

## **SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – MARCH 16 EDITION**

### **Thomasville First UMC's Giving Garden grows food, friendships**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

Where an empty, abandoned house once stood now grows a lush, vibrant garden, full of life.

Sitting in the heart of downtown Thomasville, Thomasville First United Methodist Church's neighbors are businesses, other churches, and restaurants. With only convenience stores and dollar stores nearby, it's in what some would call a "food desert."

"For people living near the church, there might not be super easy access to fresh produce," said Drew West, Thomasville First UMC's director of youth and Christian outreach.

That's why, after returning home with an idea from a 2019 mission trip to Nashville, Tenn., West and other church members decided to turn the small plot of land into a garden.

Called the "Giving Garden," the idea behind Thomasville First UMC's garden is to give away what's grown via a weekly pay-what-you-can market. Those who aren't able to pay aren't turned away, West said. Other produce is regularly donated to Rescue Mission Ministries, a local ministry that serves meals to those experiencing food insecurity and homelessness.

While it's a fun hobby, the garden is much more than that, West said.

"We've tried to look at what we have and how those things can be used to bless other people," he said. "I think, so often, it's easier to see the challenges and the things we don't have, especially when it comes to ministry, but we can look at the resources we already have and how to maximize those."

While the lot wasn't exactly fertile farmland, it was convenient to the church and available. By building raised beds, bringing in truckloads of good soil, installing an irrigation system, and conducting regular soil testing, the garden has produced abundant harvests. Since really ramping up last summer, volunteers have grown okra, yellow squash, and cucumbers in the summer and collards, kale, and garlic in the fall and winter.

A love of gardening initially drew church member Jason Prothro to volunteer his time to the Giving Garden. He also appreciates that the garden beautifies the area while giving back to the community.

"To me, it's really using what God gave us: the soil, the rain, all of His creation and what He gave us to contribute to the community to be able to give people a fresh, healthy choice of food," he said.

The Giving Garden isn't just about fresh food. West says the congregation hopes the garden helps it develop deeper relationships with those who live and work in the community.

"We've always wanted it to be a way into the community that's closest to our church, getting to know people through the markets and such," West said. "Our goal is to really get to know the folks around our church and build relationships and bless them."

Prothro, one of about a handful of year-round garden volunteers, helps tend the garden and keep it maintained. A lifelong gardening enthusiast turned agricultural researcher, he has a few tips for any congregation interested in starting its own garden.

"You can almost make anywhere that has sunlight a garden with raised beds. We've made that work for us," he said. "The site we're on used to have a house on it. It's not that great for gardens. The soil is hard. But we've made it work with raised beds and soil, and it's been successful. So, don't let the site scare you away; you can make it work. Have fun with it and enjoy it."

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## **South Georgia funds being used for mission and ministry in North Katanga**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

New roofs. Empowerment trainings. Rebuilt churches.

That's how some of the \$60,000 in mission funds sent to the North Katanga Annual Conference from the South Georgia Annual Conference is being used for mission and ministry.

"It is true love in action," said Rev. Bomboko Kakese, senior pastor of North Katanga's Dean Scott local church, where he is in charge of plastering the assistant pastor's parsonage.

Thanks to South Georgia's support and partnership, he says, the church's assistant pastor will live in a clean and spacious house behind the church.

Last year, the South Georgia Annual Conference [approved the reallocation of \\$60,000 in designated reserve funds](#) to support several ministries in the North Katanga Annual Conference in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

In a recent report, North Katanga Annual Conference leaders updated South Georgia Conference leaders on the status of the five ministries and projects being supported by the funds.

So far, the North Katanga United Methodist Women have held empowerment trainings for women and young adults in eight districts. This month, women's leadership training conferences will be held in 15 additional districts in North Katanga.

Church development is another major goal of the program. Hundreds of bags of cement and sheets of metal roofing have been purchased to help build and reconstruct local churches in the North Katanga Conference. One congregation in Kamina ville received 350 bags of cement and was able to continue constructing its church.

“It is a joy to rebuild the church in Tenke,” said Maman Marie Jose, chairwoman of the United Methodist Women in the Tenke District, who explained that the church was being rebuilt after having collapsed under heavy rains.

And at Kamisamba Farm, they’re using funds to train farmers from different communities on crop production, animal husbandry, marketing, and more. The farm is helping improve production, nutrition, sustainability, and conservation of natural resources.

“On behalf of the entire staff of Kamisamba and North Katanga folks, we really want to thank the South Georgia Conference for the gift,” said Lorraine Charinda, missionary, agriculturist, and Rural Economic Development Specialist for Global Ministries. “It comes from the deepest part of our hearts and we ask God to bless you abundantly from where you have taken. We promise to be good shepherds of the funds and put it to good use.”

Allison Lindsey, Director of Connectional Ministries and one of a six-member team who traveled to the North Katanga Annual Conference in 2019 to explore a partnership between the two conferences, also gave thanks to South Georgia United Methodists.

“God is so good, and it is exciting to see our gifts being transformed into mission and ministry,” she said. “The churches in the North Katanga Annual Conference continue to grow and our partnership will bless both of our annual conferences. Equipping and empowering the women and church leaders builds a strong foundation from which to share salvation and living hope in Jesus Christ throughout this region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Thank you, South Georgia!”

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### **Join today's “Alive Together at the Table” conversation**

Join us today at noon or 5:30 p.m. as we gather around a virtual table for a time of reflection, conversation, and connection. We'll be talking with other South Georgia people about things that matter to South Georgia. We can't wait to see you! [Register](#)

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### **United Methodist Women to gather virtually for fellowship and spiritual growth**

You are invited to "Come to the Table for Justice & Hope" for this year's annual UMW Spiritual Growth Retreat. This weekend, March 19-20, South Georgia's United Methodist Women will gather at the virtual table to explore the question: how do Christian women stand firm in faith and witness in today's chaotic world?

This year's speakers are Rev. Earnestine Campbell, senior pastor of Epworth UMC in Columbus, Rev. Christy Bandy, senior pastor of Cairo First UMC, and Bishop R. Lawson Bryan, episcopal leader of the South Georgia Annual Conference. [More information](#)

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## High five and five fruitful practices

### OUR CONNECTION MATTERS

ALLISON LINDSEY

*"No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:4-5*

I have spring fever! As I write this outside in the breezy 70-degree warmth of the sun, I am beginning to see buds on my fig trees open up, displaying small green leaves, and I anticipate the fruit we will enjoy in the months ahead.

The image of the vineyard Jesus shares in John 15 is rooted in the foundation and the connection of bearing kingdom fruit. First, we remain in Christ (the vine) and Christ works in us and through us to bear fruit and be a witness in this world. There is another word I tune into in this scripture: branches. It is plural and certainly applies to each of us individually as Christians, but what if we visualize our local churches being branches and other conferences throughout our connection making up these branches. The vine connects us all and enables and empowers us to bear fruit both individually and collectively!

Highlighting and sharing the fruit our churches are bearing inspires me. In this edition of the *Advocate*, Kara Witherow brings us [an update](#) from our partnership with the North Katanga Annual Conference and how their churches are also bearing much fruit. The funds South Georgia allocated are being used for mission and ministry. How exciting it is to see the impact and the fruit this generosity is bearing!

As I think about kingdom fruit, this brought to mind Bishop Robert Schnase's book, [Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations](#). Reflecting on my two trips to the Congo and witnessing the fruit of this ministry, I want to take a moment to share a few thoughts around the five practices from this book:

- **Radical Hospitality:** [Those from South Georgia who were part of the 2019 team\\* to the Congo](#) will enthusiastically share the radical hospitality found in all the places we visited in the North Katanga Conference. Crowds gathered in each location, and the very best

was prepared for us everywhere we went. It truly is a humbling experience to feel so welcomed and embraced. (Team members: Nita Crump, Allison Lindsey, Paula Lewis, Christi Bandy, Joseph Carter, Lee Pettis.)

- **Passionate Worship:** While in the Congo I saw firsthand how the music and the choirs of the different churches are an incredible part of every worship experience. Singing and dancing, passionate preaching, and responding to God's word highlights the energy. And the places of worship are packed with children peering in all the windows and doorways to be part of what is happening within. The money you provided for church development is creating and improving spaces for worship and ministry.
- **Intentional Faith Development:** In [Kara's article](#), you will read about the training that has been developed to pour into and empower women. Our partnership made this possible. The North Katanga Conference is also very intentional with their church plant model, which I feel models John Wesley's movement in social holiness. When they begin to establish a church, they build a water well to meet the greatest need in the areas. As people travel for miles to collect clean drinking water, they see the cross and flame and begin to ask who the Methodists are who are meeting these needs. Then the Living Water is shared with the people. I invited you to watch this short clip from an interview with Bishop Mande Muyombo, the resident Bishop in North Katanga, as he shared how they pave the way for the Holy Spirit to do the work. [Watch here](#)
- **Risk-Taking Mission and Service:** The creativity for innovative ministry in the North Katanga Conference is inspiring. A few examples of this that South Georgia is partnering to make possible is the development of fish ponds at the Kamisamba Farm for training and sustainable food sources and the Kamina Children's Home. The Children's Home repurposed their school building for a business center the youth there manage. These youth came there as children but as young adults are learning about entrepreneurship and transitioning to living on their own. We are helping to make this happen!
- **Extravagant Generosity:** The commitment and service of the leaders and members of the churches in North Katanga is indeed extravagant. They give of their time and talent in sharing the good news of the gospel, they practice social holiness, and they even make their own bricks to build their churches. I am thankful also for the extravagant generosity of our Conference in the funds given through this partnership. It is truly having an impact as we are Alive Together in Christ!

