

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – OCT. 15 EDITION

Centenary UMC partners with local group to combat “period poverty”

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

When was the last time you had to choose between paying for a meal or a menstrual pad?

For many women, the choice is all too real. Called “period poverty,” it’s the lack of access to sanitary products due to financial constraints, and it affects women and girls around the world.

It’s a problem that affects more than those who are financially strapped or experiencing homelessness, though. According to a [recent survey](#), nearly one in five American girls have either left school early or missed school entirely because they didn’t have access to menstrual products.

Since February, Macon’s [Centenary United Methodist Church](#) has worked to address this issue through its partnership and support of [Macon Periods Easier](#).

An offshoot of non-partisan organization Georgia Women, Macon Periods Easier works to address period poverty in Macon and Bibb County and normalize the conversation about menstruation through educational presentations and events.

The group collects menstrual supplies such as pads, tampons, liners, and wipes and packs a few of each in donated cosmetic bags or zippered storage bags. They give them to local elementary, middle, and high schools and Daybreak, the local homeless center. Since its inception in February, Macon Periods Easier has distributed more than 23,000 products.

In September, Centenary UMC’s School of Creative Education hosted a Ladies Night Out “Period Party.” The event’s purpose was to have fun, raise awareness, and collect products. Event participants donated 2,312 pads, 1,120 liners, 978 tampons, and 34 packs of wipes. That evening, church members decided to keep collection bins out year-round and to also begin offering free feminine hygiene products in the church’s restrooms.

Centenary UMC’s involvement with Macon Periods Easier is just one more way the congregation is reaching out to those in need, says member Yvonne Stewart, who organized the church’s Period Party. The congregation hosts a Sunday morning breakfast, built two showers in its fellowship hall, and runs a bicycle ministry, among other outreach efforts.

“This just falls in with that mindset and in noticing what people need and finding ways to help provide it,” she said.

Public benefits like food stamps can't be used to buy tampons or pads, Stewart said. The products aren't included in flexible or health spending account allowances and they're not covered by health insurance or Medicaid.

"If people are financially strapped and there are three or four women in the household, it can be difficult to go out and buy these products."

More than 50 Bibb County schools receive the period packs, said Susan Long, a Macon Periods Easier board member who occasionally attends Centenary UMC.

Without a budget for such items, school nurses were often using their own money to purchase pads, tampons, and other products for girls who would request them, Long said.

"There's no hard data available, but in talking with school social workers and school nurses we have found that girls are missing school because they lack products," she said. "It feels like the work we're doing is helping remove one more barrier to girls attending school."

Macon Periods Easier is filling a big need in local schools and in the community, Long said, and the support they're receiving from Centenary UMC and other congregations is vital.

"Some of us had not realized the extent of this need, that 'period poverty' even existed," she said. "But once we became aware of the issue it is something our community has really gotten around and is supporting and helping provide for these girls and women."

If you have a story of how God is using your local congregation to transform the community, please contact kara@sgaumc.com. The South Georgia Conference Communications team wants to tell your story.

Sparks UMC's activity mats help dementia patients

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

When Pat Scrogam's mother, Margery Resser, was living with dementia, Scrogam looked high and low for something to keep her mother's hands busy.

"Their hands need to be moving," Scrogam said.

She searched online but was unable to find exactly what she was looking for.

"I had even gotten her a baby toy that she could twist and twist, and it made her happy."

Coming up empty at local stores and craft fairs and not satisfied with what she found online, Scrogam decided she and the Sparks United Methodist Church sewing group, the Joyful Stitchers, could create what she envisioned.

She explained the details to one of the sewers, and a couple of months later Scrogam was presented with a small lap blanket.

“We thought it was so neat and Mom just loved it,” she said, getting teary as she remembered her mother, who passed away in March. “It had a red zipper, and that’s Mom’s favorite color.”

That one activity blanket sparked a ministry. Scrogam saw how much her mother enjoyed working with her blanket and asked the Joyful Stitchers group to make more.

Each dementia/Alzheimer’s activity blanket is made of nine eight-inch squares of different fabric. They’re sewn together, filling is added, and a back is attached. Each square has an embellishment sewn onto it: a button or two, a couple of bows, a zipper, a piece of Velcro. Those who receive the mats like to hold them in their lap and play with them.

“They really loved it,” Scrogam said. “You’d hear the zip, zip. They’d practice putting the button in the hole and taking it out. They can do it over and over again and it’s like brand new. It’s so nice to see them work with them.”

The Joyful Stitchers made about 65 of the blankets and gave a few to each senior home and nursing home in the area. The nurses and physical therapists praised the blankets, Scrogam said, and one even asked if they could be bought in bulk.

Somewhat time consuming to make, Joyful Stitcher Sylvia Kent estimates it takes one Monday morning sewing session – three or four hours – to make the blankets. Scrogam cuts all of the fabric, Kent sews them together, and the two of them sew on the embellishments.

The work was fun and rewarding, Scrogam said, and it felt good to do something helpful. Kent and Scrogam are the only two Joyful Stitchers left of the five women who were originally making the blankets, but Scrogam says with the renewed interest they may begin making the blankets again. They’re currently making keychains to give away at Christmas, but are always looking for new projects that will help others.

Kent appreciates the opportunity to serve while staying busy.

“It gives me something to do and it helps other people, too,” she said.

For Scrogam, whose mother was a member of the Joyful Stitchers, the blankets are close to her heart and a way to show others that there are those who care.

“It’s just nice to do this,” she said. “Mom absolutely loved it.”

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Rev. Scott Stanfill reflects on Hurricane Michael one year later: 'We saw church happen...'

As we mark the one-year anniversary of the worst storm many in Northwest Florida and Southwest Georgia have lived through and as Colquitt United Methodist Church (CUMC) still navigates the effects of the storms, Rev. Scott Stanfill, senior pastor of CUMC, shares his reflections:

The word for “patience” in the Bible can be translated “long-suffering.” Indeed, CUMC continues to live into our current reality of long-suffering while we eagerly anticipate returning to our building. The layers comprising this time of suffering are many, and they are deep. One of the layers is the physical exile into which we are living.

We all recognize and understand that Church is not a building. Church is a movement of the people of God empowered by the Holy Spirit to partner with Jesus in his yoke for the renewal of all things. For CUMC, Church is a movement of the people of God doing their part in making thy Kingdom come in Colquitt as it is in Heaven. Thus, Church can, does, and should happen anywhere. Our community and church continue to live into this truth.

We saw Church happen as Lenox Baptist Church removed massive debris from dozens of yards in the City of Colquitt after the storm. We saw Church happen as the Mennonites cleaned approximately 350 yards and tarped hundreds of roofs in the months following the hurricane. We saw Church happen as Dacula UMC fed thousands in our community via their John 3:16 food truck. We saw Church happen as Christians of all denominations in Colquitt joined hands and worked together. We saw Church happen as many of our members, many of whom were dealing with their own property damage, drove around town handing out water and sack lunches to workers. We saw Church happen as UMC ERT teams from North and South Georgia worked hundreds of hours in Miller County and the surrounding areas. We saw Church happen as over 200 UMCOR cleaning buckets were distributed throughout our community. We saw Church happen as Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson from the North Georgia Conference came to our area to work alongside ERT teams. We saw Church happen when our own Bishop, Lawson Bryan, and members of the cabinet made multiple visits to the area. We saw Church happen as individuals and churches donated water, generators, first aid supplies, and non-perishable foods. We saw Church happen as individuals across the country and local congregations in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Tennessee sent monetary donations in support of our community. We saw Church happen when Albany First UMC offered CUMC a “Sunday Sabbatical,” inviting us to their

facility, hosting a covered dish luncheon in our honor, and presenting us with a love offering. We saw Church happen as over 600 United Methodists from two congregations gathered to laugh together, cry together, and encourage one another. We saw Church happen as Madison First UMC collected school supplies for 50 children in Colquitt.

Church is not limited to a building. Church can happen anywhere.

Although CUMC is displaced, Church continues to happen. We have not missed one Sunday morning worship service since the hurricane. We have not missed one planned Wednesday evening activity since the hurricane. Thanks to Chad Cooper and the wonderful people at Colquitt First Baptist Church, we are blessed to have a beautiful sanctuary in which to gather weekly for worship while we await our return home. All of our Sunday School classes have rooms at First Baptist in which to meet and study and grow together. Wednesday morning Bible Study continues. Wednesday evening supper and activities are held at the Miller County Senior Center with good attendance at prayer meeting, young adult study, youth and children's classes. We were blessed by the invitation to join a combined VBS in June with First Baptist. Our annual Fall Festival in October was said by many to be the best in recent memory, with many un-churched people in attendance. Family fellowship events occurred weekly throughout the summer. We continue to run a Food Bank out of the CUMC parking lot, feeding up to 450 families in Miller and Baker Counties every month. The Agape store (CUMC sponsored and run thrift store) continues to meet a huge need for clothing and affordable household goods and items as residents seek to restore what was lost. Other church ministries continue assisting those at risk and those needing help with utility bills and medical expenses. Although we are displaced, the mission keeps moving forward.

