

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – APRIL 20 EDITION

South Georgia churches awarded more than \$200,000 in grants for hybrid ministry

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

During the coronavirus pandemic, social media – especially Facebook – has helped the Lone Hill United Methodist Church congregation stay connected, said pastor Rev. Lori Howell-Miller.

And with training and a \$5,100 grant, the church plans to expand their social media presence, build a church website, post sermons and events on YouTube, and more.

“You can still be a rural, small church and still be vibrant and alive,” Rev. Howell-Miller said. “Technology will help break barriers for any of us.”

Rev. Howell-Miller and a Lone Hill UMC lay member attended the South Georgia Conference’s [This and That Think Tank](#), a recent gathering of South Georgia pastors and laity interested in hybrid ministry.

Designed to help congregations innovate and expand both their in-person and digital ministries, the This and That Think Tank was led by Congregational Development. 40 congregations participated, 25 applied for grants, and more than \$200,000 in grant funding was awarded.

In the past eight months or so, many pastors and church leaders have been doing “a little bit of this and a little bit of that,” said Anne Bosarge, assistant director of Congregational Development. They knew they needed both digital and in-person worship services, but didn’t really know how best to make them both happen well.

The Think Tank, she said, was to help pastors and lay members understand the available options and think about how they align with their church’s ministry and mission.

“The point of a hybrid ministry isn’t to have a hybrid ministry,” Bosarge said. “It’s to help you accomplish your mission. In the Think Tank we started by asking, ‘What is your mission? What is God calling you to do?’ That has not changed. The method has changed. The mission remains the same.”

Held both in person and virtually, churches of all sizes attended the Think Tank – small, rural congregations to large, city churches. And while grant requests – totaling \$417,000 – ran the gamut, the ones granted were specifically for hybrid ministry.

Grants were given for new equipment, podcast support, for new online campuses, for creating new spaces for hybrid worship or filming, for coaching, and more.

“Many people came in thinking it was just your online worship experience and they left thinking it could be used for so much more,” Bosarge said. “The Think Tank gave them a broader picture of hybrid discipleship, not just hybrid worship.”

Lone Hill UMC – which celebrates its 173rd birthday this year – is excited about how the grant will help them expand their ministry and reach out to the community, Rev. Howell-Miller said. She’s also eager to have the church’s youth involved with the technology and more invested and contributing to God’s kingdom.

“We’re still doing what we’ve always done, we’re just using some new lure,” she said, referencing Luke 5:10. “We’re not changing what we do, we’re just bringing in some new ways.”

Creativity, computers help annual Confirmation Retreat continue

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

For thousands of South Georgia children and youth, the Conference’s [Confirmation Retreat](#) has been a crucial part of their confirmation journey.

Since 2002, hundreds of children have flocked to Epworth By The Sea each spring for worship, study, and fellowship with fellow confirmands.

But because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this year’s Confirmation Retreat was in limbo and organizers had to determine if and how to host the event.

“Now more than ever, youth are desperate to know the ‘why’ behind everything in our world,” said Suzanne Akins, associate director of Connectional Ministries. “This makes the Confirmation experience that much more vital. Being able to ask and find answers to the ‘why’s’ of their faith, their church, and their denomination is crucial to their spiritual journey.”

Thanks to computers and the creativity of a 2021 Task Force, the Confirmation Retreat continued on this year despite COVID-19.

Instead of 500 confirmands gathering in person this year, Akins created a digital version of the annual retreat and dubbed it “Confirmation: Reimagined.” While the content was packaged differently than in years past - with video courses, Zoom sessions, digital downloads, and Spotify playlists in lieu of speakers, small group sessions, and bands - the content was the same.

“We knew churches were going to try and bring back Confirmation classes after most missed a year,” Akins said. “We knew we couldn’t offer the supplement of a big retreat, so we sat down (by Zoom of course!) with our task force and figured out how to get the content straight to the local church leaders through digital mediums.”