High five to these missions and ministries in the Congo for the many ways they – just like each of us – have pivoted and continued to bear fruit during a time of pandemic to be the church living out these five practices.

You, South Georgia, are a vital part of this vineyard in the North Katanga Annual Conference. We are all branches connected to the vine, and together we are bearing fruit and building the

kingdom both here in South Georgia and in North Katanga. We are living out being Alive Together At The Table. What a great big table!

[The five practices in Bishop Schnase's book](#) provide a framework to evaluate where we see fruit in our own lives, our ministry setting, our local church, and beyond. Where do you see kingdom fruit?

One day when we are finally together again, I'm giving you a great big high five!

*Allison Lindsey is the director of Connectional Ministries. She has a passion for the local church and its people. Contact her at [allison@sgaumc.com](mailto:allison@sgaumc.com).*

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### **Camp Connect filling up quickly, register today**

Camp is back! And this time, with a twist. With Epworth By The Sea remaining closed to the public for the 2021 summer, [Camp Connect](#) is packing up and moving 18 miles away to Camp Jekyll on Jekyll Island! Registration is **now open** for all six camps (Bridge Camp, High School Camp, two Middle School Camps and two Elementary Camps). We can't wait to see you on Jekyll Island this summer for a once-in-a-Camp-Connect experience! [More information](#) | [Registration](#)

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### **College students needed! Apply to be a camp counselor this summer**

Applications are now being accepted for the 2021 [Camp Connect](#) Summer Leadership Team. Applications are open to college students who have completed at least one year of college. The Leadership Team will commit to nine weeks of camping ministry which will include serving at high school, middle school, and elementary camps. These camp counselors will minister to hundreds of youth and children throughout the summer while making Christian friendships with other staff members that last a lifetime.

For more information, [click here](#) or contact Suzanne Akins, Camp Director, at (912) 638-8626 ext. 107 or by email at [suzanne@sgaumc.com](mailto:suzanne@sgaumc.com).

Follow Camp Connect on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/CampConnectUMC](https://www.facebook.com/CampConnectUMC).

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### **Prophet of Wisdom**

**Spring Quarter: Prophets Faithful To God's Covenant**  
**Unit 1: Faithful Prophets**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of March 21, 2021**  
**By Dr. Hal Brady**

**Lesson Scripture: 2 Kings 22:14-20**

**Key Verse: 2 Kings 22:19**

**Lesson Aims**

1. Identify the two major parts of Huldah's prophetic message.
2. Explain the key verse (2 Kings 22:19) in light of the text's spiritual principles.
3. Pray for our nation's leaders that they will seek the common good, one leader each day for the next week.

The events recorded in this week's scripture lesson took place in the days of Josiah, king of Judah (reigned 640-609 BC). He was a godly king known for his tireless efforts to purify Judah's worship and the temple.

To understand this lesson, we need to know that during the years preceding Josiah's rise to the throne, the kings of Judah had wavered between devotion to the Lord and idols. Josiah's great grandfather Hezekiah (reigned 724-675 BC) had instituted a set of religious reforms in Judah that were intended to restore proper worship of the Lord (2 Chronicles 29-31). However, gross unfaithfulness to the God of Israel characterized the reign of Hezekiah's son Manasseh (694-642 BC). He rebuilt pagan worship shrines that his father had destroyed. Manasseh encouraged worship of the Baals as well as that of the sun, moon, and stars (2 Kings 23:11). Manasseh went so far as to offer his son in child sacrifice and built pagan altars within the Lord's temple itself. Toward the end of his reign, Manasseh repented of his sin (2 Chronicles 33:10-17). But his former evil contributed directly in Judah's ultimate destruction and exile (example, 2 Kings 21:10-16; 23:26).

Then Josiah's father, Amon (reigned 642-640 BC), returned to the idolatry that characterized the earlier years of Manasseh. King Amon was assassinated in a palace coup after a two-year reign, and the "people of the lord" made his 8-year-old son Josiah king in his place (2 Kings 21:19-26, 2 Chronicles 33:20-25).

Apparently, as a boy, Josiah was influenced by godly advisers among Judah's aristocracy. Some are named in today's text. Other godly contemporaries included well-known prophets. Zephaniah, a descendant of King Hezekiah, prophesied during the reign of Josiah (Zephaniah 1:1). Jeremiah's prophetic ministry began in the thirteenth year of Josiah (Jeremiah 1:1-2), five years before the event of today's lesson. The point is that their ministries were an impetus in Josiah's reforms. The result was that when Josiah was 16 years old, "he began to seek the God of his father David" (2 Chronicles 34:3). And in the twelfth year of Josiah's reign, he began to purge the land of pagan idols and shrines (2 Chronicles 34:3-7).

About six years later, King Josiah ordered a renovation of the temple. The temple was, for the Jewish people, the symbol, the very incarnation of religion. Thus, in restoring the temple, Josiah was seeking to restore the religion that was enshrined in it. And we would do well in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to apply ourselves to a similar task, to the rebuilding of religion into the structure of our society.

But while in the process of renovating the temple, the Book of the Law was found within the temple. Scholars disagree regarding the exact identity of the book that was found. Some believe it was a copy of the entire Law of Moses (the first five books of the Old Testament, known as the Pentateuch). Others believe it was only the book of Deuteronomy or some portion of it. Sometimes in the previous decades during the reign of wicked Manasseh and Amon, the Book of the Law had been lost and forgotten. Or perhaps, we are told that idolatrous priests intentionally “misplaced” it in order to hide the guilt of their own waywardness.

When Shaphan, the king’s secretary, reported to Josiah on the progress of the repair project and also alerted him to the discovery of the book, Josiah’s reaction was one of great distress to what he had read from that book (see 2 Kings 22:11). The book detailed the punishment Israel would suffer if the people failed to keep the covenant.

These curses would culminate in exile from the land (Deuteronomy 29:25-28). Realizing the guilt of Judah, Josiah sent a delegation to inquire of the Lord concerning the wrath that the king feared would soon be visited on him and his kingdom (II Kings 22:12-13). A description of the nature of that delegation is how today’s lesson scripture begins.

### **A Word Sought**

#### **2 Kings 22:14**

At this point, we see the forming of a delegation. This is the first action taken as a result of King Josiah’s order in 2 Kings 22:12-13. King Josiah called “Hilkiah” the high priest, “Ahikam” son of the royal secretary, “Akbor” official in Josiah’s court, “Shaphan” the royal secretary and “Asaiah” the king’s attendant, to go and inquire of the Lord about what is written in this Book found in the temple concerning the king and the people of Judah.

Knowing that their ancestors had not obeyed the Book’s dictates and hence had brought the Book’s covenant curses upon themselves, Josiah is portrayed as one who is willing to seek the counsel of the prophets.

In this instance, the prophetic word comes from a previously unknown prophetess named Huldah. Huldah appears elsewhere only in the parallel account to this event in Chronicles 34:22-28. Nothing more is known about her except what is given in these two accounts. However, the delegation felt no hesitation in coming to Huldah.

Although female prophets in Israel were rarer than male prophets, Huldah's role is not without precedent in the Old Testament. Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), and the unnamed wife of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:3) precede her in being designated "prophet."

A question for us is, where do we go for wisdom? When we face change, do we reinforce our negative thinking by consulting with cynics of like mind, or do we, like the delegation, seek wisdom from the Lord.

## **A Word for Jerusalem**

### **2 Kings 22:15-17**

Huldah confirms Josiah's fears, pronouncing judgment upon Jerusalem and its inhabitants because they have been disloyal to God and have served idols. The anger of the Lord will be kindled against Jerusalem ("this place") and its inhabitants (meaning the citizens of Judah), says Huldah, and it will not be quenched.

Huldah begins her response with the prophetic formula "this is what the Lord...says." Her use of this phrase, which occurs more than 500 times in the Old Testament, marks her as a true prophet. Adding "the God of Israel" emphasized the Lord's sovereignty over the nation and his relationship to it. God chose to associate himself with Israel specifically. And though this fact should have had implications for how the people behaved, it did not often play out in reality.