Yes, church can happen anywhere. We have seen that. We have lived that. And we will continue to live that for another year at the very least. We know Church is not limited to a building. But we know church buildings are sacred spaces for many of us. Church buildings are holy ground on which the people of God take off their sandals, gather together as a forgiven and reconciled community, and drink from "thou fount of every blessing." Our faith is wholistic—comprising the spiritual as well as the physical. Our faith is heaven and earth coming together. Our faith is one in which we believe God became flesh and lived among us. Our faith is one in which we believe the Creator of all that is and is to come came to us at a specific time, in a physical location. And we believe, through the Holy Spirit, the presence of God is manifest today through physical means of grace. The Church is a means of grace. Church buildings are physical locations where we experience God's grace through worship, grow in God's grace through study and intimate, Christian fellowship, and share God's grace through service. Most every significant event in my life is connected to a local church building and its people. Church can indeed happen anywhere, but for the members of CUMC it has happened specifically at their church for over 100 years. Most every significant event in the life of a CUMC member is connected to 453 East Main Street, Colquitt, Georgia. I know because I am reminded almost every day.

I hear story after story of people who committed their lives to Christ at the altar at 453 East Main Street. I hear of people who remember VBS years ago when children first heard the old, old story of Jesus and His love. I hear stories of Christmas Cantatas and Easter musicals, powerful performances in which the life, death, and Resurrection of Christ penetrate the visceral depths of the soul in a way that mere words cannot. I hear of people whose spirits were so stirred by the Holy Spirit they began a Celebrate Recovery group. I hear of people whose hearts were so filled with a Holy Discontent they were sent out into the mission field. I hear of people who heard and responded to the call of Jesus to feed the hungry by organizing a food bank. All of this fruit, and so much more, is produced by the vine of Christ rooted at 453 East Main Street. I hear of baptisms, weddings, funerals, celebrations of the Lord Supper—all of those holy moments in which the presence of Christ and the imminence of his grace is palpable. I hear the stories. And I hear the pain.

Walter Brueggemann says we often think of the Old Testament prophets as social critics and political activists. But they are best described as poets. Their first poetic move is always a public expression and processing of grief and pain. The prophet does this, not to leave people in tears, but rather so that people, through their grieving, might learn to relinquish their commitment to the status quo, and try to be open to the new arrangements of reality, to the will of God. Vision and revision as God moves us deeper into God's will is dependent upon letting go, and in the relinquishment there are always tears. We have shed many tears as a community and church family since October 10. There have been many things of which we have let go. Some have been by choice. Most have not.

Children of our church have asked when they will be able to sing in “their church” again. And the tears are shed. Elderly members have wondered about having their funerals at someplace other than the church where they have worshiped and served for eighty years. And the tears are shed. I see the looks on congregants' faces every time I stand in the pulpit on Sunday mornings. And the tears are shed. I see a glimmer of hope as we worship together, yet I see a glimmer of pain, longing for home. And the tears are shed. I field questions on an almost daily basis from members asking when any visible progress will occur. And the tears are shed. Since our worship services, study groups, and outreach activities are scattered around town, my six-year-old daughter and three-year-old son now refer to 453 East Main Street as “the damaged church,” simply to keep all of the locations straight in their minds. And the tears are shed.

On this one-year anniversary of Hurricane Michael and with at least another year before we can return home, the days and nights spent in the prophetic wilderness are taking their toll. We are still in what Brueggemann refers to as the poetic stage of grief and pain. Several clergy colleagues have asked to what would I compare this entire experience (which is far from over by the way). The best to which I compare it is this: Passion. As CUMC gathered for worship on Palm Sunday amidst threatening skies and tornado watches, I shared the following words by Dr. Geoffrey Lentz (Sr. Minister at Port St. Joe FUMC), slightly edited to fit CUMC's context:

"We are longing for the days when homes will be built again and clear progress will be made. If I am honest, this moment, six months in, may be the hardest yet. Researchers tell us at about the six-month mark the adrenaline from trauma wears off and desperation sets in. I am certainly seeing people wearing down. If I'm honest, I'm worn down. It has been a tiring pace of working day in and day out to put our lives and community back together, and now people are exhausted. We are wondering what comes next. When will we wake up from the insurance nightmare? When will the rebuilding start? When will we get back home? When will things get back to normal?"

"Right now, we are still in a time of suffering. We are not in the Garden of Eden. We're in the Garden of Gethsemane. And here we are, set to begin another week of desperation and suffering in that garden. The more traditional title for Holy Week was Passion Week. We usually think about passion in terms of love or devotion, but the word passion originally meant "suffering." Passion Week is a remembrance that Christ suffered. He knew about the storms of life. He was betrayed by a kiss, abandoned by his friends, suffered under an unjust sentence and sat on death row. Then, he suffered on a cross. Holy Week looks different for us this year, because we know a lot more about suffering. Suffering is a basic human state; we all suffer and have our losses. The difference with Hurricane Michael is we suffered together. We all share the same story and similar losses. It is a great comfort to know we do not suffer alone. This year, especially, we are comforted knowing Christ suffered with us, his body was broken like our homes, our church, and lives. But just as Christ was not forgotten in his suffering, we know we are not forgotten either."

We are not forgotten in our suffering, as churches and individuals in Colquitt and Miller County continue to extend the love of Jesus to one another. And yet, in ways that are impossible to convey without the shared experience, we are still living Passion Week as a church family. Tears continue to be shed. Maybe the outward tears have dried, but the internal tears and pain of the heart remain. I am well aware there have been many "tears of relinquishment" throughout this season. I am well aware there will be many more until we occupy 453 East Main Street again.

Moreover, I believe with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength that neither tears nor suffering goes to waste when it is brought to the foot of the cross. Whether your life is broken, your heart is shattered, or your building damaged, the best and only option to take is to trust God with the loss. Jesus can take the worst of life and redeem it for the best as we DAILY put our hands in scarred hands of our Lord and Savior.

The Prophet Jeremiah wrote these words known to many, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). Yet we often forget he wrote those words to people in exile, held captive in a foreign land. Best I can tell, the assurance of hope given to God's people in Scripture is never given during a time of prosperity. It is given in the midst of long-suffering. That is the reality we share with each other. That is the reality we share with our Crucified and Risen Savior. Our hope is tied to Jesus, the One who showed us how to remain faithful during suffering, the One who strengthens us to remain faithful during our suffering, and the One who WILL ULTIMATELY

bring renewal to ALL things. Although we at CUMC remain displaced and will be for some time longer, our hope is not. I am confident in the redemptive power of Jesus and fellowship of the Holy Spirit to transform our grief into joy, our fear into faith, and our death into life.

Romans 15:13: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

New Conference Center receives another \$100,000 donation

The South Georgia Conference’s effort to build a new Conference Center on the grounds of Wesleyan College in Macon has been given another boost with its second major gift in three months.

At a recent New Conference Center Task Force meeting, held Oct. 2, Dr. Hal Brady, chair of the Conference Center Task Force, announced that a second anonymous donor has given a \$100,000 gift towards building the new Conference Center.

“We celebrate this gift and are grateful to the donor and the generosity that motivates us to keep moving toward achieving our goal,” said South Georgia Bishop R. Lawson Bryan.

[The previous \\$100,000 donation, given in August](#), enabled the Conference to receive a “challenge gift” of \$100,000 and brings the amount needed to complete the project to \$100,000.

Members of the New Conference Center Task Force recognize that the timing of the project is impacted by General Conference 2020 but believe that they will be able to move forward with plans more quickly and with more clarity once General Conference has concluded. The General Conference Session is set for May 5-15, 2020.

“Whatever the outcome of General Conference, there will still be a need for this office center in South Georgia,” said Dr. Derek McAleer, Director of Administrative Services. “We thank everyone who has contributed to this project and celebrate this most recent gift.”

Gifts can be sent to Dr. McAleer, PO Box 13145, Macon, GA 31208, payable to the South Georgia Conference.

“This is the perfect time to be Alive Together in raising the final \$100,000 that is needed,” Bishop Bryan said. “Let us move forward Alive Together in Witness!”

Excel in the grace of giving

OUR CONNECTION MATTERS

NITA CRUMP

At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. (2 Corinthians 8:14 – NIV)

In the eighth chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul is writing about generosity and sacrificial giving. The Macedonians, who were described as being “in the midst of a very severe trial,” gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability. Paul encourages the Corinthians to “excel in this grace of giving” so that there might be equality, the kind of equality that means that when I have more than I need, I share so that you might have what you need, and vice versa. We demonstrate our love and care for others by sharing what God has given to us.

Recently, six of us from the South Georgia Conference traveled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where we [explored ways to be partners in ministry with the North Katanga Annual Conference](#). While there we had multiple opportunities to see the outcome of persons who live by Paul’s instructions to excel in the grace of giving. We attended the ribbon cutting at a new hospital that was funded by the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM). We attended the ribbon cutting at a medical clinic that was also funded by GBGM. We visited a hospital that was being renovated, again with funds from GBGM. We flew on a medical missionary plane funded by another conference. We visited a farm that is being developed by the North Katanga Conference to teach people farming techniques and how to raise crops that provide nutritious food to their families. The director of the farm is a missionary who is there because of GBGM. Since we’ve been back, we’ve seen pictures on Facebook showing the solar panels being placed on the roof of the instructional building at the conference farm. GBGM funded the solar panels and batteries for the farm. They will now have electricity for their classrooms.

The people who will have access to health care without having to travel hours are grateful that people halfway around the world practice the grace of giving. The people who will learn how to grow nutritious food to feed their families are grateful for the people who practice the grace of giving. Thank you for the grace of giving that allows you and your congregation to contribute to this work through the payment of apportionments. Thank you for caring enough to share what God has given you with those who have needs.

