repentance (as described in 7:14); but those who turn from him and reject his commandments will experience his judgment.

Once the temple has been rejected by God, it will become a “byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.” In this situation, instead of being treated with reverence as a sacred place, it will be viewed with contempt.

Now, this temple in Jerusalem is intended to be a place where God’s people can joyfully anticipate gathering for worship. But instead of being awestruck at the sight of the renowned temple, passers-by will be stunned to see it lying in ruins. The question will be raised, “Why has this happened?” The reference to the people’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt (v.22) is extremely important; it suggests that the Israelites have forgotten their history, their roots. They will have forgotten that no other people have a history like theirs because no other people have a God who can do the wonders that only he is capable of. The judgment of God comes upon the Israelites because they have been worshipping and serving some other gods instead of the God who delivered them from bondage and established his covenant with them. They will have no one but themselves to blame for their sad state.

Now, the words of 2 Chronicles 7:14 include a very special promise from God to Solomon following the completion and dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. The verse reads, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their

land.” While it’s true that the words of this verse are addressed specifically to Old Testament Israel, it is not wrong to apply the principle and promise of the verse to any other nation in history. One of the foundational teachings of scripture is that God is willing to forgive any individuals or nation turning to him in true repentance. So, as scholars affirm, the really crucial thing here is not trying to focus too closely on “my people” but in bringing as many individuals as possible to the place where they can address the Lord as “my God.” And that place is the forgiveness available in and through Jesus Christ.

Action Plan

1. Have the class discuss the question, “How should evidence of genuine repentance manifest itself in the twenty-first century?”
2. Do the requirements for walking before God differ from person to person? Why, or why not?
3. In the light of this lesson on “Keeping My Statute and Ordinances,” where do you see the United States today?

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).

He Has Risen

Sunday school lesson for the week of April 1, 2018

By Dr. Hal Brady

Spring Quarter: Acknowledging God

Unit 2: All Glory and Honor

Lesson Scripture: Luke 24:1-12, 30-35

Lesson Aims

1. Restate the mystery of Jesus’ missing body and the resolution of that mystery.
2. Explain why the women’s preparation was unnecessary.
3. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving that God keeps his promises.

On this joyful Easter Sunday, we are full of hope! In many worship services today, that hope will be expressed by a worship leader who declares, “He is risen,” to which the congregation responds, “He is risen indeed.”

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. It is clear that Jesus was crucified and buried on Preparation Day, which is the day before the Sabbath (Luke 23:54). The writer of Luke further indicates that the women prepared "spices and perfumes" on Preparation Day so as not to violate the Sabbath. As we probably know, the spices were used for anointing Jesus' body, following the Jewish burial custom of wrapping a body in strips of linen and spices. For sure, this was not an easy task, at least in the case of Jesus, as John 19:39 reveals the use of approximately 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes.

Witness of the Women (Luke 24:1-12)

Scholars inform us that the focus in Luke 24, on the witness of certain women, has Luke 23:50-56 as its point of departure. What follows presupposes that the women knew the location of the tomb, and they did (compare Matthew 27:61). However, the same is not said of the remaining 11 apostles, although at least two of them certainly did – Peter and the other apostle whom Jesus loved.

Now, the first day of the week is Sunday; the Preparation Day (Friday) and the Sabbath (Saturday) are past. These women who arrived early in the morning at the tomb were totally astounded at what they found. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb. Archaeologists have uncovered hundreds of tombs within three miles of Jerusalem. We are informed that many have stones that can be rolled away like the one mentioned here. But Mark 16:4 records that the stone over Jesus' tomb was "very large." And since limestone weighs about 170 pounds per cubic foot, even a stone of moderate size means substantial weight. According to scholars, a stone four feet across would weigh over a ton. No wonder these women were surprised.

Verse 3 states that when the women entered the tomb, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. Thus, the missing body of Jesus is the central, dramatic element of Luke 24. Luke makes this clear as he builds to the climax of his Gospel that there is a reason for Jesus' body to be missing.

Moving forward, the women's confusion about the missing body doesn't last long, as it quickly gives way to fear. The two men who caused the fear are identified as angels (Luke 24:23). And while John also mentions two angels, Matthew and Mark only mention one, likely because the focus is on the speaker only.