Huldah's referring to King Josiah as "the man who sent you to me" created space between the king and herself. Though he was powerful, she was the one who had heard a true word from God to share. Huldah's words reminded the delegation that Josiah was merely a man who, like all people, was subject to God's reign.

As great as King Josiah's desire was to spare his nation, he could not save Judah from coming judgment. Thus, Huldah indicated that Josiah's worst fears were justified (see 2 Kings 22:13). Moses had warned that destruction would come if the Israelites were disobedient to the Lord (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). And later prophets based their judgment oracles on warnings found in the Law of Moses (example Jeremiah 6:16-19; Amos 2:4-5). Josiah may have heard these calamities read straight out of Deuteronomy 28:15-68 (2 Kings 22:10-11).

In verse 17, Judah's having "forsaken" God for idols would result in punishment. What Moses had warned about (Deuteronomy 28:20; 29:25; 31:16-17), Huldah recognized as a coming reality in Judah. Jeremiah also cited Judah's having "burned incense to other gods as evidence of their idolatry and this means by which the nations provoked the Lord's "anger" (example Jeremiah 1:16). Both the idols and the sacrifices offered to the idols were works "their hand have made."

God's anger was abundantly justified since it had been provoked by intentional human rebellion, and this had happened so often that the limits of God's patience were exceeded. Zephaniah pulls

no punches and indicates that Judah was rotten to the core (Zephaniah 3:6-8). Thus, the fire of God's judgment would "burn," and it would "not be quenched."

An acquaintance wrote to a Russian novelist and said, "I have decided that the real problem of life is learning to put one's self in second place." The novelist wrote back: "I have decided the real problem in life is to decide what to put in first place."

Now, the First Commandment deals with that. God says, "you should have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). God first! God first!

What is an idol? Timothy Keller, Presbyterian minister, says it is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God. Truth is, anything can be an idol – family, children, spouse, grandchildren, country, money, profits, romance, sex, success, power, Facebook, even religion. An idol is anything that takes the place of God.

The writer of First John warns, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols (1 John 5:21). What we are being told is to keep ourselves from misplaced devotions.

### **A Word for the King** **2 Kings 22:18-20**

As for King Josiah, because he has heard God, God has also heard him. Huldah's message of judgment against Judah is not the final word.

When earlier Shaphan, the royal secretary, read the law to Josiah, the king was shaken to his core. He had torn his "robes" to signify his grief (2 Kings 22:11). That was an appropriate response to the words of the scroll that announced that Jerusalem would "become a curse and be laid waste." God had heard Josiah and had seen his weeping and the state of his heart. So God had decided to honor the king's humble and contrite response.

Moses had described such repentance as a prerequisite for the Lord's restoring Israel after it fell under judgment (Leviticus 26:40-42). And such humble repentance had led God to delay the demise of Ahab's dynasty (1 King 21:29), to postpone judgment in the days of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:26), and to restore Josiah's grandfather Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:10-13). The New Testament also highlights the centrality of humility and repentance before God.

Many kings of Israel and Judah paid little heed to God's word because they were impressed with themselves. However, Josiah was different. He was a model of humble leadership. He placed God and the welfare of his nation before himself, and God blessed him as a result.

In verse 20, we see that God would honor King Josiah by protecting him from the punishment that was coming against Judah. The phrase "I will gather you to your ancestors" is a variation on the formula "[name] rested with his ancestors," as used through 1 and 2 Kings. The king would not experience the "disaster" that God would bring on the temple, Jerusalem, and Judah.

As has been pointed out, the phrase “you will be buried in peace” may seem to contradict what we know about Josiah’s death in battle (2 Kings 23:29-30). But the idea is that Josiah would die at peace with God. He would not presumably witness what the words of the book anticipated and what Huldah confirmed: the devastating destruction of Jerusalem and the temple at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 BC.

The message of God through Huldah confirmed anew God’s righteousness, faithfulness, and mercy. God would be faithful to the word he had uttered centuries before when he warned Israel of the penalties that would result from unfaithfulness to the covenant.

Important to note! Huldah’s message and the words of the book resulted in Josiah’s gathering the nation for a covenant renewal ceremony.

So Judah was spared while Josiah was alive. But after his death, Judah returned to evil ways and experienced the promised curses. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar as well as the exile in Babylon.

## **Conclusion**

The events described in 2 Kings 22 point out both the importance of engaging with God’s words and responding to them. To say the least, it seems strange that the Book of the Law was neglected and lost to the people of Judah. We wonder how that could have happened among God’s covenant people. Yet is that really so different than the Bible being lost to numbers of Christians who never read or study it?

The great 19<sup>th</sup> century preacher Charles Spurgeon is reported to have said, “The way you defend the Bible is the same way you defend a lion, you just let it loose.”

But the Bible has such power only if we open it and turn it loose – in reading it, repenting of our sin and responding in obedience to what has been read.

We honor God when we do his will as recorded in Scripture. King Josiah sought to do just that and he serves us as a good role model.

## **Action Plan**

1. What can you do to ensure that a hobby or favorite activity doesn’t become an idol?
2. What would you say to a fellow Christian who fully expects to escape all consequences God may visit on the idolatrous culture around us?
3. Why do you think so many Christians fail to read the Scriptures? Please explain!

## **Resources for this lesson**

1. “2020-2021 Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching,” pages 249-256.
2. “The New Interpreter’s Bible Volume III,” pages 279-282.

3. "The Interpreter's Bible Volume 3," pages 315-319.
4. "A Popular Survey of the Old Testament" by Norman L. Geisler, page 144.

*Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries ([halbradyministries.com](http://halbradyministries.com)).*

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## **Prophet of Courage**

### **Spring Quarter: Prophets Faithful To God's Covenant Unit 1: Faithful Prophets**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of March 28, 2021  
By Dr. Hal Brady**

**Lesson Scripture: 1 Kings 18:5-18  
Key Verse: 1 King 18:18**

#### **Lesson Aims**

4. Tell what happened during the meetings between Elijah and Obadiah, then between Elijah and Ahab.
5. Explain a purpose of a prophet's ministry as it confronted the righteous and the wicked.
6. Write a message of encouragement to someone whose ministry requires a special measure of courage.

In the classic movie "The Wizard of Oz" all the cowardly lion had to do to find the courage he wanted was to receive a medal from the wizard. It was inscribed with the word "Courage." If courage were only that easy!

As a number of us are aware, some of the most courageous individuals anyone could ever encounter are the prophets of the Old Testament. One of these is vividly seen in today's lesson. He is Elijah, a man who was used by God to confront one of Israel's most wicked kings, Ahab, and his ruthless wife, Jezebel. The times demanded a person would not back down in the face of bold defiance of the true God of Israel, and Elijah was that man. However, Elijah's courage did not come from a medal but from the Lord himself.

We are told that today's lesson scripture covers the early portion of the ministry of the prophet Elijah (who prophesied about 869-838 BC). He proclaimed the word of the Lord during one of the most critical periods of Old Testament history. His ministry began after the split of the nation into two kingdoms (931 BC): Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom).

The first king of the north, Jeroboam I (931-910 BC), began his reign by violating the first two of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-4). He set up two golden calves for the people to worship: one in the northern part of the northern kingdom, Dan, and one in the southern part, in Bethel (I Kings 12:28,29). Thus it was easier for those in the north to embrace pagan worship.

Now, the reign of King Ahab in northern Israel (874-953 BC) was characterized by economic prosperity, at least at the outset. It was also a time of spiritual poverty. And idol worship became more widely accepted when Ahab married Jezebel. Jezebel was the daughter of the king of Sidon and a devout worshiper of the god Baal (I Kings 16:31; 18:19). Baal was a fertility god, believed to be in control of anything to do with giving life, whether to animals, plants, or human beings.

To say the least, wicked king Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, provoked the Lord with their aggressive idolatry. Suddenly, it was that Elijah responded by calling down a famine on the land. In 1 Kings 17, Elijah boldly proclaims to Ahab that “there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word” (17:1). Moses had warned God’s people of the abomination that idolatry constituted in the sight of God (Deuteronomy 4:15-24). And famine was listed among the curses that would result from disobeying God’s law (Deuteronomy 28:23-24).

Important to note! A declaration of famine amounted to a grave insult to Baal (and to Ahab and Jezebel) and constituted a direct challenge to the authority of that fictitious god.

Following this announcement of a famine, Elijah himself fled to the brook Cherith where God miraculously had ravens bring him food. Continuing to hide, he traveled northward to Zarephath of Sidon (Jezebel’s homeland). There he stayed with a widow, for whom he offered two unforgettable demonstrations of God’s power. First, Elijah supplied food during the famine and second, he raised up her dead son. Both miracles revealed the Lord’s authority in matters of fertility, where Baal was believed to be in control.

At this point, Elijah was ready to go back to the northern kingdom, as he was spiritually prepared to speak and demonstrate God’s authoritative word to a defiant and disobedient king named Ahab.