Confirmands from St. Mary’s Road United Methodist Church in Columbus look forward to the Conference’s annual Confirmation Retreat and attend each year. Church leaders were grateful to have options with the digital content this year when gathering in person wasn’t possible.

“I was really excited when I saw that the Conference had put together Reimagined materials and that we could use them,” said Paula Shaw-Powell, St. Mary’s Road UMC’s Christian Education

Team Chair. “The parents were motivated to have their children go through confirmation and the children were motivated to go through confirmation, too.”

Using the Reimagined curriculum, St. Mary’s Road UMC leaders and its six confirmands gathered via Zoom every Wednesday and Sunday afternoon for six weeks. They occasionally struggled through attention and Internet connection issues, but the confirmands persevered and took their vows March 14.

“We saw the determination in the kids to go through this so they could have their confirmation this year, together,” Shaw-Powell said. “We say to them, when they finish, that they know more about The UMC than the adults in the pews. They learn so much about being a Christian and the call to be a Christian in their young lives and what it means to be a United Methodist. I think that’s important because we have so many people who don’t think that staying in church is important. It is important, and the kids learn why it’s important.”

Even in the midst of the pandemic, Annie Paulk has seen creativity and connectionism thrive.

As Tifton First United Methodist Church’s Director of Children's Ministries, Paulk has been a regular participant in the Conference’s Confirmation Retreat, taking groups year after year.

For her group, forging relationships is a huge component of the retreat, and she wanted to find a way to use the content, foster relationships, and stay safe.

“For me, personally, it is all about relationships,” Paulk said. “The retreat’s content helps them understand it on their level and helps them see how important relationships are – with each other and with God.”

She and Nichole Lawson, Perry United Methodist Church’s youth pastor, teamed up for a small retreat at Camp Jekyll on Jekyll Island. Using the Conference’s Confirmation: Reimagined materials and with in-person sessions led by Akins and Conference Historian Anne Packard, they were able to gather for their own mini Confirmation Retreat.

“It was amazing,” Paulk said. “(The kids) were so excited to be doing something. It met all of the ministry goals we were trying to reach. I love the connectionism, and it’s so evident in that retreat. That connectionism really empowers us to make a greater impact for the body of Christ.”

While Confirmation looked different this year, church leaders are grateful for the Conference’s creativity and the opportunity to continue the confirmation connection.

“It was really fun,” Shaw-Powell said. “It wasn’t Epworth, but it was great. This year was a unique year, and they still learned what it meant to be United Methodist.”



Mathew Pinson elected GUMF President/CEO

The Georgia United Methodist Foundation Board of Trustees has unanimously elected Mathew Pinson as the Foundation’s next president and CEO, effective July 1, 2021. Pinson will succeed Rev. Keith E. Lawder, who is retiring after serving as the Foundation’s president since 2016.

GUMF Search Committee Chair Kathryn Dennis said of Pinson’s selection, “We selected Mathew after conducting an extensive nationwide search. He brings great talents and a strong vision to lead the Foundation in the challenging years ahead. We are delighted he has accepted the challenge!”

Pinson responded, “I believe the Georgia United Methodist Foundation has an exceptional opportunity to provide leadership and resources for Methodists across the state. We have great potential to convene strong partners to advance the Foundation’s mission further—from our existing programs to developing new opportunities.

The way the Foundation directly supports individuals, congregations, and organizations is inspiring. I look forward to joining a strong team of board members and staff at the Foundation as we seek to serve as a leading financial partner by providing faith-based solutions for investing, lending, training, and planned giving.”

Pinson has served Emory University in various roles for nearly 14 years. He currently serves as assistant vice president and chief of staff to the senior vice president for advancement and alumni engagement. This division supports the university and health sciences programs (including Emory Healthcare). Previously, Pinson served as associate dean of development and alumni relations at Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

Pinson is passionate about serving The United Methodist Church. He has served on the Board of Directors of Wespeth Benefits and Investments and the General Council on Finance and Administration; served as a delegate to six General Conferences and five Jurisdictional Conferences; chaired the North Georgia delegation and served as Conference Lay Leader for the North Georgia Conference. A native of Newnan, Ga., Pinson is a graduate of Reinhardt University. Before his work at Emory, Pinson served as director of development at Tennessee Wesleyan University.