As scholars note, fear at the appearance of an angel is apparent in the writings of Luke (1:11,12,29;2-9). However, in other appearances, angels tell people not to fear. But here there is no such admonition. The women's response of bowing appears to be instinctual. Bowing also seems to be a common act of respect for authority in the ancient near East, as noted in Genesis 33:3;42:6; and Ruth 2:10.

The angels' concluding question in verse 5, "why do you look for the living among the dead?" is valid but not understandable to these women. These women have not yet seen Jesus alive and they do not expect to. Even so, there is a hint to the mystery of the missing body in the angels' question.

Next, in verse 6, the angels state the most important fact in all history when they declare the reason for the absence of Jesus' body – that "He has risen." The verse reads, "He isn't here but has been raised." The implication is clearly that God is responsible for Jesus' return to life. God has intervened just as Jesus promised. "Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again" (24:6,7). This remark is both a call to remember and a rebuke. Here, we are reminded that God often says things we fail to understand because we have trouble accepting them.

According to scholars, the remark in verse 6-7 is important for another reason. The reference to the necessity of the Son of Man going through these events emphasizes divine design. These things must happen. God's plan for Jesus had three steps: betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection. And the angels' remark leads the women to recall Jesus' remarks. If we want to find the fulfillment of God's promises, we must look to Jesus.

What happens next is that the women leave the tomb and journey back to where the disciples and others are gathered and share their incredible story. Luke indicates that there are at least five women involved with three being named, Mary Magdalene (she was delivered from demon possession by Jesus, Luke 8:2); Joanna (wife of an official in Herod's household, Luke 8:3); and Mary (the mother of James and Joseph, Matthew 27:56). There is some scholarly debate as to whether this Mary is the mother of Jesus. At any rate, all these women are followers of Jesus. But despite these numerous female witnesses, their story is not viewed as credible. Instead those gathered (including the Apostles) dismiss their story as "nonsense." We can only imagine the disappointment and hurt these faithful women must feel at not being believed.

Luke tells us in verse 11, "But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense." Their words seemed to them ... take your pick ... "as an idle tale," "empty talk," "a foolish yarn," "utter nonsense." For a moment, let's focus on several possible reasons why the resurrection might not be believed even today.

First, the resurrection is sometimes disbelieved because it seems "an idle tale." Someone has described the Easter story using the analogy of a baseball game. At the bottom half of the ninth inning with your team behind 20-0, you decide to go home and avoid the rush in the parking lot. However, in the next day's newspaper, you find that somehow your team won! Second, the resurrection is sometimes disbelieved because of fear. Reading further in our Lukan text we find these revealing words, "But they were startled and frightened..." (Luke 24:37). This was the disciples' reaction to the supernatural. They thought they had seen a

ghost. These disciples were simply afraid to believe. And, in reality, isn't that true of some moderns today? If the resurrection is true, then life will make sense alright, but only on God's terms and not on ours.

Third, the resurrection is sometimes disbelieved because it is simply too good to be true! Where there seems to be a period in life, God often puts a comma. Maybe for some people the news of the resurrection is just too good to be true, too good to assimilate all at once.

But we take heart in that Peter got up after hearing from the women and ran to the tomb. "Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened" (2:12). The fact that Peter is wondering to himself indicates that Peter needs a reminder of Jesus' words just as much as the women did.

Epiphany at Emmaus (Luke 24:30-35)

As the two disciples walk along the road and discuss the despairing happenings of the previous days, we are informed that Jesus draws near and begins to walk with them. But unfortunately, they don't recognize him. However, the nature of the conversation and the going down of the sun impels the two to invite the incognito Jesus to remain with them. Especially, they invite him to share a meal.

Now Luke 24:13-29 sets the stage for our text (Luke 24:30-35) which begins with the happenings of that shared meal.

Verses 30 and 31 read: "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight." It is no accident that Jesus is revealed as he sits having table fellowship with the two disciples. The table was the place for fellowship in the ancient world. Luke has underscored the importance of meal scenes throughout his Gospel (examples: Luke 5:27-39; 7:36-50). The table or mealtime was a place where Jesus was heard and where his presence came across most intimately. This fact suggests that Jesus reveals himself in the midst of the basic moments of life. He is at home in the center of our everyday happenings.

Concerning the situation at hand, the drama has been building since 24:13 with the climax now unfolding.