Paul writes that the giving flows both ways. Where we have plenty, we share with those who have need. And where we have need, those with plenty share with us. It’s easy to think that the grace of giving flows only one way between the South Georgia Conference and the North Katanga Conference. It’s easy to think that the giving flows from us to them. I pray that’s not the case. Where they have plenty, we have need. They have amazing faith despite abject poverty. They worship in churches built with bricks they made themselves. They worship in churches without complete roofs and with dirt floors. They praise God for all that he has given them, they sing, and they pray. And their churches are packed – tiny buildings with more than 300 in worship and growing every week.

In the coming months, we will be considering the ways we can join the people of the North Katanga Conference in ministry. That ministry will flow both ways. We can partner with them to build buildings and expand ministries. They can partner with us to build congregations filled with exuberant, joyful disciples. Abundance is shared through the grace of giving. Thank you to all who give!

Dr. Nita Crump serves as Director of Connectional Ministries. Contact her at nitac@sgaumc.com.

Register today for Encounter Youth Retreat, set for Nov. 22-24

Youth groups from around the South Georgia Conference (and beyond!) will come together for a fall weekend retreat that offers passionate worship, relevant Bible study, and a meaningful time with other teens at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. Sponsored by the Office of Connectional Ministries, Encounter Youth Retreat, set for Nov. 22-24, 2019, is for all middle and high school students.

Encounter offers a chance for students to take a break from school, have fun in the beautiful outdoors, and worship Christ with church groups of all sizes.

Rev. Jonathan Smith, Director of the Wesley Foundation at Georgia Southern University, will teach during the four sessions. Philip & Leah George from Monument Ministries will lead worship, and Jacy Robertson, Director of the Wesley Foundation at Coastal Georgia, will emcee the event.

Breakout groups for students by age will give them a chance to hear from college students living a life of faith. Breakout groups for adult leaders will examine Anxiety, Depression, and Suicide Prevention in Teens led by Rachael Lee, a licensed professional counselor who works with teens on a daily basis.

[Online registration](#) is open and will be available through November 11. Churches will register as a group. The cost for this event is \$150 per person, which includes programming, insurance, food, lodging, and a t-shirt. Adult chaperones with Safe Sanctuary certification must be provided by each church group.

[Click here to learn more about the event and registration.](#)

For more information, contact Suzanne Akins at suzanne@sgaumc.com or (912) 638-8626, ext. 107.

Church and Society to host Young Adult Clergy Forum 2020, scholarships available

[Church and Society](#) will host the Young Adult Clergy Forum 2020 Jan. 26-29, 2020, in Washington D.C.

The Office of Connectional Ministries is offering two scholarships of \$500 for two persons, up to the age of 35, to attend who have not participated previously.

The forum is for those serving in full time in ministry in local churches or appointments beyond the local church (deacons, elders, or full-time local pastors).

Send scholarship requests to earnestine@sgaumc.com. The requests will be honored on a first-come, first-served basis.

Goals for the forum:

- Connect young clergy with the ministry of Church and Society
- Provide a forum to share knowledge and experience
- Create bridges for future ministry collaboration.
- Build relationships with other young clergy from across the United Methodist connection.

[Click here for further details and registration information.](#)

Humble Faith

Fall Quarter: Responding to God's Grace

Sunday school lesson for the week of October 20, 2019

By Dr. D. Craig Rikard

Lesson Scripture: Luke 7:1-10

Key Verse: Luke 7:7

I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.

Lesson Aim: To understand and learn the important role of humility in faith and life.

Geographical Context

Jesus has finished giving the Sermon on the Plain just outside the city of Capernaum which stood on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. The narrative reveals Jesus *entered* Capernaum in contrast to *traveled to* Capernaum. This wording implies he was near the city while giving the sermon. Though reared in Nazareth, Jesus chose Capernaum as his home and headquarters. It is also the home of Matthew the tax collector. The town had a population of approximately 1,500 people, making it a busy fishing village. The town possessed a synagogue. Jesus taught and performed miracles in Capernaum. One of the most memorable miracle accounts involved the lowering of the paralytic through the roof into the presence of Jesus. Later Jesus became angry with the town for its unbelief in Jesus as Messiah, cursing it along with Bethsaida and Chorazin.

(Mat. 11:23) This unbelief on the part of the town makes our narrative especially interesting for it is a story of humble faith expressed by a Roman soldier. (Wikipedia used as resource)

Historical and theological reflection introducing the narrative

In Jesus' day, Israel was a puppet nation for the mighty Roman Empire. The Israelites were given a degree of autonomy, especially regarding their religious belief, yet were taxed and ultimately governed by Romans. The Jewish people highly resented Rome's presence. The zealots were determined to drive them out with militant action. A Roman centurion lives in Capernaum, embodying the Roman occupation. However, he is a man who respects Israel's religion and history. Our narrative even states that he was perceived by the Jewish elders as a man who "loves the nation." He is good to the city, even helping them build a synagogue. The narrative seems to imply he may have been a God-fearing man who respected the morality of the Jewish law and believed in the God of Israel. We have no way of knowing this facet of his life. However, we do know that in a day when most centurions would have been mistrusted and despised, the people of Capernaum are respectful of him. The centurion was still a man of status and rank, with the power to command the Jewish people to obey him. He must have utilized this power with great restraint. His humility stands in stark contrast to many in Capernaum. No one expected a Roman Centurion to care about the Jewish people under his authority. No one expected him to respect the God of Israel. No one expected him to ask Jesus come to his house. No one expected such humble faith from a gentile soldier. Again, God has used an unexpected person to reveal his surprising love.

Historical, theological, and experiential reflection upon Luke 7:1-10

Luke 7:1-2

These two verses introduce the narrative to follow. A servant of a centurion is dying. The more revealing words in this introduction are the descriptive words that the servant *was highly valued*. The teacher's manual for this lesson reminds us that servants could be treated as little more than a tool for their master. It was legal to use the servant in most any manner chosen. We can only imagine the painful, often humiliating conditions in which they performed their duties. Using the servant as a tool was often inhumane, and the servant would have been stripped of their humanity. They would have felt like *things*. The adverb is important. This servant isn't just valued, he is *highly* valued. In the original language the phrase meant that the servant was considered *precious*. The centurion's servant isn't just liked, he is considered precious and treated as such.

I enjoy giving my spouse jewelry as gifts. Her jewelry box contains several pieces she frequently wears. However, there are pieces we would never keep in the box. They are too precious, too costly. We do all we can to protect them and would feel a sense of loss should we lose them. I love the text of I Peter 2:4-6, in which Peter describes the Jewish people as precious to God. He is also directly asserting that the church is now just as precious. Jesus' suffering reveals just how precious we are to God. The centurion is aware of the great loss he would experience without

this precious servant. He will do what it takes to protect and save his life. It may be the skills of the servant which have made him so highly valued. However, the entire tone of the narrative indicated a human, emotional bond of love and care. We might infer that the servant has become a friend. Though the first verses are introduction, they provide us with an emotional context for the story that follows.

Who is precious to you? How do you treat them as precious? Do you feel precious to God? How can you know how precious you are to God?

Luke 7:3

This one verse is enlightening. First, it informs us that the centurion had *heard of Jesus*. This phrase may mean that he has heard that Jesus has returned to the town. However, it also reveals that he had heard of Jesus as a teacher and healer. Why else would he have called for Jesus to come? It has always been important for people to hear of Jesus. One of the great joys of being a Christian is to let the world know that Christ is present. We accomplish this through living in a manner that allows others to see Jesus in us. We also accomplish this witness through word. Everyone experiences crises in life. It is especially important for non-Christians to know that there is one to whom they can call. Almost every miracle in the gospels occurs when a hurting person has heard of Jesus and calls to him. Read the story of blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46-52. This beautiful narrative reveals what can happen when hurting people hear of Jesus, and call upon Him. This verse also informs us that the centurion chose to call Jesus through the elders of Capernaum. First, his use of the elders reveals the respect they must have had for him. Secondly, it reveals the centurion's respect for them and Jesus. Remember, he could have simply sent soldiers and ordered Jesus to come. However, his choice of the elders might also reveal the strained relationship between the Jews and Romans. The centurion doesn't just want Jesus to come. He needs him to come! Thus, if he wanted to ensure Jesus would come and be receptive to healing his servant it might prove wiser to use Jews to speak to a Jewish healer. The act of sending for Jesus also reveals the humility of the centurion. Again, he is a man of status and power. One hundred servants are under his command. Yet, he is personally asking Jesus to come.

How can we share with others the good news of God in Jesus? Is the church effective in such a witness? If not, why not?

Luke 17:4a

The centurion has asked that Jesus come to his home through the elders of Capernaum. Later in his ministry the Jewish hierarchy only comes to Jesus to test and entrap him. However, it is the gracious life of the centurion that earns him the respect of the elders. Jesus already is becoming a figure of controversy, yet the elders would engage in an action they would only perform for a good man. Goodness has the power to knock down walls of division. In this story the one thing the centurion, the elders, and Jesus all possess is a love and respect for that which is good. There is a degree of humility in their willingness to approach an itinerate preacher and healer. The narrative also implies that they too possessed knowledge of Jesus and his ability to perform

miracles. It is important to note the adverb *earnestly*. The word reveals the depth of respect the elders had for the centurion. Another accurate translation is that the elders were asking Jesus to *do everything he could for the servant*. Again, this passionate request will later stand in stark contrast to the words they will speak to Jesus in the future. As noted in the introduction, Jesus will later curse Capernaum for its unbelief. The elders most likely were among those unbelievers.