### **Ahab and Obadiah** **1 Kings 18:5-6**

The name Obadiah is used of some 12 different men in the Old Testament and is also the name of an Old Testament book. This particular Obadiah is first mentioned in the biblical record in First Kings 18:3, where he is described as Ahab’s “palace administrator.” This is the ancient Israelite equivalent of the chief of staff in the United States White House and was a powerful and prestigious position. Thus, Obadiah was in charge of Ahab’s palace in Samaria (capital of the northern kingdom of Israel) and assisted in the administration of official matters.

In addition, Obadiah was a man of remarkable courage, given the position he held and the faith he embraced. He is described as a man who “was a devout believer in the Lord” (1 Kings 18:3), and his name means “servant/worshiper of the Lord.” And Obadiah’s faith was not a private matter. Consequently, he must have been savvy in how he exercised it with the devotion of Ahab and Jezebel to Baal. When Jezebel tried to have all the prophets of the Lord killed off, Obadiah hid 100 of them and sustained them with food and water. Hence, Obadiah is seen as an instrument of God, even though he is also a trusted official in Ahab’s government.

The severity of the famine in the capital forced Ahab to act. His first priority, it seemed, was the care of his “horses and mules” – that is, animals used for the convenience of military personnel, nobles, and members of the royal family. Famine and drought were in the land, but king Ahab was concerned, not about his people, but about the stables. The prophets of the Lord were being killed off (v.4), but Ahab was more concerned about his animals being killed off. So he summoned Obadiah to assist him in looking for fodder and water, the two of them divided the country between them (v.6).

### **Elijah and Obadiah**

#### **1 Kings 18:7-15**

On his way, Obadiah meets Elijah, whom he recognizes, but is surprised to see. Obadiah’s question reflects some measure of doubt that this is really Elijah that he is seeing at all. However, addressing Elijah as “my lord” reflects the reverence with which Obadiah holds the prophet as God’s messenger. This title does not imply deity.

Elijah confirms that he himself is speaking to Obadiah as part of a command to return to Ahab. Although Obadiah had called Elijah “lord,” Elijah implies that Obadiah has actually been serving his “master” Ahab. This may be a subtle dig or an outright test of Obadiah.

In verse 9, Obadiah assumes that if Elijah were asking him to put his life on the line, it must be to punish him for particular sin he had committed (compare 1 Kings 18:12). Evidently Obadiah’s thinking is similar to that of the widow in Zarephath, who accused Elijah of punishing her sin by taking her son from her (17:18). Calling himself Elijah’s “servant” rejects the idea that “Ahab” has Obadiah’s true allegiance. Thus, Obadiah distances himself from any implied sin, especially idolatry, that could result from serving Ahab in any capacity.

At any rate, Obadiah anticipates Ahab’s reaction to Elijah’s message. For Obadiah to leave Elijah alone in order to travel to Ahab would no doubt anger the king. The same king who had stood by as his wife killed God’s prophets. Point? Would Ahab suspect that Obadiah was a supporter of Elijah and a worshiper of Elijah’s God?

In contrast to the prophet who feared this task would leave him dead, “the Lord...lives” (see 1 Kings 18:15). The promises of Obadiah and Elijah were made before God. This made both men

as true prophets. They serve the living God, not idols or fictitious, powerless gods (1 Kings 18:26-29, not in printed text).

We need not assume that there was not literally “a nation or kingdom” that Ahab didn’t question about Elijah’s whereabouts. Obadiah is simply referring to the intensity of Ahab’s search for the prophet. What does the intensity of our search for Jesus say about us?

Along that line, the late Leslie Weatherhead tells of a man who on his deathbed was confronted by his minister with the fact of God and of the need of giving himself over into God’s hands. The man rather irritably mumbled, “I never had time for that sort of thing.”

Weatherhead’s comment was that he had 3,000 Sundays. Once more, what does the intensity of our search for Jesus say about us?

Back to our scripture lesson! If Ahab heard from Obadiah that he had met “Elijah” without arresting him, the king would be infuriated. This implication would be that Obadiah is lying to the king – something that one just doesn’t do.

At any rate, Obadiah has concluded that he will pay with his life as the Spirit whisks Elijah away. We often think of the Spirit’s work in the prophet’s lives in terms of their speech and writing. However, Obadiah is more concerned with the Spirit’s ability to move or hide a person supernaturally, as he had done with Enoch (Genesis 5:24).

Obadiah knew something of how prophets “of the Lord” operated in obedience to him. And though Elijah certainly intends to appear before Ahab, it would only happen if God allows it. In fact, however, God has commanded it (1 Kings 18:1,2, not in our printed text).

It’s here (v.12b-13) that Obadiah begins a defense of his personal character and devotion to “the Lord” as a reason why his life should not now be put in danger. He has lived up to the meaning of his name, “servant, worshiper of the Lord.” In reality, he’s grown up from his youth fearing God, a sign of wisdom. And Obadiah’s saving actions on behalf of those 100 prophets has proven his fear of the Lord.

In verse 14, Obadiah repeats the danger that Elijah was putting him in. In verse 15, Elijah expands on Obadiah’s oath (18:10): not only does God live, but he is “the Lord Almighty.” This is a warrior image of God, leading the heavenly angels in battle against evil. The title called Obadiah’s attention to God’s power, not just his presence.

And the words “whom I serve” suggests the close relationship between God and Elijah. As God’s spokesperson, Elijah stands ready to go, speak, and do whatever his commander asks or desires.

## **Elijah and Ahab**

### **1 Kings 18:16-18**

Evidently, Elijah's word and oath satisfied any doubts that Obadiah may have had about Elijah's returning with him. Consequently, this would be the first time King Ahab and Elijah met face-to-face following the three-and-a-half-year famine that had devastated the entire northern kingdom of Israel.

Elijah finally confronts Ahab, who immediately accuses him of being "the troubler of Israel." The Hebrew word for "troubler" suggests someone whose actions or presence is destructive to others. So, Ahab's charge is that Elijah is an unsavory influence in Israel. However, Ahab does not spell out the charge.

At any case, Ahab's words reflect the utter contempt in which he held prophets like Elijah. And this disdain was based on the bad reports prophets frequently brought him (example 22:8).

But in a sense, Ahab was right. Any true prophet of the Lord will trouble people when he or she confronts them with the truth about their sinfulness and their need to repent. Ahab was justified in accusing Elijah of being the cause of the famine of the past three-and-a-half years (James 5:17). However, Ahab's larger point is totally in error. God's judgment would not have occurred had Israel remained faithful to God alone (1 Kings 18:18).

Writing in her book "Old Testament Prophets For Today," Carolyn J. Sharp, Associate Professor of Hebrew Scriptures at Yale Divinity School, states, "When we are smug, inattentive, or narcissistic, the prophets will disrupt us. The prophets disrupt the ways in which we justify our heartlessness to each other and our half-heartedness toward God. For the prophets are satisfied only with a deep and complete commitment to knowing God and to serving God's people in the world."

In verse 18, Elijah does not back down in the face of King Ahab's anger. Elijah replies that it is Ahab himself who has troubled Israel by following his father's idolatrous ways, specifically, by following "the Baals – a reference to various local manifestations of the Canaanite deity. The decisions of Ahab as king adversely affected his people's fate.

And it wasn't long after Ahab and Elijah's meeting both the king and the people saw a clear demonstration of the importance of idolatry and the power of Elijah's God at the contest on Mount Carmel. Even that, however, did not convince Ahab to change his evil practices, though he did repent late in life (21:27). Ahab is still remembered primarily for all the trouble he caused Israel.

## **Conclusion**

Courage has always been the trademark of God's spokespeople. Like Elijah, these prophets continuously proclaimed courageously and lead faithfully according to God's word. And also, like Elijah, these prophets were considered troublemakers.

As you know, in many parts of the world today, an increased measure of courage is required to preach and teach the gospel. Defiant authorities in numerous countries like China or Sudan consider followers of Jesus to be modern troublemakers. And such leaders work hard to silence missionary voices. Literally, all over the world, Christian refugees seek new homes in nations that will welcome them in peace.

So let us pray together for these faithful servants of God, that they may be restored, strengthened, settled, and empowered with the courage that has always characterized God's people in an often hostile world.

### **Action Plan**

4. What are some ways Christians can reassure one another in times of fear or doubt?
5. When condemned or mocked for following God's Word, how should you respond? Should your response be the same in all situations? Why, or why not?

### **Resources for this lesson**

5. "2020-2021 Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching," pages 257-264.
6. "The New Interpreter's Bible Volume III," pages 130-135.
7. "Old Testament Prophets for Today," by Carol J. Sharp, pages 15-18.

*Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries ([halbradyministries.com](http://halbradyministries.com)).*

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## **The Suffering Servant**

**Spring Quarter: Prophets Faithful To God's Covenant**

**Unit 2: Prophets of Restoration**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of April 4, 2021**

**By Dr. Hal Brady**

**Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 53:4-11a**

**Key Verse: Isaiah 53:5**

### **Lesson Aims**

7. Restate what the servant of the Lord would accomplish through suffering
8. Explain how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy.