Scholars point out that the similarity between Jesus' actions in this verse and the earlier action in Luke 22:19 are intriguing. There Jesus "took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them" in instituting the Lord's supper. The question is, does Jesus intend the current situation to be a reminder of the previous?

The scholars go on to point out that three factors suggest the answer is no. First, Jesus has said that he “will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16). Second, no cup is mentioned (compare 22:17,20). Third, the blessing and breaking of the bread was not something unique to the last supper (Matthew 14:19).

As William Barclay put it: “It was at an ordinary meal in an ordinary house, when an ordinary loaf was being divided, that these men recognized Jesus ... It is not only at the communion table we can be with Christ; we can be with Him at the dinner table too.”

Up to this point in Luke 24, Jesus’ body has been missing or otherwise kept from being recognized. This is the point, however, in Luke’s resurrection account where that changes.

Here, it is thought that interplay of physical and spiritual blindness may also be intended by Luke. Jesus’ two hosts for the meal are men who “were kept from recognizing him” (Luke 24:16). At this same time, they had been rebuked by Jesus: “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (24:25)! The suggested connection is that the lifting of their spiritual blindness (24:32) had to happen before they were able to recognize Jesus physically.

The phrase “hearts burning within us” (v.32) refers to a sense of longing or excitement that comes while learning truth. Scholars note the sequence: (1) the correction of deficient understanding of the Scripture while on the road to Emmaus was accompanied by burning hearts; (2) that correction in turn has led to the ability to recognize Jesus; and now (3) the two disciples comprehend the connection between (1) and (2).

Verse 33ff tells us how these two disciples, when they received their own joy, could not wait to share it. Immediately, they hastened back to Jerusalem, as the good news was too good to keep to themselves. As we know or should know, “the Christian message is never fully ours until we have shared it with someone else.

These two disciples return to Jerusalem only to hear from the Eleven and the others what they now already believe and have experienced, that “the Lord has risen.” This is the focus of all accounts in Luke 24 and the central idea of what is commonly called Easter today.

Those gathered also confirm that the “Lord has appeared to Simon.” Of course, this is Peter’s other name as well as Cephas (Luke 6:14; John 1:42). So why is this described here about Simon? When Peter last appears in Luke 24:12, the Lord has not appeared to him. Now we read that he has.

And then verse 35 actually serves as a transition to Jesus’ appearance in verse 36. The same verse also summarized all that has happened to the two men from Luke 24:13 until now. As we are minded, Jesus’ body was missing from the tomb, but found when he was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

The joyful point of Luke 24 is that “He is risen!” And this should be remembered not just at Easter, but every day. Why? Because the resurrection of Christ has daily implications in terms of blessings and responsibilities for all believers. Hallelujah! Christ is risen! Thanks be to God!

Action Plan

4. How can we ensure we relate to Jesus as living Lord and not as a long-dead historical figure?
5. How do lives focused on the resurrection differ from those that are not?
6. How can we encourage each other in our faith in the risen Lord?

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).

Being who your dog thinks you are

Dr. Hal Brady

The late Norman Vincent Peale, American minister and author, once said that there are three questions we should ask ourselves about any business transaction. Is it legal? Is it balanced? Will it make me feel good about myself? Here, Dr. Peale is talking about character.

I simply cannot over-estimate the importance of character. Character has been defined in many ways. Character is what you are in the dark. Character is who you are when no one else is looking. Character is who you are through and through. Character is the essential “stuff” a person is made of. Personally, I like all these definitions of character, but the one I like best is this one, “Character is being who your dog thinks you are.” If we are decent and trustworthy our dog will love us, be loyal to us, trust us, and always be our friend.

Chuck Swindoll, minister, author, and professor, said that for years he served on the board of the Dallas Theological Seminary with the late Tom Landry, legendary coach of the Dallas Cowboys. On one occasion while the board was talking about the importance of character among young men and women going into the ministry, Coach Landry leaned over and whispered, “You know, Chuck, for the Cowboys, when we draft men for our team, we look for five things, and the first is character.

And Swindoll responded, “Well, let me ask you something, a hard question. What if you find a terrific athlete who lacks character?”

Landry responded, “Chuck, that’s easy. We don’t draft him.” Too bad that’s still not the guiding principle in the world of sports today, professional or otherwise.

So why does character matter anyway? Undoubtedly, there are many reasons, but I only want to mention three of those reasons.