Can you recall a time when you saw respect for the goodness of another break down walls of divisiveness? Do we witness goodness breaking down walls today in the world? If not, why not?

Luke 17:4a-5

The Jewish elders offer their rationale as to why Jesus should help the centurion's servant. They remind Jesus that the soldier "loves their nation." They add further, "and has built us a synagogue." The building of the synagogue was offered as proof of the centurion's goodness. How could a Jewish preacher and miracle worker not respect a Roman who built a synagogue? They are stating that the centurion *deserves* the help. It is understandable that the elders would think in terms of merit. Central to Judaism was obedience to the Mosaic Law. A person worked for their goodness and the favor of God through obedience and good works. If obedience to the Law and good works earned the favor of God, how could Jesus deny the centurion? Works righteousness will be challenged by Jesus in his preaching, and Paul will confront it as well in his epistles. Paul's writing in Eph. 2:8-10 beautifully describes the difference between having God's favor through grace and earning that favor through works.

Does our culture think in terms of grace or works? Do we believe some people deserve help, and not others?

Luke 17:6a

Jesus does not argue. He simply goes with them. The embracing of grace does not mean good works are not valued. James, the Lord's brother, argued in his epistle that "faith without works is dead." Jesus is not going to debate with the elders whether the centurion deserves his help. Grace looks more deeply than works; it looks beyond the concepts of earning and deserving. Grace sees the person, their need, and the best response.

How do you understand James' assertion that faith without works is dead, especially as it relates to helping another?

Luke 17: 6b, 6c

The centurion now sends *friends*. The elders most certainly are walking with Jesus toward the centurion's home. The text does not state whether the friends are Jewish or Roman. However, looking at the event through the eyes of grace there is no Roman or Jew, just friends. No other author of a gospel sees beyond nationality and ethnicity more than Luke. We should not take lightly what he omits from narratives as much as what he includes. The sending of the second delegation reveals a sense of desperate love and concern on the part of the centurion. There is a sense of urgency in sending the second delegation of friends. Now we hear the true humility of

the Roman centurion. He states, “I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.” Though the Jewish elders speak and act through their works of righteousness, the centurion acts through humble grace, even if he doesn’t understand the theological concept. Most Romans were polytheistic. However, as stated in the introduction, the centurion most likely respects the God of Israel. Whether he worships Israel’s God, the text doesn’t state. He probably has not gone through the process and rituals required to become a *God-fearing Gentile*. He simply knows and recognizes his humanity. All true humility begins with the recognition of God, of a being far greater than oneself. We cannot understand how little we are (yet very important) until we recognize how big God is. God must always be greater than us, and his will is to be embraced far above our own. In Psalm 103 David offers a majestic and poetic declaration of who God is and what God does. However, as the psalm continues, David adds, “all men are like the grass which withers and fades.” Why would he make such a statement in the midst of his beautiful declaration of God? David understood that unless we realize our mortality and humanity we cannot fully embrace the wonder of who God is. The centurion understands very well his humanity, and he acknowledges what others have said about Jesus. It is most probable that he did not encourage the elders to offer their rationale as to why Jesus should come to his home. He knows his goodness has nothing to do with it. Jesus will come if he chooses, based on his own reasons. Thankfully, Jesus comes for reason of love, compassion, and to reveal the love of God to the world.

How do we acknowledge the greatness of God? How do we recognize our own humanity?

Luke 17: 7a

Initially the centurion reveals to Jesus that he does not consider himself worthy of having Jesus enter his home. Now, he reveals that he does not consider himself worthy of *going to Jesus*. The centurion is a man of status and power. Yet, he recognizes that his status and power pale in light of who Jesus is and what he has done. Once again, he has recognized someone greater than himself and his own unworthiness. These are the foundations of all true humility. We should understand the concept of being unworthy as the Bible defines it. It is true that we must understand our mortality, and our humanity. This means we acknowledge our weakness and frailty. However, the idea of *not measuring up* is valid only when we compare ourselves to God. Thus, everyone stands on equal ground. Everyone is unworthy in some manner when compared to God’s perfect love in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah and the New Testament apostle Paul both state that our righteousness does not compare to God’s nature. (Isa. 64:6, the entire chapter of Romans 3) Therefore, we should never compare ourselves to others in terms of worthiness. We are equal, all in need of grace, when standing before God.

Luke 17: 7b-8

The centurion offers an expression of faith that reveals the very nature of humble faith. “But say the word and my servant will be healed.” There is no attempt to couch his need in perfect language and expression. It is an honest expression of need and trust. The centurion understands the power of an oral command. When he speaks an order to his men it must be obeyed. Yet, he

now stands before Jesus in utter humility and acknowledges Jesus' words possess more power than his own. His words reveal his acknowledgement that Jesus is someone more powerful than himself. The centurion is basically stating that if he can make things happen with his word, how much more can Jesus' words accomplish! Again, all humility begins with the acknowledgement of someone greater than ourselves. For us that is God, revealed in Jesus Christ.

Do we recognize the creative power of our words? Are there examples of our word accomplishing an act or change in a person or the world? How then are we to understand the words of Christ? What affect does Jesus' words have upon us? How have they changed us?

Luke 17: 9-10

Jesus is amazed at the man's faith. His surprise over the man's faith is not just because the request is simple and honest, though it is. It is the humility expressed in the man's faith that is amazing. This is a Gentile, a Roman soldier, standing before Jesus in the company of fellow Jews. Above all others the Jewish people should recognize there is something godly, righteous, and indescribable about Jesus, for God has been revealing himself in their history. When Jesus begins to reveal his divinity, they should be the first to recognize and acknowledge it. However, they will prove reluctant to do so. Their lack of recognition will later lead Jesus to do something rare: curse the city. How did a Gentile come to recognize the spiritual status and power of Jesus before the Jews in Capernaum? This recognition will occur again as Jesus is dying. As the Jews stand around the cross, it is a centurion who exclaims, "This man was truly the Son of God!" As previously stated, prior to recognizing and acknowledging God's greatness we must understand our mortality and humanity. The centurion has done just that and his expression of faith amazes Jesus. Jesus responded to the centurion's faith by healing the servant with his word.

What expressions of faith amaze us? Where have we witnessed true humility in one's faith? How can we become the expression of such a beautiful faith?

Summary

Humility is the recognition that God is God, and we are not. Humility helps us understand our place in the larger picture of life. We are but one life in a large interconnected world. However, in Christ we understand how important one life is. We are individually loved and employed for the Kingdom of God. Humility not only recognizes the greatness of God, it recognizes God is good. Thus, to worship God and serve God is to live in goodness. It is goodness that can break down all walls of division, and unravel all stereotypes. Goodness is something we can all recognize, appreciate, and embody through Christ. A humble life is one that believes God is great, and God is good. Thus, a life of humble faith embraces our powerful Lord, and embodies his goodness. A humble faith is unashamed to reach toward God in weakness and need, and to reach toward others in goodness and love.

Prayer

Almighty God, the creator and sustainer of all life, the lover of every soul, we come to you in our

frail humanity. We recognize that through Christ we can accomplish the remarkable, and even our weakness can be employed for your Kingdom. Empower us to walk in faith, trusting in your ultimate goodness and redemptive will for all humankind. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Grateful Faith

Fall Quarter: Responding to God's Grace

Sunday school lesson for the week of October 27, 2019

By Dr. D. Craig Rikard

Lesson Scripture: Luke 7:37-48

Key Verse: Luke 7:38

As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

Lesson Aim: To understand and learn the important role of generosity and gratitude in faith and life. To understand the power of unbridled, courageous love.

Personal note

There are other parallel passages in Matthew 26, Mark 14, and John 12. Some believe these are different descriptions of the same event and point out the similarities and inconsistencies.

However, we cannot assume this event in Jesus' ministry just occurred once, and was recorded four times. We have no definitive way to know if they are describing the same event. Therefore, I am studying the narrative as presented with no reference to the other passages. Remember, Luke states in the opening of his gospel that he consulted other sources in writing his gospel.

Thus, Luke was rather careful as to how he recorded the events. He describes a banquet that in many ways is different from those in the other gospels regardless of the similarities. Therefore, we will study this text in isolation from the others. The purpose of Luke in recording this event is to reveal who Jesus is, and reveal the nature of a true, grateful heart. This purpose is that which is most important for our study.

Geography and Background Context

Jesus is attending a dinner given by a Pharisee named Simon. Most likely the dinner is occurring in Capernaum but could have been held in any of the villages of Galilee. The meal seems to occur not long after the centurion's servant was healed. It is possible Jesus is invited in order to trap him and make mockery of his ministry. As Jesus' popularity grows so grows controversy. Banquets at the homes of Pharisees were held in the presence of the courtyard. Visitors were allowed to stand or sit in the courtyard and listen to the conversation. Thus, we can infer that if

the Pharisee is attempting to entrap Jesus he wants to do so in the presence of the townspeople. The dining guests are reclining on their right arms, the usual posture for dining in ancient Israel. The scene would have been busy with servants moving to and fro from the table. This would explain the sinful woman's ability to approach Jesus before being recognized. Jesus accepted invitations to dine in the homes of religious leaders more than this one occasion. Why would anyone accept an invitation to a banquet in which the host is almost certainly hostile? Jesus took advantage of such settings to reveal the truth of God's love for all. Those perceived as sinful were especially in the mind of Jesus when he accepted. He most likely didn't accept to engage in conflict, but to express God's love to the listeners in the courtyard and around the table.