Pinson is married to the Rev. Susan Pinson, senior associate pastor at Glenn Memorial UMC. They have a daughter and a son.

Reinhardt University proudly announces new president, Mark A. Roberts, Ph.D.

Reinhardt’s Board of Trustees appointed Mark A. Roberts, Ph.D., as the 21st President of Reinhardt University. Dr. Roberts assumed his role on April 7, 2021.

“The Board of Trustees embodies a strong sense of purpose and is deeply committed to the ideals of private higher education and the mission of Reinhardt University,” said Ken White, Chairman of Reinhardt’s Board of Trustees. “We are pleased to announce Dr. Mark A. Roberts as our 21st President, a leader who will uphold the values of Reinhardt and who, with great care, will impact the lives of our students and the entire Reinhardt community. The Board took their responsibility seriously in making this selection and invited the community, faculty and staff, and alumni leaders into our process. Throughout Dr. Roberts’s distinguished career, and during the past several years as Reinhardt’s Provost, Executive Vice President and Interim President, Dr. Roberts has proven to be a highly respected and effective leader who can guide and elevate Reinhardt during a time of tremendous opportunity in providing the education for today’s students to thrive in a very complex and changing world. We are grateful for his service to Reinhardt and look forward to his tenure as our President.”

Jim Hasson, Chair of the Leadership Committee of the Reinhardt Board of Trustees, shared, “Dr. Roberts has the proven qualities needed by Reinhardt both during the present pandemic and over the extended future. He is respected by students, faculty members, community members, and University staff, as well as the Trustees. His academic qualifications and organizational abilities prove of great value to Reinhardt.”

Under President Tom Isherwood, Roberts was hired in 2013 as vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty. He made history when then President Kina Mallard named him Reinhardt University’s first Provost in January 2017. Soon after, he was promoted to Executive Vice President — just two years into his provost position. In these roles, and among many accomplishments, Roberts integrated student affairs and academic administration, leading to an improved first-year experience and increased retention rates. Working with a motivated and innovative faculty and staff, Dr. Roberts led the University to strengthen the Reinhardt student experience to ensure the education of “the whole person” and advance the vision to create a place “where each student thrives.”

To the position of president, Dr. Roberts brings twenty-five years of private higher education experience and intentional preparation for the role. In 2019, he completed the Presidential Vocation and Institutional Mission program – a year-long immersive experience of mentorship and study for prospective college and university presidents with the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC). At the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Roberts led the university successfully through its initial crisis response, and in July 2020, the Board named him Interim President. He has since guided Reinhardt’s community in a year like no other, encouraging persistence, vigilance and grace under pressure — while mitigating the risk of COVID-19 on campus. In his own right, Dr. Roberts, as the university’s leader, continues to celebrate victories as sure steps toward overcoming obstacles imposed by the pandemic.

“I am very grateful to the members of the Board of Trustees for their confidence in my leadership. Their engagement and collaboration throughout these trying times have been of strategic importance and, quite frankly, inspiring to me. I also must recognize Reinhardt faculty, staff and students. Their devotion and openness to innovation has been the guiding light that

allows the university to persist and grow despite many obstacles. I am humbled to serve as president of this great learning community.”