9. Write a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord, using language from today's passage, and use it as a source of devotion every day this week.

Kyle Yates, an Old Testament scholar who taught seminary for many years, once referred to Isaiah 53 as the “Mount Everest” of Old Testament prophecy. The writer of the lesson points out that analogy brings to mind the reality that mountain summits are not reached without first doing a lot of hiking up difficult terrain. However, reaching a summit – a passage like Isaiah 53 – makes us realize that the climb is worthwhile.

### **Lesson Context: The Prophecies of Isaiah**

The importance of the book of Isaiah is understood in the fact that it is quoted more than five dozen times in the New Testament. Isaiah prophesied in Jerusalem during dismal times for God's people. His prophetic call came “in the year that King Uzziah died” (Isaiah 6:1), which would have been 740 BC. The latest historical event recorded (not prophesied) by the prophet is the death of the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib (37:37-38), which occurred in 681 BC. Since this represents a lengthy period of ministry it is probably safe to say that Isaiah's call came when he was a teenager or thereabouts.

The span of Isaiah's prophetic ministry included the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria in 722 BC. The southern kingdom of Judah was in danger of going the same route in 701 BC. However, the presence and the prayer of a godly king, Hezekiah (Isaiah 37:14-20), resulted in an outcome far different from what the north experienced. Isaiah assured the king that the capital city of Jerusalem would be spared (37:33-35), and it was – miraculously (37:36).

However, with spiritual guidance, Isaiah spoke of a future day when Jerusalem would not be delivered: it would come under the control of the Babylonians (Isaiah 39:5-7). But Isaiah also promised that the Lord was not finished with Jerusalem or with his people. To the contrary, the Lord would rebuild the city through the efforts of a ruler whom Isaiah named: Cyrus (44:24-45:1). But in addition, Isaiah looked beyond even this restoration to someone far greater than Cyrus.

### **Lesson Context: The Servant**

The Lord's “servant” is one of the most striking figures in the book of Isaiah. The term “servant” is sometimes a reference to the entire nation of Israel. It describes the special relationship the covenant people have with God (see Isaiah 41:8). In other places, “servant” seems to describe a remnant of God's people, referring specifically to those who remained following captivity in Babylon (example: 48:20).

And there are still other passages where the word “servant” points to one individual who was assigned a very special role to fulfill. As we are told, four passages in Isaiah – often called Servant Songs – function in this way to point to the Messiah: Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and

52:13-53:12 (Isaiah 61:1-5 can also be include since Jesus applied it to himself in Luke 4:16-21). This servant would carry out his tasks in a way that neither the nations of Israel nor the remnant could ever do.

The servant passage studied today is the fourth in the list, beginning, “see, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted” (Isaiah 52:13). Some suggests this refers to Christ’s resurrection, ascension, and exaltation to the right hand of the father. It ultimately focused on His exaltation (Acts 2:31-33).

The passage then describes the astonishment and rejection many would experience at the servant’s lowly and repulsive appearance (52:14-53:3). Prior to the servant’s exaltation is His humiliation (52:14). Our printed text begins with an explanation of the servant’s sorrows and grief that are introduced in Isaiah 53:3.

Christians have long and rightly interpreted the prophetic Servant Songs as fulfilled in Jesus alone. For instance, Isaiah 53:7-8 makes up the passage that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when Philip approached his chariot. The Ethiopian asked whether the prophet was speaking of himself or someone else. And Philip “began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35). No other figure appears in Scripture who claims to be the servant, and only Christ fulfills all that were written about that servant in those passages. The importance of today’s text is understood in the fact that the New Testament quotes from the song in which it occurs seven times.

## **The Servant’s Death**

### **Isaiah 53:4-9**

Understanding how “suffering” was often viewed in biblical times (both Old and New Testaments; examples Job 4:7-8; John 9:2), those who witnessed the servant’s suffering saw it as a punishment “by God.” The servant was deemed to be bearing the “path” and “suffering” associated with his own sinful actions. No one would have assumed that he was suffering on account of the wrongdoings of others.

Yet, followers of Jesus can readily see in verse 4 a compelling description of Jesus’ suffering on the cross. Those who mocked him there communicated their belief that God had abandoned him – that he was punished, stricken, and afflicted. Indeed, there was a sense in which the servant was punished “by God,” in that Jesus fulfilled God’s “deliberate plan and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23).

However, why Jesus suffered matters tremendously! Being only partially right about Jesus’ suffering is terribly wrong about what it could accomplish.

Jesus’ death was the ultimate example of substitutionary atonement – the idea in Christianity which regards Jesus as dying as a substitute for others, “instead of” them.

In the Law of Moses, atonement for sins was fulfilled through God's accepting the sacrifice of animals (Leviticus 1:4-5, etc.). They were substitutes for the people who had sinned and so deserved to die (Romans 6:23). Jesus, however, became the perfect sacrifice for others' sins (Roman 3:25). For this reason, we no longer offer sacrifice of grain or oil or animals; Jesus is the last and perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10-14).

God created the world in an instant, and it was a beautiful process. God re-created the world on the cross – and it was a horrible process. But that's how love works. Love that really changes things and redeems things is always a substitutionary sacrifice.

Jesus died so that a complete reversal of the curse of sin could be accomplished (see Genesis 3:14-19; Isaiah 65:17, Revelation 21:5). The wholeness of body accomplished by Jesus' servanthood is illustrated in Matthew 8:14-17. Immediately following a description of Jesus' healing ministry and his power to cast out unclean spirits, Matthew writes that all this happened to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah (Matthew 8:17).

During Jesus' earthly ministry, miracles and signs pointed out that he possessed power to heal all brokenness, sinfulness or otherwise. And His return will usher in new heavens and a new earth from which sin and its consequences will be banished. But until that day, Jesus takes our infirmities and sicknesses, not by healing them immediately in every instance but by providing grace in those circumstances. As God said to Paul in his infirmity, He says to us in ours, "My grace is sufficient for you" (II Corinthians 12:9).

In verse 5, the emphasis is again on "he" and "our." He was wounded for our transgressions. We are guilty, but Jesus was treated as though he were. "Punishment" signals the consequence for sin, the consequences we deserve. "Peace" with God is the result (Romans 5:1); indeed, Christ is our peace (Ephesians 2:14-17).

We see in verse 6 that humanity's descent into sin is not something we have no part in; we make choices to turn from God. As Dallas preacher Tony Evans put it: "One reason we don't have a high view of sin today is that we have a love view of God...we have become too comfortable living in an age that devalues God's standards and makes acceptable that which He hates." Yet the one against whom we sin placed our wrongdoings and their punishment on the servant. "All" is repeated to emphasize that every one of us has sinned and the servant has given his life for each of us.

Moving on to verses 7-9, the servant would respond to his cruel treatment with silence. This is somewhat amazing when we think of who Jesus was and the power in his spoken word. Jesus used his words to heal the sick, raise the dead, calm storms, and work other miracles. Yet when it came to defending himself, he said nothing. Such silence should produce a reverent silence in us.

However, and I need to add, Jesus did not remain silent even when others were being harmed especially by leaders who should have cared for them. He called out the enemies who would kill

him – the teachers of the law and the Pharisees – for the ways their hypocrisies damaged the people of Israel. Without doubt, his speech on behalf of others contributed to the hatred those powerful leaders felt for Jesus. Yet he did not argue on his own behalf to proclaim his innocence.

Again, the servant's atoning death was voluntary. He presented Himself to his executioners like a willing sacrificial lamb (v.7). He was arrested and sentenced to death. In his enemies' hatred and hands, Jesus was denied any semblance of a fair proceeding. For example, a person could not be put to death except on the testimony of two or three witnesses according to Deuteronomy 17:6. The witnesses called to testify against Jesus did not agree in their testimony (Mark 14:55-59), but he was still found guilty and crucified.

Jesus fulfilled verse 9 in two ways. First, Jesus was an innocent man who was convicted as if he were a notorious criminal. That resulted when a crowd was offered a choice between releasing him or a man guilty of murder and insurrection, and they chose the latter. As a result, Jesus was hung between two criminals as if he were one of them. Jesus had engaged in violence to clean the temple, but he never committed a violent act that would call for Roman crucifixion.

Second, Jesus was buried in the grave of a rich man. Normally, criminals at the time of Jesus who were executed were left unburied. Eventually, the beasts and the bird consumed their remains. Jesus, however, was treated differently as two factors come together: a request by Jewish leaders to get the bodies off the crosses and a request by a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea, to have Jesus' interment in his tomb.

### **The Servant's Delight** **Isaiah 53:10-11a**

God was at work in and through the servant's suffering, though not in the sense that God was punishing the servant for his own sins. In truth, the servant's suffering and death constituted "an offering for sin." The Hebrew term used here refers to the guilt offering (see Leviticus 5:1-6:7).