Historical, theological, and experiential reflection on Luke 7: 37-48

Luke 7: 37-38a

I once built a church on the Yucatan Peninsula in a poverty-stricken neighborhood. During lunch we retired to the home of a United Methodist family. The homes of all were similar. They were concrete hovels with bars on windows rather than glass. As I eagerly bit into a sandwich I heard commotion near the window. I turned and saw the children of the community pressing their faces against the bars to watch us eat. That was the most difficult sandwich I have eaten. The Pharisees and leaders of Capernaum must have thought little about the people in their courtyard, watching and listening during the banquet. I imagine the common people often felt overlooked, or were invisible to the "important" people at the table. The sinful woman came with a mission. She brought an alabaster jar of perfumed oil, most likely myrrh, with her. She had heard of Jesus and was determined to express love and gratitude for him. The oil was most often used for perfume, for anointing the dead, and anointing the heads of prophets and religious leaders. Perfumed oil was expensive. Using the oil to express her affection for Jesus would have been a great sacrifice. Judas Iscariot once complained about a woman anointing Jesus with such oil. Jesus rebuked him, for an expression of love and gratitude was of far greater value than money. The woman most likely is a former prostitute or adulterer. I use the word "former" because it is evident something has happened within her. It was something so great and beautiful she was willing to risk ridicule, rejection, or worse to thank Jesus.

When a text is translated from the original language into English it can often lose some of its emotional power. The word "sinful" used by Luke implies a detestable life. One scholar interprets the life of the sinful woman as "a miserable way of life." Jesus might have touched her life on a previous occasion, or she had heard him speak and act and witnessed his great love. She knew in her heart he would not turn her away. She was ready to leave her former life behind, for she witnessed the power of love and forgiveness in Jesus' ministry. Capernaum was Jesus' home, and most likely she heard him teach, or touch sinful lives, or both. Her emotion and tears reveal the depth of the love that drove her into the home of Simon. The narrative reads, "she stood behind him weeping." We can also witness humility in her love.

Human need can humble the proudest person. In last week's lesson the centurion humbled himself as he asked Jesus to heal his servant. I doubt this woman was proud. Her need for wholeness allowed her to engage in a risky act of love. It is definitely a humble woman who draws near to Jesus. She is standing behind Jesus as she weeps. This would have been the moment she was recognized by her host and the others as the "sinful" woman in Capernaum. Simon and the others would have bristled at her appearance. Remember, the touch of a sinful woman defiled a person. Those touched would have been unable to participate in religious rituals and functions. She is most likely a divorced woman. A woman could be divorced for any reason. Often if she failed to bear a male child she was divorced. But, she could receive a bill of divorce for most any reason. She could never remarry, though her husband could. If she had no family in the area, where would she go? How would she eat? No one wants a woman with the capability of defiling their home. Some women turned to prostitution to eat bread, or depended upon an unfaithful man to provide the most basic needs. We do not know the details of this woman's life. But, it was most likely a "most miserable life." If Jesus treated her as a worthy person, and loved her without condition, yes, she would weep. Jesus' words and actions would have been most strange to her, and most beautiful.

Has a need in your life ever driven you to engage in risky love? Why was it a risk? Can you remember a time when your need, or the need of another, gave you a deep sense of humility? In what way? Are there individuals "standing in the courtyard" of our society, feeling uninvited and as though they have nothing to contribute to the conversations in our culture? What can be done to bring them into the conversation? How can we best issue an invitation?

Luke 7: 38c-38d

A woman's hair was usually bound atop the head. A woman was expected to cover her head when in public. Some rabbis taught that an uncovered head was akin to being immodest and creating lust. On occasion a woman's hair was unbraided and loosened in public as part of a ritual designed to humiliate them for their adultery. It is interesting that the woman in our narrative has let her hair down. This was shameful in public. Yet, her need to lovingly wipe her tears from Jesus' feet was far more powerful than public shame. It is obvious that she doesn't care what others think. Love is in action; it is expressing affection so powerfully that cultural expectations are ignored. Some would consider her action foolish; Jesus considered it loving. She is lost in the wonder and power of love. It was customary for the host to ensure the servants washed the feet of his guests. We can infer from the host allowing Jesus' feet to remain unwashed that he was already beginning to treat Jesus with disregard. It appears the refusal to see that Jesus' feet were washed was an act of "putting Jesus in his place."

Everyone has their place in the narrative. Simon and the "important people in the city" are reclining in the most respected places. The uninvited are in the courtyard observing. The servants are busy walking to and fro in their service. Jesus is most likely not reclining in the area set aside for the respected. If Jesus was reclining in the most important area of the table his feet would certainly have been washed. The woman is standing behind Jesus. The two most humble loving

hearts are not in the high places; the proudest occupy them. Her tears are not a mere trickle down the cheek. The original language and tone of the narrative indicates she is almost sobbing. Some authorities on language state she is emitting a “shower of tears.” She is performing the task that should have been done by the servants. No one has asked her, or commanded her to wash Jesus’ feet. Again, she is doing so from a grateful, loving heart. She is also anointing his feet with her costly perfume. She is giving Jesus the respect and reverence due him in contrast to the host’s possible attempt to belittle Jesus in the eyes of the observing public.

Can you recall a situation in which you were driven by love? When your loving actions would have been unstoppable? Is there a moment in which you didn’t care what anyone thought, when you followed your heart, and above all Christ? Have you been so thankful you just “had to” express your thankfulness to Jesus?

Luke 7: 39

The preposition “if” is important in the text. “If Jesus was a prophet, and if he knew what kind of woman touched him” are words that question who Jesus really is. Prophets were on occasion anointed with oil. Either Jesus has a reputation for being a prophet, or the woman’s anointing of Jesus with the perfumed oil are affirming Jesus as a prophet of Israel. Simon doesn’t agree and is stating his dislike of the woman’s actions and the crowd’s belief; both declare Jesus to be a prophet. Indeed, Jesus was a prophet. Prophets were not simply the tellers of the future. They were those who perceived the culture through the eyes of God, and boldly declared God’s truth. Like Elijah and Elisha they might also perform miracles. Remember, Capernaum will later be cursed for its refusal to believe in Jesus. The phrase that if Jesus was a prophet “he would know what kind of woman this is” proves revealing. The Pharisee is correct that a prophet would certainly recognize sin. But, Jesus is not an ordinary prophet. Simon does not call the woman by name, instead he is stereotyping her as “one of those kind of women.” She has a name, and she has a story. The prophet Jesus is aware of her story, and that she is worth loving and redeeming. Simon also refers to her “touching Jesus.” Allowing a sinful woman to touch you was sinful itself. The person touched was defiled. Yet, in Jesus eyes she is not a sinful woman. She is a repentant woman, grateful for her forgiveness and loving in her response to it. In allowing the woman to wash his feet and anoint his head, Jesus is accepting her at a banquet to which she was not invited.

Has anyone ever made you feel unworthy of God’s love and forgiveness? Did you ever feel excluded for being the person you are? As a forgiven person, how do you express gratitude to God? Have there been occasions when we stereotyped people, or judged them without knowing their story? What would we do differently?

Luke 7: 40-43

After implying Jesus could not have been a prophet and that he had defiled himself by allowing a sinful woman to touch him, the Pharisee must have felt he accomplished his purpose in

discrediting Jesus in the eyes of the observers. However, Jesus always overcame such accusations with truth, and he does so in a parable.

In Vacation Bible School I learned a simple definition of a parable that has been useful throughout my Christian life. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Some of Jesus' parables may be hard for us to understand. We live in a western culture and we are studying a near eastern culture. There are differences in our perceptions of truth and our understanding of life. However, this parable is easy for anyone to understand. It is simple, short and to the point, and the point is inescapable. One man owed 500 denarii, a wage that would require a common laborer to work one and a half years. The other man owed 50. The man owing 50 possessed the ability to eventually pay his debt. However, the man owing 500 was forever locked into his debt. Interest would continually increase his debt, and he could not earn enough money to live and pay the debt. The narrative reads that neither man could pay at the time. They stand before their lender without a means of resolving their problem. Still, the man owing 50 denarii could eventually pay his debt. A means could be worked out in which he would live with some sacrifice, and save in order to pay his debt. Erasing his debt was very possible. However, for the man owing 500, his case appears hopeless. His family would eventually be sold into servitude as a means of payment. He is already imprisoned before any legal action. However, the creditor forgives both debts. Jesus turns to Simon and asks one pointed question. "Now which of them will love him more?"

Jesus was a master at asking a right question at the right time. With these eight words he has done so again. Notice that Jesus has quickly whittled down the issue to its most fundamental point. The story is about love. It isn't about who deserves to have the debt forgiven, or who can find the best means for payment. Jesus is asking who will be most grateful for the forgiveness. For, the one most grateful will be the one who loves most. Gratitude and love usually walk hand in hand. Jesus is inferring that both men will love the lender, for both are grateful. But, Jesus adds the word "more." He is implying there are measures of love. One can love more than another. He is asking his host who would love the creditor more. The answer requires no superior knowledge, just what we might call common sense. Simon knows the answer immediately, though he sounds almost reluctant in offering it. "I suppose the one who had the greater debt." The host cannot escape the answer. It is the only answer to the parable. Why does he not want to simply answer without hesitation? He knows that he has been entrapped by the truth.