Dr. Roberts’s tenure at Reinhardt has been one of expanding opportunity and leading growth. Since 2013, Dr. Roberts has worked collegially with faculty and staff to secure grants in support of academic excellence. Included in these successes are grants from the Goizueta Foundation, National Science Foundation, Department of Justice, and National Endowment for the Humanities. Among his many achievements in program development, in collaboration with Reinhardt faculty, Dr. Roberts has strengthened and launched an academic school, several degree programs and an academic center: Reinhardt’s Cauble School of Nursing & Health Sciences, the Etowah Valley Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in creative writing, the Master of Science in sport administration & leadership, and the Center for Innovative Teaching and Engaged Learning (CITEL). Through CITEL and its Goizueta Foundation funding, Dr. Roberts, on advice from faculty, approved the development of the Lightboard Studio. The studio enables faculty to record visually appealing video lessons, much like using a whiteboard in the classroom. The studio has been a tremendous asset for faculty and students, especially in meeting the challenges of the pandemic.

Dr. Roberts’s creativity is also evident in his focus on developing educational opportunities for working professionals. “I completed my doctoral degree while holding down a full-time professorship during the day, teaching adult-learners at night, and homeschooling and raising four children with my devoted wife, Kelley,” Roberts said. “I have a great admiration for adult learners.” To support these students, Dr. Roberts paved the way for Reinhardt to launch the 100% online Bachelor of Business Administration and revamp the Master of Public Administration to center the curriculum on developing law enforcement leaders in the state of Georgia.

In addition to service at Reinhardt, Roberts has assumed several unique responsibilities that offer significant opportunities and global exposure for Reinhardt. One of these includes serving as editor of the James Dickey Review, an annual literary journal with university library subscribers from around the world. The journal publishes some of the most important voices writing today and contributes to the on-going scholarship of the enduring work of Georgia writer, James Dickey.

Coming from humble beginnings, Roberts is a native of Maryville, in east Tennessee, where he grew up on a 50-acre family farm. Inspired by a high school trip to Shakespeare’s home, he attended Middle Tennessee State University to earn a bachelor’s and master’s degree in English literature and language. He went on to earn a Ph.D. in interdisciplinary studies in the humanities at the Union Institute and University, an institution modeled on the one-to-one tutorial Oxford College model. He has served as a National Endowment for the Humanities fellow studying Appalachian culture, a duPont fellow at the National Humanities Center, studying cultural globalization, an American studies fellow at prestigious Salzburg Seminars in Salzburg, Austria, and a fellow in the John S. Knight Writing Seminar at Cornell University. His scholarly publications and presentations focus on Appalachian cultural identity and American poetry. A

creative writer at heart, Dr. Roberts has numerous poems published in literary journals and poetry anthologies.

“My goal for the University in the short-term is to steer the institution through the challenges imposed by the global pandemic while remaining true to our higher education mission. I am a big picture thinker. When I think about Reinhardt, I imagine what the university should look like in 2033, at its seminal 150 years of existence. I have my own ideas of how it should grow into its full potential, but I also need the input of the good people who constitute the fullness of Reinhardt’s essence — its students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, friends, and board members. With the University community and my leadership team, I am eager to define, shape and implement that vision.”

Dr. Roberts’s colleagues recognize his effective leadership, his devotion to broad, intellectual inquiry, his belief in the power of people who band together under a unified purpose, and his love of teaching and inspiring students. Among his peers, he is often praised for his efforts to combine the best of a broad higher education experience with the “knowledge-needs of the community” and for espousing private higher education as an undeniable public good.

Dr. Harold V. Hartley III, Senior Vice President for the Council of Independent Colleges, shared, “The Council of Independent Colleges congratulates Dr. Mark Roberts on his appointment as president of Reinhardt University. Dr. Roberts is deeply committed to independent higher education and its potential to transform the lives of students, especially those from underserved communities. He is a thoughtful and collegial leader who understands both the broader trends impacting all of higher education as well as the particular circumstances that can shape the future of Reinhardt University.”

“Dr. Roberts has extensive experience fostering academic and industry collaborations,” said President of the Georgia Independent College Association Jenna Colvin. “His talent and energy will be valuable additions as Reinhardt moves forward.”

Roberts and his wife Kelley live in Waleska, Georgia. They have 4 adult children - Taylor, Raynah ‘21, Zoe ‘19, and Jayden - and one grandchild, Nara. We can’t forget, too, the Reinhardt star in his own right - Wilson, the family canine companion.