First, the pressure of events! Too often we have seen what happens when character is absent. We have seen business corruption, wholesale cheating, massive problems of crime, athletic betrayals, political dishonesty, destructive leadership, religious scandals, greedy self-interest, unthinking prejudice, and all sorts of mediocrity.

But as someone observed, “There is a growing awareness that a variety of public problems can only be understood – and perhaps addressed – if they are seen as arising out of a defect in character formation.”

Second, character matters because of its vital importance to leadership! In their study a few years ago of what followers most want from leadership, the authors of the book “The Leadership Challenge” found three basic categories: commitment, competence, and consistency. These qualities must not only be present with the leaders, they must also be present within the organization. When leaders assume responsibility, they commit themselves, they work at being competently, and they practice consistency. And this practicing of consistency has to do with character.

So, far from being a cliché, character in leadership is critically essential for two distinct reasons. Externally, character provides the point of trust that links leaders with followers. And internally, character is the leader’s first prompting to do good and the final barrier against doing wrong.

Someone described Dorothy Day, the noted Roman Catholic social worker like this, “It wasn’t what she wrote that made her so great, it wasn’t what she believed that made her so great. It was the fact that what she believed and wrote was in line with what she lived.” She was committed, competent, and consistent.

And third, character matters because it has to do with the impending presence of God! In plain truth, God intends that we be people of character. If not, why the deliverance at the Red Sea, the Ten Commandments at Sinai, the Old Testament prophets, the incarnation in the babe of Bethlehem, the cross that Jesus died upon, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God, the church, the forgiveness of sins, and the hope of humankind.

On the wall of Harvard Divinity School are carved these words, “Acquaint thyself with deity.” If we do that we’ll understand God’s call to the hero or heroine within God’s call to character.

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OBITUARIES

Mr. Franklin O'Neal

Mr. Franklin O'Neal, age 75, of Cedar Crossing, died Thursday, March 8, 2018, at his home, after an extended illness. He was a lifelong resident of Toombs County, and worked as supervisor for General Communications for many years. He was a member of the Hardens Chapel United Methodist Church. He was preceded in death by his wife, Hilda H. O'Neal in 2008; parents, William Forrest O'Neal and Hazel Alexander O'Neal; and a sister, Opal O'Neal.

Mr. O'Neal is survived by two sons, Greg O'Neal and wife Lisa, and Bill O'Neal and wife Beth, all of Johnson Corner; two sisters, Audrey Crump and husband Ronnie of Martinez, and Dean Anderson and husband Gilbert of Johnson Corner; four grandchildren, Brittany O'Neal, Chase O'Neal, Julia O'Neal, and Pearson O'Neal; and four great-grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Hardens Chapel Cemetery Fund, C/O Jerome Toole, 1830 GA Hwy 135, Vidalia GA 30474.

Rev. James Houseal

Rev. James Emlon Houseal, 87, of Moultrie, Ga., died Friday, March 9, 2018, at Colquitt Regional Medical Center.

Funeral services were held Tuesday, March 13, 2018, at Cobb Funeral Chapel with the Rev. Jimmy Voyles and the Rev. Dan Robinson officiating. Interment, with military honors, followed in Cobb Suncrest Memorial Gardens.

Casketbearers were Scott DeMott, Roy Reeves, Dr. Randy Benner, Lawton Matthews, Shannon Ritchie, Rev. Walter Powell, Dr. Jim Allen, Rev. Wayne Mitchell, Larry Slightom and Bill McCalley. Honorary casketbearers were pastors in the South Georgia Conference and residents that have been on Kairos at Autry State Prison and Autry State Prison Kairos Team members.

He was preceded in death by his parents, William B. Houseal and Mary Sessions Houseal; brothers, Walter S. Houseal and Bill Houseal; and niece, Beth Houseal.

Reverend Houseal was born October 12, 1930, in Birmingham Ala. He graduated from Battle Ground Academy in Franklin, Tenn. in 1949. He joined the U.S. Army in 1950, went to Fort Jackson, S.C. for Infantry Basic Training and then to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. In the latter part of 1952 he received orders to the Republic of Korea where he joined a "Bastarded Artillery Outfit" in or around The Reservoir. He recalled that it didn't have any water, but plenty of snow and ice.