Why do you think the Pharisee is somewhat uncomfortable answering? What do you think of his answer? How does the parable apply to your life?

Luke 7: 44-47

Jesus now compares and contrast the woman and the host. She is the one owing 500 denarii in the parable. Simon is forced to admit that she would be more grateful, but he is uncomfortable with the answer. His answer reveals he has been far less loving and gracious than her. It isn't their status, standing, or title that reveals who loves most. It is their actions. When perceived in

the light of love, Simon's actions pale when contrasted to the woman's. Jesus reminds him of all the woman has done to reveal her gratitude, and how little he has done. The crowd in the courtyard must have been astounded. First, they hear Jesus claim to know God has forgiven the woman. Who can know such a thing, except for God? On another occasion the same issue will arise. A man is lowered through a tiled roof into the presence of Jesus. Jesus will claim the man's sins are forgiven. The crowd will be dismayed, and the religious leaders irate. Secondly, the observers witness Jesus accepting and publicly endorsing her and her actions. In their culture, she has done everything wrong. In the eyes of Jesus, she has done everything right. Jesus has now revealed his ability to forgive sin, thus he is beginning to express his divine nature. Consequently, he is more than a prophet, for a prophet cannot forgive sin. It would prove too broad an assumption that the woman recognized Jesus' divinity, or even knew that he is a prophet. She just knows he has treated her as a person. He has accepted, loved, and declared her forgiven in the presence of the town's leaders and its common people. We should not leave this narrative without giving attention to Jesus question to Simon, "Do you see this woman?" Simon and most others would not have seen her true nature and heart. To most she is a sinful woman undeserving of any attention, and certainly undeserving of unconditional love. But, Jesus sees her for who she is. He knows her story. He knows who she has been and who she can be.

Does our gratitude emerge from believing being forgiven has made our life better, or believing it has given us our life? Is there a difference? How do we express gratitude daily for the forgiveness of God? How do we embody that gratitude when we interact with others?

Summary

We frequently speak of how amazing God is. However, we often forget that Jesus was often amazed at us. He could be amazed at our love, our faith, and our courage. In the prior lesson, the humble faith of the centurion amazed Jesus. In this narrative, the woman's gratitude and courageous love are amazing. The sinful woman acted in a most amazing manner. She risked public judgement and humiliation to express gratitude in love. Notice, the woman asked for nothing. It doesn't appear that she came to get something from Jesus. She already recognized his love and acceptance. No one else had treated the poor, sick, and forgotten like Jesus. And, no one else had cared for a woman shamed by her culture. True gratitude births great love. Gratitude helps us add the word "more" to our affection. Yes, we love. But, when grateful, we love "more."

Prayer

Almighty God, your love is beyond our description and imagination. We are thankful you have declared us worthy of your affection. We are most undeserving, yet you are most giving and forgiving. Teach us the depth of gratitude that drives us forward, toward the highest expressions of love and care. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Faith That Is Tested

Fall Quarter: Responding to God's Grace

Sunday school lesson for the week of November 3, 2019

By Dr. D. Craig Rikard

Lesson Scripture: II Corinthians 13: 1-11

Key Verse: II Corinthians 13:5

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless of course you fail the test?

Lesson Aim: To learn that each Christian must test themselves before judging another. To understand our ability to recognize God's truth is directly related to our own personal healthy relationship with Christ. To understand what the world considers Christian weakness is that which makes us strong.

Geography and other relevant background information for the text

Corinth is a large city in Greece of approximately 90,000 people, the second largest city in Greece. It is located about 50 miles west of Athens. Corinth and Athens are very different from one another. Athens prides itself on its Greek philosophy and education. Corinth is a busy commercial hub for Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Asians. It is not only a melting pot of commercial trade, it is also a city with a synthesis of religions. It was said that scholars were made in Athens, fortunes were made in Corinth. A large temple to Aphrodite stood in Corinth. Again, the religious tone of the city is rather eclectic. Corinth was a perfect city for Paul to evangelize, for the gospel could touch so many from so many parts of the world. Paul adhered to a missionary methodology. He would enter a city and preach in its synagogue where he was welcomed as a Jewish religious leader. He would then work in the tent-making guild in the city as a way of communicating the gospel with the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Eventually a family would take Paul in, and a home church would form. Paul would remain with that church until it was rooted in Christ, and a dependable leadership formed. Then, he would travel to the next city. Paul remained in Corinth for 18 months. These churches were Paul's children. He worried over them and maintained contact with him as a parent would a child. However, his absence gave rise to false teachers with claims far different from the teaching of Paul. When difficulty arose, if he could not visit, he would send an epistle addressing the issues with which they struggled, along with encouragement. The church he founded in Corinth consisted of both Gentile and Jewish Christians. It is important to remember that though the Jewish Christians possessed a familiarity with the Law and O.T. writings, most Gentiles were very unfamiliar with Jewish law and scripture. Imagine attempting to convert Gentiles to Christ as the fulfillment of the law of grace and love when they possessed no background in Judaism. They were totally dependent upon

Paul's teaching. Thus, Paul had to be sincere and believable. His character had to teach as potently as his words. It is too easy to overlook just how convincing and sincere Paul's presentation of the gospel had to be in order to win the Gentile converts. His personal faith had to demonstrate that the truth he spoke was valid and consistent with his personal life. Thus, Paul's personal integrity and the sincerity of the truth he taught at Corinth are important in understanding this text.

This text is not what one might call a "feel good" passage. It is text of warning, of concern, and of chastisement. A false teacher, or teachers, had visited Corinth after Paul's departure, claiming a superior knowledge of truth because of their Jewish heritage. They could claim superiority in knowledge over their Gentile listeners just for being Jewish. Paul would encounter such teachers throughout his ministry. Again, the Gentiles in particular were susceptible to believing these teachers. In concern, Paul writes a word of warning to them and also visits. Paul made three visits to Corinth and wrote four letters. The first and third letters are believed lost. In the New Testament canon, we have two of those. We have Paul's second letter and the fourth. The third letter was a strongly worded, stern letter that later caused Paul to bear some grief after writing it. We can sense Paul's pain in writing such a stern letter, for he loved the church at Corinth and never delighted in having to rebuke. Though Paul is often presented as an authoritarian apostle, a thorough reading of his epistles reveals a caring father in the faith who is pained when his children suffer. It is more accurate to say Paul was an emotional man. It is undeniable he was a genius with a superior intellect. When he felt anger, he deeply felt it. However, it is equally true that when his heart was broken, he felt the pain as deeply as anyone.

The difficulties Paul faced at Corinth were substantial. Though the Jewish community had the Torah, the Gentiles had little religious teaching akin to Judaism. Many Jews considered themselves superior to the Gentiles for having the Mosaic Law, and were certain to let the Gentile Christians know that Jesus, too, was Jewish. The Gentiles would have resented this. These "super Jewish apostles," as Paul would refer to them, would have believed a strict moral code of Jewish ethics and claimed a superior cultural superiority as Jews over the Gentiles. The Gentiles possessed a very loose, subjective code of ethics based on former beliefs in Roman gods like Aphrodite. In contrast, there were instances of incest, adultery, and other forms of sinful behavior common in Corinthian culture. The truth of grace was becoming lost in the legalism imposed by those Jews claiming superior authority over Paul. Paul had the task of forming these two into one church through the love of God in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, and he had done just that during his second missionary journey. However, many of the divisive elements reared their head in his absence. Paul's authority and calling were being called into question, requiring Paul to defend himself. Our letter of study is a statement in which Paul is preparing the way for a third visit to clarify who he is in Christ, and who they are as the church of Jesus. We must remember, such accusations against Paul not only hurt the faith, it hurt Paul personally for the Corinthian converts were his spiritual children, and the church his family. Still, above all, Paul would allow nothing to interfere or impede the true gospel of Jesus Christ entrusted to him.

This epistle was written to prepare the church for his third visit to them, to clarify his teaching, and reestablish his ministry and the truth of the gospel.

How do you think you would feel after spending 18 months giving yourself to others in love, only to have them question your motives when you were away?

Historical, theological, and experiential reflection on II Cor. 13:1-11

II Cor. 13:1-2

An ancient Jewish tradition required two witnesses in agreement to accuse a person of wrongdoing. (Deut. 19:15) From a positive perspective, Paul must be certain that it would prove difficult to find two witnesses to truthfully accuse him of being a false teacher. Though arrogant teachers are disrupting his flock, Paul is confident his character and upright living will prevail. From a negative perspective it is sad that Corinth cannot resolve this issue face to face, brother to brother. Using a more “legal proceeding” could mean that the church has reached a level of conflict that requires a legal solution. Exactly what is the source of their desire to discredit Paul? We are not given the specific reasons. However, remember that the Jewish Christians well remember Paul’s persecution of them. It is not unreasonable for false Jewish leaders seeking to discredit Paul to remind the flock of his former destructive persecution. From another perspective, we know power corrupts, and power also can create jealousy. Those opposing Paul might have thought, “Who is he to instruct us?” “Why should we follow his leading?” “Are we not as knowledgeable as him, after all we possess a strong Jewish heritage?” Again, we do not know the answers. Corinth has a history of ungodly behavior and hedonistic practices. Certainly, Paul is concerned that the false teachers are leading his flock back into the very lifestyle from which Jesus delivered them. Still, it is obvious Paul retains much of his spiritual authority and warns those leading others astray, and those participating, that he will take whatever strong action is necessary to rid them of the “sinful yeast” permeating the loaf and restore them to righteous living.