The inauguration of Dr. Roberts will take place in Fall 2021.

Caring for God’s Creation

OUR CONNECTION MATTERS

ALLISON LINDSEY

“Creation is the canvas on which God has painted His character.” Author Unknown

Spring fever is upon me, especially as the temperature begins to feel like summer. I love to be outdoors in God’s creation, and April is the perfect time to highlight Creation Care as we celebrate Earth Day on April 22.

You may be familiar with the Seven Wonders of the World, but do you know there are [seven natural wonders of Georgia](#)? Two of these wonders are located right here in South Georgia: the Okefenokee Swamp and Providence Canyon.

As someone who loves to explore nature and hike, I am, of course, drawn to [Providence Canyon](#) – also known as the “Little Grand Canyon” – located in Lumpkin, Ga. And, yet, while I am inspired by the beauty of the canyon, it is interesting to note that the massive gullies of the canyon, which go as deep as 150 feet, were actually caused by poor farming practices during the 1800s. The canyon is evidence of the impact we have in this world and on the land in which we live.

This makes me wonder about the future as it relates to the ways we use and interact with this world and all its resources God has entrusted to us. What will our world be like for future generations? There’s no doubt, God calls us to care for his creation.

Below are resources to help you learn more about Creation Care, discover activities for families, youth and children, and find practical ways you can be good (or better!) stewards of what God has created for us each and every day:

- [52 Ways to Care for Creation](#)
- [Georgia Interfaith Power and Light \(GIPL\)](#)
- [Toolkit For Launching Your Creation Care Ministry](#)
- [Global Ministries Earth Day Sunday Worship Resources](#)
- [Caretakers of God's Creation](#)
- [United Methodist Women Climate Justice Resources](#)
- [Ministry Matters™ | Kids and Creation Care](#)
- [5 Fun Environmental Activities About Taking Care of God's World](#)
- [Youth Group Lessons on Creation](#) and [Youth Group Games on Creation](#)

I am also working with Pat Homer, a lay member of Pittman Park UMC in Statesboro, to produce upcoming resources in which she will share her passion and knowledge around the theology of creation care and offer training for our conference. Pat was commissioned by Global Ministries as an [EarthKeeper](#) in 2020. She is the first person in South Georgia to complete this training and embark on education and building awareness for creation care in her community and beyond.

As we challenge ourselves to become more aware of the beauty God surrounds us with, I am reminded of Paul’s words in Romans 1:20: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

We see God in creation, and we honor God by honoring His creation. I encourage you to find time to spend outdoors to enjoy creation each day. You will discover more of God's eternal power and divine nature up close and personal. And if you haven't visited Providence Canyon, an adventure awaits you – no mask required!

Allison Lindsey is the director of Connectional Ministries. She has a passion for the local church and its people. Contact her at allison@sgaume.com.

The Nation's Plea

Spring Quarter: Prophets Faithful To God's Covenant

Unit 2: Prophets of Restoration

Sunday school lesson for the week of April 25, 2021

By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: Lamentations 5

Key Verse: Lamentations 5:21

Lesson Aims

1. Describe the historical context of the book of Lamentations.
2. Summarize the reasons for the people's mourning.

How many sermons or lessons have you heard on Lamentations? In all probability, not many. As the writer of the lesson pointed out, Lamentations has been largely neglected in favor of texts that call us to joyful worship. Even in personal devotional time, Lamentations is often bypassed in favor of almost anything else. Simply stated, we don't like to dwell on pain, which is what Lamentations does.

However, we are reminded that remembering tragedy, as important as that is, isn't the only purpose of Lamentations. This book can also teach us much about our relationship with God – if we let it.