Jim served as a Forward Observer in direct support of the 7th Infantry Regiment around “Pork Chop Hill.” On one given day the hill was over-run and the regiment won it back 16 times in hand to hand combat. The First Sergeant and Jim were captured by the Chinese and North Koreans but escaped four days later. Staff Sergeant Houseal rotated back to the States in 1953 and was Honorably Discharged in Fort Breckenridge, Kentucky. He then returned to Alabama where he attended Auburn University from 1954 to 1955, transferring to Birmingham Southern College from 1955 to 1956. In June of 1956 he joined the U.S. Navy, was stationed in Charleston, South Carolina from 1956 to 1970 and served on board four different destroyers all out of Newport, Rhode Island. He was in Danang, Vietnam from 1966 to 1967 working Shore Patrol. After two months he rode shot gun taking supplies to the “Rock Pile.” He stayed at sea nearly 14 years before going to the Naval Reserve Center in Columbus, Georgia in the latter part of 1970, where he stayed until his retirement in 1975 as a Chief Boatswains Mate. From 1950-1975 he received the following 12 medals and unit citations: Navy Good Conduct with a Star, National Defense with Star, Korean Service Ribbon Four Stars, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with Star, United Nations Korean Service, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Korean War Service Medal, Army Presidential Unit Citation, Korean Presidential Unit Citation, Vietnam Presidential Unit Citation and a Navy Combat Ribbon.

Reverend Houseal said, “Of all the places I have been, there is nothing like coming into port and seeing the American flag waving in the breeze and your wife waiting on the pier.” He worked at TRW in Columbus, Georgia eight years. The Lord called Jim to preach in 1984 and he preached for 34 years. Rev. Houseal served at Tyson Memorial United Methodist Church.

Survivors include his wife of 57 years, Estelle Mary Palmer Houseal of Moultrie; sister-in-law, Christine Houseal of Augusta, GA.; niece, Alice Houseal Vinson and Jim of California; nephew, W.B. Houseal and Pat of Birmingham, AL.; great nieces, Christine Anderson and Frank of Augusta, GA., Conette Blake Houseal and husband Nick of Atlanta.

Rev. Dr. Don W. Northrip

Rev. Dr. Don W. Northrip, age 86, died early Sunday morning, March 11, 2018, at The Gardens at Southern Manor in Statesboro. He was born to Rev. Dwight O. Northrip and Dorris Morgan Northrip in Oklahoma City Sept. 9, 1931, and lived all over the Midwest and Georgia before moving to Newington, Georgia in 1995. Rev. Northrip studied at Oklahoma Baptist University, University of Oklahoma, University of Missouri, University of Munich, and Candler School of Theology at Emory University. He served honorably in the United States Air Force Security Service from 1952 to 1958, and was a professor of music at Oklahoma City University from 1960 to 1964, then Georgia Southern University from 1964 until 1974. Rev. Northrip served as a minister of music in United Methodist Churches throughout his life, and then as pastor at three successive charges in the Statesboro District of The United Methodist Churches from 1990 until his retirement in 2002.

Surviving are his son and daughter-in-law, David and Emily Northrip of Marietta, Georgia; his daughters, Anna Northrip Montgomery of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Maria Carter of Sapulpa, Oklahoma; and his grandson, Hartridge Thomas Northrip.

Services were held Monday, March 19, 2018, at First United Methodist Church of Statesboro with Rev. Jimmy Cason officiating.

The family requests that memorial contributions be made to the Georgia Southern Foundation, Inc./ Music Department 0228, PO Box 8040, Statesboro, GA 30460, or to the Newington United Methodist Church, PO Box 113, Newington, GA 30446.

Friends may sign the online register book at www.joineranderson.com.

Joiner-Anderson Funeral Home & Crematory of Statesboro is in charge of arrangements.

Scripture Readings – March 20

March 25

Passion Sunday/Palm Sunday

Sixth Sunday in Lent

Liturgy of the Palms

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 (UMH 839)

Mark 11:1-11

John 12:12-16

Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16 (UMH 764)

Philippians 2:5-11

Mark 14:1-15:47

March 29

Holy/Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

March 29

Holy/Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalm 22

Hebrews 10:16-25

John 18:1-19:42

April 1

Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34-43

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 (UMH 839)

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

John 20:1-18

or Mark 16:1-8

Events in the South Georgia Conference – 3/20/2018 edition

Bishop Bryan's calendar

It's now easier than ever to find out when and where Bishop Bryan will be preaching in your district and around the conference. Visit the updated [calendar and events page](#) on the conference website and look for the red highlighted dates.