We are reminded that what made this offering distinct from others was the connection between the sin committed and the remedy stipulated in the law. Jesus' atoning death on the cross was exactly what humanity needed. And it was a sacrifice that needed to be offered only once (Hebrews 7:26-27; 9:24-28). And by Jesus' death, he destroyed "him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

As a result, the servant will see his offering. The number of Jesus' disciples – "his offering –" has continued to grow since the first century AD, when his church was established. And that the servant will "prolong his days" likely points to Jesus' resurrection. It was only then that his disciples began to grasp how he fulfilled many prophecies, including this one.

Like a victorious general who has conquered the enemy, the servant will be victorious through his death, dividing the spoils of battle by conquering both sin and Satan.

But just as we cannot begin to understand the depth of Jesus' suffering at the cross, we cannot imagine the joy that he felt after he uttered the words "It is finished" (John 19:30).

Let's be sure we understand. The song has been sung. The blood has been poured. The sacrifice has been made. Forgiveness has been offered, and the sting of death has been removed. There is nothing more God could do to ease the human race. There is no Plan B. Plan A (the death of Christ) is good enough.

"Paid in full" means that once a thing is paid for, you never have to pay for it again. As a matter of fact, we are foolish if we try to pay for it again.

Writing in his book, "In the Shadow of the Cross," Ray Pritchard says that all your sins have been stamped with three words – "It is finished" (paid in full).

Anger...paid in full.

Gossip...paid in full

Drunkenness...paid in full.

Adultery...paid in full.

Lying...paid in full.

Wrong priorities...paid in full.

Pride...paid in full.

Laziness...paid in full.

Unkindness...paid in full.

Indifference...paid in full.

These are just a few examples. Whatever your sin, just fill in the blank. And then write over it – "paid in full."

So Jesus' death was not an accident or random tragedy as we use those terms. Rather, his death was the fulfillment of a divine plan to rescue lost humanity. And the study of a majestic passage such as Isaiah 53 should not end with this or any other lesson. All of us should continually scale the heights.

### **Action Plan**

6. Without beginning with Scripture, how would you respond to an unbeliever who claims to have no sin?

7. How would you answer a person who questions the fairness of Jesus being punished for sins committed by others?
8. How will study of today's text result in changes to your thoughts, words and actions?

### **Resources for this lesson**

8. "2020-2021 Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching," pages 265-272.
9. "The Interpreter's Bible Volume 5," pages 614-627.
10. "The Abingdon Bible Commentary," pages 663-664.

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## **The stone will roll away**

### **WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN**

**ANNE PACKARD**

A time of darkness and confusion filled with more questions than answers. Too many people in too small a space with no meaningful communication occurring. Heart-felt arguments regarding the best practices in serving God. Is it spring 2021 or Passover in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago? What's old is new again.

During this Lenten season, we are to transport ourselves, at least spiritually, to the last days of Jesus's ministry among his disciples. After traveling for years throughout Galilee, Samaria, and Judaea ministering and teaching to all who would listen, Jesus and his followers entered Jerusalem, a walled city ruled by Romans, to honor the season of Passover. The city, which is usually busy, has now double the normal population which means double the noise, confusion, animals, and traffic. Basically, it's St. Simons Island during the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and nerves are frayed.

Having lived on St. Simons Island for 30 years, my approach to a busy holiday weekend is to avoid all public places and smile at everyone. Anyway, they'll soon be gone and the island will return to normal. It's what I would have advised Jesus to do. Keep your head down and don't step on anyone's toes.

But, if I had been in Jerusalem during this historic Passover and I had advised Jesus with my "local" knowledge, I must admit that he wouldn't have listened. It's not what he did. Instead, Jesus arrived triumphantly on a donkey for all to see. He cursed a fig tree and overturned tables of money changers at the Temple. Jesus avoided an ambush and delivered a sermon at the Mount of Olives discussing the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age. He humbly washed his disciples' feet and taught them a completely new method of remembrance to be used after he was

gone, a thought which was inconceivable to these devout followers. While praying in the Garden of Gethsemane later that night, Jesus was arrested and the end began...or the beginning ended.

Fast forward to this Lenten season with the presidential election behind us, the pandemic all around us, and General Conference before us. It has been a dark and confusing time filled with more questions than answers. There are too many people in our homes and not enough in-person communication. And, by the way, what is the best way to serve God and who should do it?

If the story ended here, this column would probably not be appropriate to publish, but it doesn't end here. After the unimaginable sorrow and true heartbreak of Jesus's crucifixion and death, dawn broke. The morning came. The stone was rolled away. Jesus had risen.

*The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." Matthew 28:5-7*

As the historian for the South Georgia Conference, I can tell you where we've been, but I can't tell you where we're going or how we're going to get there. If I could, the Ministry of Memory might be renamed the Ministry of What's To Come. As the conference historian, however, I can tell you, using our Biblical history, that the dawn will break. The stone will roll away. Jesus will rise. The dark, confusing times might be at hand, but they will end and, after unimaginable sorrow, God's plan will be revealed and it will be more glorious than anything we can imagine.

And we all say together, thanks be to God!

*Anne Packard serves as Conference Historian and director of the Arthur J. Moore Methodist Museum on St. Simons Island. Contact her at [director@mooremuseum.org](mailto:director@mooremuseum.org).*

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## **When is it too late?**

**By Dr. Hal Brady**

"And the door was shut" (Matthew 25:10). Sadder words have never been spoken or written. There's a certain finality about them.

Jesus tells how 10 young women were invited to a marriage feast. Five were wise and five were foolish. The wise women showed their wisdom by planning for the possible delay of the bridegroom. They took extra oil for their lamps so they would be ready when he came.

The foolish women neglected to do so, and while they waited, all fell asleep. Suddenly at midnight, a cry went out that the bridegroom was coming. Immediately, the wise women got up

and trimmed their lamps. On the other hand, the foolish women recognized that they were out of oil and asked to borrow some. “No!” said the wise, “there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealer and buy some for yourselves.”

The gist of the story is that while they were gone the bridegroom came. And when they returned it was too late. The door was shut. As I previously mentioned, sadder words have never been spoken or written.

There are several things I want to share with you from this parable.

First, we see the unexpectedness of life! Life is fickle. We never know exactly what’s going to happen next. To be sure, we can never acquire enough education or self-confidence to protect ourselves from the crises and/or surprises of life.

A father waits anxiously in the maternity waiting room of a hospital. When the nurse finally appears, he asks her frantically, “Tell me, is it a boy?”

“Well,” she answers, “the one in the middle is!”

Life does not always move in predictable patterns. We are continually surprised by the unexpectedness of life.

Second, we see the necessity of being prepared! This parable absolutely hinges on the necessity of being prepared. The only real difference between the bridesmaids was the measure of their preparedness. All 10 of these young women had oil in their lamps, but only five of them (the wise ones) had an extra supply that would see them through the long night.

Truth is, it’s simply not possible to get ready for certain things at the last minute. Unless we prepare in advance, the consequences will be inappropriate.

I think knowledge is one of those things that cannot be acquired in the last minute. It must have been stirred up long ago. That is why the time of youth must be the time of learning. It is said that the golden age of memory is from seven to 11. But be that as it may, it is easier to learn when we are young.

And this fact is just another reason why the COVID-19 pandemic and our schools are such a serious concern. Virtual learning is appropriate as merited, but it is not the same as in-class learning. We see the necessity of being prepared.

Third, we see that some things cannot be borrowed! As you recall, the five foolish bridesmaids sought to borrow some oil from the five wise bridesmaids. Being refused, they rushed out into the night to find a seller of oil. But when they returned, the door was shut. Some things just cannot be borrowed.

For instance, we cannot borrow someone else's character. Ralph Waldo Emerson said that "what lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." He's talking about character.

We can't borrow someone else's faith! A common charge is laid against our generation that we are living on the spiritual capital of our fathers and mothers. What is meant is this: we want the world to be a place where human life is respected, where virtue is honored, where justice is real, where women and children are safe, and where the law of God is sacred. But we cannot have a world like that without people of faith and a strong religious community. Some things just cannot be borrowed.

Fourth, we must be ready to seize the opportunity when it comes! It is said of Mary of Orange that when she was dying her chaplain came to speak with her about the things of eternity.

Mary answered, "My friend, I have not left this matter to this hour."

Mary of Orange was speaking the language of the five wise bridesmaids. Matters of eternity are just too important to be left to the last minute. Seize the opportunity!

*Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries ([halbradyministries.com](http://halbradyministries.com)).*

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## **Retired Clergy Birthdays – March 2021**

- 3/01 – Ralph Bailey: 9650 Lehigh Ave.; Savannah, GA 31406
- 3/01 – Buddy Whatley: 2153 Bold Springs Rd.; Ochlocknee, GA 31773
- 3/02 – Gene Yates: 705 Curl Rd.; East Dublin, GA 31027
- 3/03 – Ricky Bishop: 292 Timberwind Dr.; Byron, GA 31008
- 3/05 – Tim Paulk: 104 Lee Rd. 2153; Salem, AL 36874
- 3/06 – Ellison Whitt: 443 Lee Smith Rd.; Ellaville, GA 31806
- 3/08 – Jerry Lillard: 253 Paul Lockley Rd.; Lyons GA 30436
- 3/09 – Grover Bell: 333 E. 53rd St.; Savannah, GA 31405
- 3/10 – Joey Cannon: 146 Callaway St.; Leesburg, GA 31763
- 3/15 – Brenda Iglehart: 305 Palm Club Circle.; Brunswick, GA 31525
- 3/16 – Joel Dent: 1819 Pine Forest Circle; Dublin, GA 31021
- 3/16 – Truett Leveritt: PO Box 15893; Savannah, GA 31416
- 3/16 – Vance Mathis: PO Box 222; Bonaire, GA 31005
- 3/17 – George Durham: 844 Woods Hole Circle; Statesboro, GA 30461
- 3/17 – David Seyle: 304 Causton Harbour Dr.; Savannah, GA 31404
- 3/18 – Tom Oliver: 511 Victory Dr.; Waynesboro, GA 30830
- 3/20 – Ronnie Culpepper: 2848 Sue Mack Dr.; Columbus, GA 31906
- 3/20 – Dan MacMinn: PO Box 1325; Ellaville, GA 31806

3/21 – Delia Steffen: 128 Cambridge Way; Macon, GA 31220  
3/22 – Beverly Flowers: 390 Brook Hollow Dr.; McDonough, GA 30252  
3/22 – Tommy Mason, Jr.: 7321 US Highway 41; Vienna, GA 31092  
3/23 – Dwight Bishop: 15 Blue Magnolia Dr.; Alapaha, GA 31622  
3/23 – James McIlrath: 748 Old Jesup Rd.; Brunswick, GA 31520  
3/23 – Jimmy Pennell: 2257 S. Lakeshore Dr.; Lake Junaluska, NC 28745  
3/24 – Larry E. Bird: 325 Langston Chapel Rd.; Statesboro, GA 30458-3773  
3/24 – Rob Grotheer: 4 Druid Court; Savannah, GA 31410  
3/28 – Hal Brady: 36 Lullwater Estate; Atlanta, GA 30307

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## OBITUARIES

### **Mrs. Emmie Stewart Carlton Johnson**

Emmie Stewart Carlton Johnson, 91, died peacefully at home the afternoon of Monday, November 30, 2020, one block from her birthplace in Oxford, Georgia. The daughter of educators Professor W. A. "Squire" Carlton and Annie Lou Bartlett Carlton, her early life was part of the close faculty community at what is now called Oxford College of Emory University. She was the namesake of Miss Emmie Stewart, who provided room, board, and genuine inspiration for Emory students, including Emmie's father Squire, in the time before dormitories. Every phase of Emmie's life, including name, education, work, her own family, and her friendships reflected the many generational and personal connections to the Methodist Church, and a deep commitment to Christ and the Christian life.

#### Early Life

Her childhood revolved around family, extended family, older sister Anne, Allen Memorial Methodist Church, and life at the college campus tennis courts, including lessons from tennis mentor (Mary) Louise Fowler. Emmie learned to read at the ages of three and four, skipped kindergarten, and started public school in Covington at the age of five. During high school, she played women's varsity basketball, tennis with the all-male Emory college students, and became the youth president of the North Georgia Annual Conference (at Camp Glisson). She loved to tell stories about visiting grandparents in Molena, Ga. and Arcadia, Fla., including the very rich relationships developed with cousins, and aunts and uncles that lasted her entire life. Covington High just had 11 grades, so at age 15 Emmie entered Wesleyan College in Macon and quickly became the unbeaten tennis champ in intramural competition.

#### Young Adult Years

Though she majored in English at Wesleyan College, Emmie began to work at Mulberry Street Methodist as a youth director and counselor along with Frances Smith (Ramsey), and Emily Britton (Parker). During her junior and senior college years, Emmie Carlton became the morning worship pianist at the small Martha Bowman Methodist Church in the nearby Howard Community. Along the way, at a Methodist youth sub-district meeting in Macon, she met Thomas Johnson. Though she was two years ahead in education, Emmie and Thomas were the same age and shared a lifelong commitment to Christ and the Christian faith (Methodist style),

and . . . a deep love of recreational, but competitive tennis in Macon, at Emory U, Savannah and on until retirement.

After Wesleyan College graduation in 1949, Emmie Carlton attended Emory University, earned a master's degree in Christian Education, and then became the Director of Christian Education at Sam Jones Memorial Methodist Church in Cartersville, Ga. During this time, Emmie's sister Anne married a Methodist minister, Richard E. Blanchard, who joined the Florida Annual Conference.

### Young Married Life

In 1951, Emmie married Thomas, by then a Candler School of Theology student called Tom, who entered the ministry of the South Georgia Annual Conference of the Methodist Church after serving a student appointment as an associate pastor in Carrollton, Ga. Though they were in Carrollton on the weekends, for a year during the week she taught public school at Medlock Elementary School in Decatur. In a later day or generation, Emmie likely would have become an ordained minister herself, but she dedicated herself to being a most effective partner in ministry wherever her beloved Thomas was appointed and served.

### Adult and Family Life

After Thomas finished at the Candler School of Theology, Martha Bowman Methodist Church in Macon initially refused the appointment of the young, inexperienced preacher of Tom H. Johnson – until the pastor parish relations committee learned that their former morning pianist, Miss Emmie, would be the incoming spouse. With great humor and relief, the young couple moved to the Martha Bowman parsonage on Bass Road and their first two children, Tom, Jr., and Nancy, were born in Macon. After a move to Chatham County, Betsy was born in Savannah.

The Methodist system in South Georgia of the 1950s and 60s moved the ministers every three to five years, the average being four years. So, Emmie's family years meant moving fairly often, on up to retirement – to Bloomingdale/Meldrim, White Bluff in Chatham County, Baxley, Valdosta, Statesboro, Perry, Thomasville, Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons, and Waycross.

Everywhere Emmie lived and served in ministry partnership with Thomas she is remembered as being kind, unfailingly gracious, and in older years, as a sweet person. Early on, Emmie and Thomas, after much deliberation, decided that she would not work in a church he was serving unless the local church had a genuine gap with no local person who could fill the spot. Still in her thirties, Emmie learned to play the organ, including pipe organs, and worked as pianist, and organist at White Bluff and Baxley, including stints as choir director and children's choir director in Baxley. Children's choir alums, now in their late sixties, remember those sessions with great fondness for the supportive encouragement they received.

Emmie's children knew her to be loving, supportive, organized, and happy and cheerful, the great band parent, Scout parent, and church youth group parent. Perhaps the delight of her life was becoming a grandmother, and near the end of her life she was overjoyed to become a great-grandmother.

## Social and Personal Concerns

A formative memory was that of operatic singer Marian Anderson being refused the use of Constitution Hall to sing My Country, 'Tis of Thee. As a young girl in segregated Oxford, Emmie's personal friendships did not recognize racial boundaries and she was very sensitive to inequity due to race. She was not given to public pronouncements about society, but along with Thomas, she made the commitment that their children would attend public school systems, especially during the period of racial integration. In later years before retirement, Emmie led workshops through the United Methodist Women about nuclear disarmament, and the negative, devastating effects of atomic testing on Pacific Islanders, residents of New Mexico, Nevada, and Colorado, and U.S. military enlisted personnel.

## Retirement

When Thomas retired, they returned to her renovated home place in Oxford and Covington, Georgia. Together, they became quite active at Allen Memorial UMC, worked with the Oxford Historical Cemetery, the United Methodist Women, and regularly attended various Emory University functions. Their mutual love of flowers – roses, irises, camellias, daylilies and more – meant that their last 30 years together BLOSSOMED.

Emmie Stewart Carlton Johnson is survived by her husband Thomas; children Betsy (and John) Strauss, Nancy (and Jeff) Lawalin, and Tom, Jr. (and Mary Carolyn Pindar); grandchildren Evan Lawalin, Emmy Lawalin, Jesse Strauss, Russell Strauss, Melissa Strauss (and Ryan) O'Connor, and Thomas, III (and C'Lee) Johnson; great grandchildren Tegan, Jude, Noah and Caleb O'Connor; niece Carol Anne Blanchard (and O.C.) Hood, and great niece Katie Reid Hicks. She was preceded in death by her parents, sister Anne Carlton Blanchard, brother-in-law Richard E. Blanchard, Sr., nephew Richard E. Blanchard, Jr, and niece Emily Blanchard-Reid.