Lesson Context

The book of Lamentations reflects the period of about 586-538 BC, the period of Babylonian captivity. Assyria had taken the northern tribes of Israel into exile earlier, in 722 BC. "Only the tribe of Judah was left" (2 Kings 17:18). But despite the warnings of many prophets, Judah continued in sin (2 Kings 21:10-15). The writer of Lamentations, commonly taken to be Jeremiah, had warned Judah for many years that God's judgment was coming (Jeremiah 25:2-11).

As instruments of God's wrath, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC (2 Chronicles 36:15-20). Many who were left alive were carried into exile while the weak and the poor were left behind to contend with foreign settlers.

The book of Lamentations consists of five independent poems, all centering, though in different ways, around one common theme: the calamities that befell the people of Judah, and especially of Jerusalem, during the siege and subsequent capture of the holy city.

Note that the five poems of chapters of Lamentations do not shy away from describing that devastation and its aftermath. Lack of food resulted in starvation and even cannibalism (Lamentations 2:20; 4:10). Those who did not die by the sword were weak with hunger and disease.

We are informed that for all the chaos of the setting Jeremiah was very intentional in the literary forms he used when writing this book. The first four chapters are all "acrostics." This means that each verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in consecutive order. In English, this would mean beginning the first verse with A, the second verse with B, etc. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, thus there are 22 verses in each of chapter 1, 2, and 4. Chapter 3 is somewhat different with 66 verses because the "acrostic" format appears there three times.

It is suggested that this tight orderliness was perhaps a way for Jeremiah to organize what he saw. And, if so, it is a subtle hint that, though on the surface all seems lost, order still exists – or at least "could" exist again.

The fifth poem, which is Lamentations 5, has the requisite number of stanzas, but no attempt at alphabetic arrangement is discernible (no acrostic pattern). That is not accidental, since it is the same length as chapter 1, 2, and 4. It is thought that the discontinuance of the careful pattern seems to mimic the ebbing fortunes of the people. For all their cries to God, no help seemed to be forthcoming (Lamentations 3:44).

Confrontation

Lamentations 5:1-15

Though the acrostic pattern disappears in Lamentations chapter 5, Jeremiah continues to use characteristic Hebrew repetition. Piling on synonyms is a way Hebrew poetry emphasizes a point. And this characteristic is evident throughout the lesson text. The effect is to give a full account of the pain of the people, who speak as one here.

Asking God to "remember" is not primarily a plea for him to recall information, but for him to act. "Look and see" both echo "remember." Putting these three verbs together conveys a sense of urgency for God to see what is happening to his people and to act without delay.

The phrase “what has happened to us” suggests that the people saw themselves as passive recipients of the tragedy that has befallen them while the phrase “our disgrace” runs parallel (compare Psalm 44:13-16).

But the people’s circumstances were because of their sins, not mere twists of fate. Lamentations 1:5, 2:14, and 3:42 tell the whole story.

We now see the results of Judah’s sins. Here the people do not recount the events of invasion as they did in Lamentations 4:16-20. Instead, they describe the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual conditions of survivors in an occupied land.

Strangers possess their inheritance, their land, and their homes. Spiritually and emotionally they are abandoned, fully displaced “orphans” (v.3). Imagine how devastating it was for that inheritance – with all its God-ordained safeguards – to be lost to “strangers” and “foreigners.” The land falling into the hands of people who were outside of God’s covenant jeopardized Judah ever receiving it back.

Orphans (fatherless children, not necessarily motherless) and widows were protected people under God’s covenant (example: Deuteronomy 10:18). They were to be taken under the wing of the community so they could thrive in less than ideal conditions. However, in a horrible reversal of fortune, God’s judgment has created widows and orphans in Judah, just as he warned (Exodus 22:24; Jeremiah 15:8; 18:21).

5:4-5: Physical conditions of life are dreadful. They have to pay for the produce of the land, for water and wood that belonged to everyone but are now controlled by their occupiers. They are fatigued and weary from forced labor, from the yoke of slavery on their “hard driven” necks (v.5). Occupation makes slaves of them and turns routine of daily sustenance into enormous burdens.