UMW Spiritual Growth Retreat - March 23-24

The United Methodist Women of the South Georgia Conference will host their annual Spiritual Growth Retreat March 23-24, 2018, at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. The retreat leader will be Yvette Richards, and Ivy Kratzer will serve as the Teen Women's Retreat Leader. Annie Akins will be the praise and worship leader. [Click here to download the brochure.](#)

Eagles' Picnic - April 5

The Eagles, retired South Georgia clergy and spouses, will gather for their annual picnic Thursday, April 5. Contact Rev. Charles "Buddy" Whatley for more information.

20th Annual Hispanic Rally – April 8

United Methodists from around the Conference are invited to celebrate, worship, and fellowship at the 20th annual Hispanic Rally, scheduled for 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, April 8 at Park Avenue United Methodist Church in Valdosta. The Hispanic congregation of Lake Park UMC will host the rally, which will be a time for worship, Bible study, fellowship, and fun, and there will be activities for children, youth, and adults. Bishop Lawson Bryan will preach.

Sexual Ethics Workshop - April 10

A Sexual Ethics Workshop will be held from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. Tuesday, April 10 at Vineville UMC in Macon. According to the Conference Sexual Ethics policy, this workshop is REQUIRED EVERY (3) THREE YEARS for any person serving under appointment by the bishop (clergy, local pastors, extension ministers, appointed lay speakers). Cost is \$35, which includes lunch (collected at the door). Checks can be made payable to South Georgia Conference. To register, [click here](#). Email questions to cpcassistant@sgaumc.com. Please note that spouses and lay employees who are not appointed by the bishop are not eligible to attend the workshop.

Native American Ministries Sunday - April 15

On Native American Ministries Sunday, United Methodists cultivate and support urban missions with Native Americans and fund scholarships for Native American seminarians. Your annual conference retains 50 percent of the offering is to strengthen and develop Native American ministries. However, if no Native American ministries exist in the conference, the entire offering is remitted to the General Council on Finance and Administration for Native American ministries in other areas. The remaining 50 percent of the offering expands mission work with the Native American Urban Initiative and provides scholarships for Native Americans attending United Methodist and other approved schools of theology. Is it easier to learn Native American traditions from a Native American or an Irish American? This is why the Native American Ministries Sunday offering is critical – to continue the traditions and nurture the gifts of Native Americans. [Click here for resources to help promote this special Sunday.](#)

United Methodist Men’s Annual Retreat - April 20-21

South Georgia’s United Methodist Men will gather for their annual retreat April 20-21 at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island, Ga. Dr. Matt Woodbery, South Georgia Conference Director of Connectional Ministries, will be the keynote speaker. [Click here for housing registration.](#) Prior to the start of the UMM annual retreat participants are invited to play in the annual UMM Golf Tournament on Friday, April 20. Practice begins at 11 a.m. with tee time at noon. The tournament will be held at Sanctuary Cove Golf Club (2050 Sanctuary Wynd, Waverly, Ga. 31565). [Click here for golf tournament registration.](#) [Click here for golf tournament rules.](#)

#generations Seminar – April 26-28

The Southwest District of the South Georgia Conference is partnering with Next Step Ministry to offer a seminar focused on reaching all generations for Christ. This two-day seminar, set for April 26-28 at Veteran's Memorial State Park, is designed for clergy and laity. For more information, visit www.swdistrictumc.org. The early bird rate of \$219 ends soon, so register today. Contact the Southwest District office with questions: 229-273-3119 or swdistrict@sgaumc.com.

Connecting Neighbors Training, Tifton - April 28

The Connecting Neighbors training event features a one-day training hosted by The Office of Connectional Ministries designed to equip and empower individuals and local churches to be a presence in their community (and beyond) in the event of a natural or man-made catastrophic event. The cost is \$10 and includes lunch and materials. For questions or additional information, contact Allison Lindsey at allison@sgaumc.com or 888-266-7642. Use this [promotional flyer](#) to gather a group from your church to attend. This training will be held April 28 at Tifton First UMC. [Register here.](#) [Click here for more information and the day's schedule.](#)

Wesley Glen Ministries’ Fish Fry - April 28

Wesley Glen’s annual fish fry is the place to be for good food, good music, and great fellowship. Join them for a fun-filled day!