A graveside service for Mrs. Johnson will be held on the first day of spring, Saturday, March 20, 2021, 2 p.m., at Oxford Historical Cemetery, with Rev. Natalie Faulkner officiating. Friends may visit with the family at the graveside 30 minutes prior to service time, from 1:30 - 2 p.m.

In lieu of flowers donations may be made to Allen Memorial United Methodist Church, PO Box 117, Oxford, GA 30054; or, Epworth By The Sea, PO Box 20407, St. Simons Island, GA 31522.

Due to COVID-19 considerations, masks and social distancing are encouraged.

## **Rev. Tom Edwards, Jr.**

Rev. John Thomas (Tom) Edwards, Jr., of Port Wentworth, formerly of Elberton, age 80, passed away at his home March 6, 2021, with his family at his side. He was born on August 22, 1940, son of the late Virginia C. Edwards and the late John T. Edwards, Sr.

Tom was a 1958 graduate of Elberton High School and a graduate of Armstrong State University with an Associate and Bachelor's degrees. He also graduated from the nine-year summer program of the Candler School of Theology Course of Study from Emory University. Tom was ordained Full Elder in 2006 and was a member of the South Georgia United Methodist

Conference. He served churches in the Waycross, Columbus, and Dublin districts. He retired as the pastor from Port Wentworth United Methodist Church in the Savannah District.

Originally from Elberton, Tom served eight years in the Georgia Army National Guard. After many years working the Edwards Brothers Farm, he and his family moved to Savannah where Tom and his wife Betty managed the Savannah Skate Inn for 16 years. They attended Cokesbury United Methodist Church where he felt the call from God to go into the ministry. Tom began attending college and was appointed Associate Pastor at Cokesbury UMC. He loved his Lord, serving Him and loved the church congregations where he was appointed. Tom and his devoted wife were dedicated to visiting the sick and the elderly. He was a member of Kairos Prison Ministry and spent many hours visiting and counseling prisoners. Tom was also a member of the Lions Club and a member of the United Methodist Men at Port Wentworth UMC. He was elected Port Wentworth's Citizen of the Year in 2012.

Tom is survived by his loving wife of 57 years, Betty Jo Saxon Edwards. He is survived by two daughters, Allison Petro (Chip) of Crothersville, IN and Susan Doyle (Robert) of Savannah; three grandsons, Nickolas Petro (Brittney) of Evansville, IN, Hogan Petro of Columbus, IN and Ian Doyle of Savannah; two great grandchildren, Beckett and Ryanne Petro of Evansville, IN; one brother, Rev. Rick Edwards (Pat), one niece, Sarah Edwards, one great niece, Abby Edwards, all of Avon, NC; one nephew, John Edwards of Wesley Chapel, FL, and many other nieces, nephews and cousins.

A graveside service will be held at 2 p.m. May 18, 2021, at Forest Hills Memorial Park in Elberton, GA. Relatives and friends are welcome to attend.

A Celebration of Life service will be held at 2 p.m. June 13, 2021, at Port Wentworth United Methodist Church. All friends and family are invited to attend.

Remembrances – The Amy Exley Bible Class at Port Wentworth United Methodist Church – 201 Turnberry Street, Port Wentworth, Georgia 31047-1924.

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## **Scripture Readings – March 16**

### **March 21**

#### ***Fifth Sunday in Lent***

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 51:1-12 (UMH 785)

Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:20-33

### **March 28**

#### ***Palm/Passion Sunday***

*Liturgy of the Palms*

Mark 21:1-11

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 (UMH 839)  
*Liturgy of the Passion*  
Isaiah 50:4-9a  
Psalm 31:9-16 (UMH 764)  
Philippians 2:5-11  
Matthew 26:14-27:66 or Matthew 27:11-54

#### **April 1**

##### ***Maundy Thursday***

Exodus 12:1-4 (5-10), 11-14  
Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 (UMH 837)  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26  
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

#### **April 2**

##### ***Good Friday***

Isaiah 52:13-53:12  
Psalm 22 (UMH 752)  
Hebrews 10:16-25  
John 18:1-19:42

#### **April 4**

##### ***Easter Sunday***

Acts 10:34-43  
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 (UMH 839)  
1 Corinthians 15:1-11  
John 20:1-18  
Mark 16:1-8

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### **Events in the South Georgia Conference – 3/16/2021 edition**

#### **Connectional Ministries' Book Club – March 16**

Connectional Ministries invites South Georgia clergy and laity to join a virtual book club via Zoom. From the comfort of one's home or office – anywhere, really – participants will discuss the week's book, its important themes, and faith. The group's first book is "[How to Be an Anti-racist](#)" by Ibram X. Kendi. Leading the discussion will be Lindsey and Rev. Andrew (Drew) Young, pastor of Mosaic Church in Savannah. The study will begin March 2 and run through April 6. Find more details and registration information online at [www.sgaumc.org/book-club](http://www.sgaumc.org/book-club).

#### **Alive Together at the Table with Bishop Bryan, Zoom – March 16**

Come together at the table with Bishop Bryan for reflections and conversations. How is it with your soul? What is going on in our conference and the general church you need to know? The conversations will begin at noon and 5:30 p.m. and will last approximately one hour. We will use the same Zoom link for all of these conversations, so once you register and receive the Zoom

link you can save it for future conversations. If you misplace the link at any point, feel free to register again. [Register now](#)

### **UMW Virtual Spiritual Growth Retreat – March 19-20**

You are invited to “Come to the Table for Justice & Hope” for this year’s annual UMW Spiritual Growth Retreat. As we gather together at the virtual table, we will explore the question: how do Christian women stand firm in faith and witness in today’s chaotic world? The year’s speakers are Rev. Earnestine Campbell, senior pastor of Epworth UMC in Columbus, Rev. Christy Bandy, senior pastor of Cairo First UMC, and Bishop R. Lawson Bryan, episcopal leader of the South Georgia Annual Conference. Music will be led by Cameron Rolling, music director at Centerville UMC. For more details, visit [www.sgaumc.org/umw](http://www.sgaumc.org/umw).

### **Connectional Ministries’ Book Club – March 23**

Connectional Ministries invites South Georgia clergy and laity to join a virtual book club via Zoom. From the comfort of one’s home or office – anywhere, really – participants will discuss the week’s book, its important themes, and faith. The group’s first book is “[How to Be an Anti-racist](#)” by Ibram X. Kendi. Leading the discussion will be Lindsey and Rev. Andrew (Drew) Young, pastor of Mosaic Church in Savannah. The study will begin March 2 and run through April 6. Find more details and registration information online at [www.sgaumc.org/book-club](http://www.sgaumc.org/book-club).

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### **Connectional Ministries’ Book Club – March 30**

Connectional Ministries invites South Georgia clergy and laity to join a virtual book club via Zoom. From the comfort of one’s home or office – anywhere, really – participants will discuss the week’s book, its important themes, and faith. The group’s first book is “[How to Be an Anti-racist](#)” by Ibram X. Kendi. Leading the discussion will be Lindsey and Rev. Andrew (Drew) Young, pastor of Mosaic Church in Savannah. The study will begin March 2 and run through April 6. Find more details and registration information online at [www.sgaumc.org/book-club](http://www.sgaumc.org/book-club).

### **Connectional Ministries’ Book Club – April 6**

Connectional Ministries invites South Georgia clergy and laity to join a virtual book club via Zoom. From the comfort of one’s home or office – anywhere, really – participants will discuss the week’s book, its important themes, and faith. The group’s first book is “[How to Be an Anti-racist](#)” by Ibram X. Kendi. Leading the discussion will be Lindsey and Rev. Andrew (Drew) Young, pastor of Mosaic Church in Savannah. The study will begin March 2 and run through April 6. Find more details and registration information online at [www.sgaumc.org/book-club](http://www.sgaumc.org/book-club).

### **Online Basic Lay Servant Ministries Training via Zoom – April 13, April 15, April 20, April 22**

Lay Servant training is designed to educate those persons interested in stretching their faith to participate more fully in the ministries of the church. They have three main areas of focus: Leading, Caring, and Communicating. The basic class is based on Cokesbury's book, "Lay Servant Ministries Basic Course," which teaches a basic understanding of ministry in the United Methodist Tradition. Included in the course is the following: Wesleyan Tradition and Foundations, Spiritual Gifts, Servant Leadership, Caring Ministries, Communicating, and Sharing Your Faith. You must complete all of the scheduled dates to complete your training. To participate you will need either a cell phone that will allow you to download the Zoom app (please do so ahead of time) or a laptop, a steady wi-fi connection, and a willingness to learn in a modern way. Registration fee for the class is \$25. For more information, contact Anne Bosarge at [anne@thechapelministries.com](mailto:anne@thechapelministries.com).

### **Native American Ministries Sunday – April 18**

On Native American Ministries Sunday, United Methodists cultivate and support urban missions with Native Americans and fund scholarships for Native American seminarians.