Do you think it is possible to have false teachers today? How would we recognize them? What would be the most Christ-like manner to deal with them? What can we do personally to ensure we are not easily led astray from basic Christian truth?

II Cor. 13:3-4

The false teachers and others at Corinth are claiming Christ does not speak through Paul. This one charge challenges the very credibility of Paul as an apostle. If Christ is not speaking through Paul all he has said and done is in vain. Paul is being asked to “prove” he is a legitimate voice for Christ. One of the great temptations in the Christian life is to attempt to “prove” our spirituality. Satan’s temptation of Jesus in the wilderness was an attempt to force Jesus to prove himself. Thus, the temptations are prefaced with the phrase, “If you are the son of God.” Satan then follows with a request that Jesus prove it. “Leap from the highest pinnacle of the temple, change the stones into bread . . .” We do not need to prove our faith in Christ. It is a faith lived naturally

through our own personality, allowing Christ to work through us in day to day life. The presence of Christ is evident in each of us through our character. Paul must not fall into this trap, and, he doesn't. Paul is going to allow the brash arrogance of the false leaders to stand in contrast to his natural gentle, compassionate faith. On occasion, Paul can exert strength when necessary. However, Paul can also exert gentleness and love. Paul could not have written such a powerful chapter if he himself did not live in such a manner. Therefore, the brash witness of the false leadership will confront the gentle, loving apostle, and Paul is confident the love of Jesus will prove the greater power. Perhaps, the power-hungry "super teachers" interpret gentleness and kindness as attributes of weakness. Even today, in the competitive corporate world, gentleness, kindness, understanding, and patience are not always understood as the type of attributes that move one ahead in the chain of power. However, Paul does not apologize for his Christ-like behavior. Yes, compassion, love, patience and the refusal to fight violence with violence allowed Jesus to be taken to the cross and killed. Paul is unafraid to identify his own such behaviors as the "weakness of Jesus in him." However, Paul knew that goodness cannot be conquered. Life cannot conquer death, darkness cannot conquer light, compassion cannot conquer cruelty, and impatient anger cannot conquer patient love. What appear to be weak attributes of Jesus take on tremendous power through the resurrection, for they are proven to be "eternal attributes."

How can it be destructive or unhealthy to try to "prove one's Christianity?" What would be our response if someone said to us, "Prove you are a Christian?" How can others see our Christianity without intentionally trying to prove we are Christians?"

II Cor. 13:5-6

Jesus taught that before a person can judge another they must examine their own life. In Luke 6:41 Jesus asks, "Why do you look for the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" The false apostles and Corinthians who have been led astray have been looking at Paul through their own magnifying glass; now Paul turns that glass into a mirror into which they must look at themselves. They need no magnifying glass to look for specks; the plank in their own eye is large and evident and can easily be seen with a look in a mirror.

None of us are perfect. The sin nature lingers and old desires and habits are not yet fully put to death. Still, a far greater power indwells us. The Christian can attest to Jesus living within and through them. Though the presence of Christ can overpower our weak sinful nature, we must allow him to do so. Our hearts must yield to the indwelling Christ in order to overcome the sin within us. Paul is asking the Corinthians, "Is it Christ dwelling in you, and the false teachers, or is the sinful nature?" "Does your behavior reflect Christ or your own pride and sin?" In Romans 7:21 Paul writes, "Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Paul clearly describes the war each of us fight each day between

sin and our new life in Christ. However, Paul is clear: Christ is the one who delivers us from the sinful life. Thus, Paul reminds the Corinthians, “You have Christ within you.” If we fail the test, it is because we have not yielded to the power of Christ within. How do we know we have passed or failed? Do our behaviors and attitudes reflect Jesus, or the self? The same test must be put to the false apostles. When faced with this test the false apostles fail, as do the wayward Corinthians rebelling against Paul. Paul is unafraid to test himself in this manner. He clearly passes. He says, “You will discover that I have not failed the test.”

Why do you think Jesus considered it imperative that we examine our own life and faith prior to judging another? What are the negative consequences of judging another without self-examination? Should self-examination be a daily discipline? If so, why?

II Cor. 13:7-9

In paraphrase, Paul is asserting a powerful testament to God’s truth. He is saying, do not depend on others enacting the truth for you, or doing so perfectly. Do not live the truth based on how others live. Live the truth because it is the truth! People can always let us down, or fail on occasion. But truth is eternal and demands our allegiance.

I was once preaching a sermon during a stewardship campaign and noticed the material continued to promise that if people would give, their life would prove more fulfilling, which, by the way, is true. However, it struck me that people should give for no other reason than it is the right thing to do. We tell the truth because it is the right thing to do. We love because it is the right thing to do. We forgive because it is the right thing to do, even if no other person does so. Perhaps the highest form of Christian morality is when we are determined to do the right thing because God has declared it is the right thing.

Would we do the right thing if there were no reward? Would we do the right thing if no one else followed? What is the danger of determining what is right by following others?

II Cor. 13:10-11

In closing, we hear Paul’s tender gentleness. He does not wish to arrive and be forced to deal harshly with them for abandoning his teaching in Christ. He longs to find a church, not just standing on their own legs, but standing in the power of Christ, unshakable and strong.

Summary

Not all biblical texts are pleasant to read, or even uplifting. Many challenge, warn, and chastise. Following Jesus has never been offered as an easy life. Indeed, the way can be narrow. The life Jesus offers is meaningful, beautiful, and rewarding. However, in our humanity we often struggle in our attempt to imitate Christ, and especially in our attempts to live in harmony with others, even other Christians. We need texts like II Cor. 13 to remind us that even Paul struggled against issues like arrogance, falsehood, false accusation, etc. This list could prove long. However, Paul and scripture consistently remind us that we are to take the high road of Christian behavior.

Christ is indeed in each of us and the ability to live as he lived is possible; it is not always easy, but is always possible.

Prayer

Almighty God, we are beset on every side by temptations and trials. Yet, we affirm our faith in the power of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit within us. Teach us to hear the divine voice and courageously follow that voice, even if we do so in solitude. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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

But Grace said ...

PATHWAY TO HIS PRESENCE

B.J. FUNK

My friend and I sat across from one another eating pizza when the subject of tips came up. We both said we always give a 20 percent tip. We discussed how unfortunate it was to have a waiter or waitress work so hard for a table of fifteen or more and then just receive a two dollar tip. That's their pay. Tips are not just some extra bonus for a hard-working waiter. That's his pay.

"Most people simply don't realize that these waiters and waitresses count on the tip for their salary," I said. "They hardly make anything."

I mentioned how nice it had been when, a few nights before, a restaurant placed a suggestion for tips on the bill. There was a 10 percent tip, a 15, and then a 20 percent.

We agreed that we wished all restaurants did that.

She said, "If I get really good service, I might even give more than 20 percent."

I liked the way our conversation was going. We were together in this "tip thing." But, suddenly my friend threw in a thought that grabbed my heart and started squeezing. The squeeze was too hard. Uncomfortable.

"If the waiter or waitress has an attitude, I also give 20 percent."

"A waitress with an attitude?" I asked.

"Yes. I usually hand them the 20 percent tip, thank them for their service, and tell them I am sorry for whatever they are going through that makes them seem so unhappy."

Wow! Tipping even an attitude?

Grace began to stir inside as I listened to my friend. To be honest, I had never thought of tipping a waitress with an attitude. I sat there with my mouth open, a new idea swimming through my head. No one wants to tip a waitress who has been hard to deal with, difficult, ornery, and lazy. I would probably give a small tip, if indeed I tipped her at all.

But Grace softly said, “You just described yourself, BJ. You, too, have been hard to deal with, difficult, ornery, and lazy. But even on your worst days, I always make sure you get good tips anyway, through love, kindness and understanding.”

I felt limp.

Completely convicted, my heart began listening to God’s thoughts. It was pretty clear. As God gives so much to me, even on my worst days, I should go and do likewise to a world filled with hurting people. I don’t have to lecture them on being a better waitress or waiter. It is the “Do unto others as you would have them do unto us” command in real life. I am called to give grace, even if someone is not nice to me, just as grace has been given to me even on my worst days.

Grace is the work of the kingdom of God. I am a child of God’s kingdom. Therefore, I am to go and do likewise, *especially* if the other person has done nothing to deserve it.

I could hardly wait to get an attitude waiter at the next restaurant so that I could show him or her grace.

The Rev. B.J. Funk is associate pastor of Central UMC in Fitzgerald. Email Rev. Funk at bjfunk@bellsouth.net.

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Retired Clergy Birthdays – October 2019

- 10/01 – David Haygood, Sr.: 100 Lindsey Barron Dr., Apt. 215; Newnan, GA 30263
- 10/01 – E. Warren Williams: 761 Myna Dr., Unit 7084; Ellijay, GA 30540
- 10/01 – Edwin Willis: 4847 NE Rocky Ford Rd.; Madison, FL 32340
- 10/02 – Ross Tracy: 3800 Shamrock Dr.; Charlotte, NC 28215
- 10/04 – Riley Middleton, Jr.: 5002 St. Francis Ave.; Columbus, GA 31904
- 10/05 – Earl Seckinger: PO Box 766; Springfield, GA 31329
- 10/05 – J.W. Womble: 2935 Cherokee St.; Waycross, GA 31503
- 10/08 – Bill Dupree: 804 Moore Dr.; Americus, GA 31709
- 10/09 – Karen Kilhefner: 7 Mistletoe Court; Savannah, GA 31419
- 10/10 – Hugh Baxter: 1272 Smith Bedgood Rd.; Harrison, GA 31035
- 10/11 – Vance Riggins: 101 Biltmore Dr.; Guyton, GA 31312
- 10/11 – Bob Shell: 210 Castlegate Rd.; Macon, GA 31210
- 10/13 – Bill Neely: 149 O’Connor Drive NW; Milledgeville, GA 31061
- 10/14 – Jairo Franco: Calle 1a Sur #42a 18 Barrio la Ponderosa; Bogota, Colombia
- 10/15 – James Aycock, Jr.: 801 Moore Dr.; Americus, GA 31709

10/16 – John Bacher: 400 South Main Ave. 106; Pine Mountain, GA 31822
10/18 – Madison Morgan: 599 Cloyo-Kildare Rd.; Cloyo, GA 31303
10/19 – Billy Oliver: 135 Hines Terrace, Macon, GA 31204
10/20 – Doug Holden: PO Box 20305; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
10/21 – Stanley Harrell: 319 Crescent Road; Griffin, GA 30224
10/23 – John Brodess: 803 Moore Drive; Americus, GA 31709
10/23 – Frank Danner: 1415 Sunrise Ave.; Moultrie, GA 31768
10/24 – James Duke, Jr.: 102 Clarksville Ct.; Macon, GA 31210
10/24 – Evelyn Duvall: 10502 Regal View Loop; Clermont, FL 34711
10/24 – Carl Howard: 154 Ridgeland Dr.; Valdosta, GA 31602
10/24 – Willis Moore: 3077 Brook Dr.; Decatur, GA 30033-3937
10/25 – Gene Cochran: 4707 120th Blvd.; Lubbock, TX 79424
10/25 – Martin Loyley: 1544 Harris Ridge Rd.; Young Harris, GA 30582
10/25 – Gil Tripp: 1203 Rose Ave.; Americus, GA 31709
10/27 – Bill Jackson-Adams: 17 Lands End Dr.; Greensboro, NC 27408

Scripture Readings – Oct. 15

Oct. 20

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 31:27-34

Psalm 119:97-104, or Psalm 19 (UMH 75)

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Luke 18:1-8

Oct. 27

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Joel 2:23-32

Psalm 65 (UMH 789)

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Luke 18:9-14

Nov. 3

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

Psalm 119:137-144 (UMH 840)

Isaiah 1:10-18

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

Luke 19:1-10

Events in the South Georgia Conference – 10/15/2019 edition

UMW Annual Meeting – Oct. 19

The 2019 South Georgia UMW Annual Meeting will be held Saturday, Oct. 19 in Columbus, Ga.

Eagles' Fall Retreat – Oct. 21-23

You are invited to join the Eagles, the retired clergy of the South Georgia Conference, for three wonderful days at beautiful Epworth By The Sea as they meet to sing together, enjoy great programs, host an auction of members' creations, share meals in the dining hall, and close on Wednesday with a service for those whom we have lost the previous year. The names of those who have passed away will be read under the Live Oak trees with the ringing of the bell for each name. It is a most holy and moving moment for all Eagles. This year's keynote speaker is Rev. Dr. Don Adams. The dates will be October 21-23. The retreat begins on Monday afternoon with registration beginning at 3 pm. There is a special rate at Epworth for all Eagles.

Lay Speaking Class (Basic), Waycross – Oct. 25-26

A lay speaker is a professing member of a local church who is ready and desirous to serve the Church, and who is well informed on and committed to the Scriptures and the doctrine, heritage, organization, and life of The United Methodist Church. A lay speaker has completed the required training courses in lay speaking and has been approved by a district or annual conference committee on lay speaking. *Lay speakers serve the local church by witnessing to the Christian faith through spoken communication, church and community leadership, and caregiving ministries.* When certified, the lay speaker may conduct services of worship, preach, and lead study sessions as requested by the pastor or the district superintendent. Registration fee for the class is \$25. This fee covers all materials and lunch on Saturday.

Registration: www.sgaumc.org/layspeakertraining

ERT Basic & Advanced Trainings, Savannah – Oct. 26

Early Response Team (ERT) trainings will be held Saturday, Oct. 26 at Isle of Hope United Methodist Church in Savannah. Early Response Team (ERT) Training helps equip individuals and teams to respond in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. The cost for the training is \$25 per participant. At the training, participants will receive an ERT training manual and, upon completing the course, will receive an UMCOR ID Badge and a conference ERT t-shirt. Lunch is provided. An UMCOR background check is required before receiving a badge. Information for submitting background checks will be sent to participants. [More information](#) | [Register](#)

UMW Sunday in Purple – Oct. 27

Sunday in Purple, sponsored by South Georgia's United Methodist Women, is a day to focus on increasing awareness of domestic violence in the United States and to be in solidarity with our sisters in South America where domestic violence often involves horrific murders. October is domestic violence awareness month in the U.S., and purple is its color. You are encouraged to wear something purple on Sunday, Oct. 27 (a ribbon or other item), take a photo, and send it to cybanks1946@gmail.com, or text it to 229-868-0381. Get your congregation to

participate! Ask your pastor to include a special prayer for domestic violence victims and those trying to combat it. [Download a bulletin insert.](#)

Lay Speaking Class (Advanced), Statesboro – Nov. 1-2

A lay speaker is a professing member of a local church who is ready and desirous to serve the Church, and who is well informed on and committed to the Scriptures and the doctrine, heritage, organization, and life of The United Methodist Church. A lay speaker has completed the required training courses in lay speaking and has been approved by a district or annual conference committee on lay speaking. *Lay speakers serve the local church by witnessing to the Christian faith through spoken communication, church and community leadership, and caregiving ministries.* When certified, the lay speaker may conduct services of worship, preach, and lead study sessions as requested by the pastor or the district superintendent. Registration fee for the class is \$25. This fee covers all materials and lunch on Saturday.

Registration: www.sgaumc.org/layspeakertraining

Wesley Glen's Golf Tournament – Nov. 4

One game of golf can make a big difference! Tee off at noon at the beautiful Brickyard Golf Club in Macon to support Wesley Glen Ministries. Lunch is provided and you're guaranteed to have a great afternoon! www.wesleyglenministries.com

Wesleyan College Sunday – Nov. 10

Each local United Methodist Church in South Georgia is encouraged to take up a special offering to support the ministry of Wesleyan College in Macon. To learn more about Wesleyan College, visit www.wesleyancollege.edu.

Lay Speaking Class (Advanced), Waycross – Nov. 15-16

A lay speaker is a professing member of a local church who is ready and desirous to serve the Church, and who is well informed on and committed to the Scriptures and the doctrine, heritage, organization, and life of The United Methodist Church. A lay speaker has completed the required training courses in lay speaking and has been approved by a district or annual conference committee on lay speaking. *Lay speakers serve the local church by witnessing to the Christian faith through spoken communication, church and community leadership, and caregiving ministries.* When certified, the lay speaker may conduct services of worship, preach, and lead study sessions as requested by the pastor or the district superintendent. Registration fee for the class is \$25. This fee covers all materials and lunch on Saturday.

Registration: www.sgaumc.org/layspeakertraining

UMVIM Team Leader Training – Nov. 16

Have you been on a mission journey and would you like to take others to a destination to serve? Have you led teams before and are you interested in sharing your experiences in other local churches to help them engage in mission opportunities both home and abroad by training team leaders? This training is designed for all who are interested in learning more about leadership

and opportunities in missions. The UMVIM Team Leader Training will be held Saturday, Nov. 16 from 9:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. at Pittman Park UMC in Statesboro. The cost is \$10 per person, which includes materials and lunch. [Register here](#). If your church would be interested in hosting an UMVIM training or for additional information, contact Dr. Gene Barber at hbarber781@bellsouth.net.

SEJ Clergywomen's Retreat – Nov. 18-21

Calling all SEJ Clergywomen! Register now for Uncharted: Adventuring the Wilderness with God, Nov. 18-21, 2019, in Jacksonville, Fla. Registration: \$225; At-the-Door: \$250. More information and registration: www.unchartedconference2019.com/

Encounter Youth Retreat – Nov. 22-24

Encounter is a weekend retreat designed for 6th - 12th grade students where everyone will ENCOUNTER God, and each in a very unique way. This retreat will offer passionate worship, relevant Bible study and a meaningful time with other teens at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. [Click here for more information](#). Online registration is now **OPEN**. [Click here for group registration](#).

United Methodist Student Day – Nov. 24

The United Methodist Student Day Special Sunday Offering helps provide funds for scholarships and loans for United Methodist students. Student Day gifts make a real difference for those who hope to attend college. Ninety percent (90%) of the offering goes toward funding the many scholarships and loans administered by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (www.gbhem.org) and ten percent (10%) stays within our state and goes to Georgia UM-related schools for merit scholarships. Contact the Georgia Commission on Higher Education and Collegiate Ministry (770-854-7283 or www.umcommission.org) or [click here for more information and promotional materials](#).