5:6-7: Verse 6 interrupts the complaint to interpret the people’s plight. They have contributed to their current condition by having made a pact with the foreign powers of Egypt and Assyria. They have given their loyalties to another, not to God. This language brings prophetic attacks on foreign entanglements. No nation can save them; only God can. The sins of their ancestors must include these alliances for which the present community must bear the punishment.

Those who lifted their voices in their lament certainly felt the shock waves of the sins of previous generations. But throughout those generations, God had warned about judgment. Even more, God had promised to relent from punishment when the people repented (see Jeremiah 18:7-8; Jonah 3:4-10).

The Babylonian exile, shocking in its scope, marked the end of God’s patience. Lamentations is witness to how bad that judgment was. However, God did acknowledge that the Babylonians had

overstepped their role in carrying out his decreed judgment and would themselves be punished for that (see Isaiah 47).

5:8-15: The perilous predicament of the occupation returns to the center of the people's complaint. Slaves have become their rulers. The slave rulers may refer to a puppet government or to appointers of the occupying nation, or they may signify the topsy-turvy nature of the current social order. At any rate, slaves are people unprepared and unsuitable to lead, and they have replaced Judah's proper rulers.

Danger lurks at the simplest circumstances of daily life. Perhaps because of military or palace presence or because of general chaos in the society, the people obtain food at the "peril of their lives" (v.9).

Even the people's appearance has changed – their skin has blackened – because of hunger that burns and destroys their bodies. Women are not safe; virgins are raped. Princes are hung by their hands. Being executed in such a public way such as implied here was a grave indignity. The spectacle of their (prince's) death was meant to remind the people of their powerlessness.

Elders are shown no respect. It seems likely, given the parallelism of the two lines in verse 12, that the dishonor offered them was also public execution.

Typically, it was female slaves who were the ones to grind grain. But this task has fallen to "young men" who would be better suited to different tasks. In contrast, "boys" are given work much too difficult for them. The image is that of falling under their burden of sins – the weight of its punishment.

In verse 14, the people turn from their descriptions of the horrors of their external world to its impact upon their spirits. Grief abounds, but it makes them tired and numb. Joy is gone, and mourning replaces dancing.

In Jerusalem, the elders congregated at the main gate to decide legal cases. The fact that they are gone speaks to the complete upheaval of the government. The lack of "music" further reveals the cultural upheaval that is evident throughout the book.

Now, in Psalm 30:1-3, the psalmist rejoiced in God's deliverance from enemies and sickness. The exact opposite is seen here. The conquered people suffer from both, with "joy" turning to "mourning." How utterly hopeless their current situation seemed!

Confession

Lamentations 5:16-22

The 16th verse, "The crown has fallen from our head," summarizes the societal and governmental upheaval that the people have experienced. Though "the crown" represents the monarchy, the monarchy itself represents Judah.

Verse 16b follows with “Woe to us for we have sinned.” These mourners had claimed that they suffered from previous generations’ sins (Lamentations 5:7). Here they take responsibility for their own sin. The word “woe” expresses their grief.

The truth is, these people finally echoed the words of Pogo in the old Walt Kelly comic strip: “We have met the enemy and he is us!”

In verses 17 and 18, we see that weakness of “hearts” and “eyes” result from the fate of “Mount Zion.” This place once had great significance. Now the presence of “jackals” in the heart of the city marks the profound desolation of Jerusalem.

Abruptly (v.19) in the typical style of laments, the speakers utter words of assurance in the midst of their suffering. They address directly the blind God, the One whom they are begging to remember and to see (v.1): “You Lord,” they say “reign forever.” The power of the divine ruler endures, and the divine reign still stands. Just knowing that God’s presence can be counted on can be a source of comfort, even if in the current moment he seems far off.

The late Bishop Bevel Jones told me once, “Hal, there will be times in your ministry when you’ll get down on your knees and ask, “God, are you really there?” I remember when I was a very young minister and had just conducted the funeral of a little five-year-old girl who had died of bone cancer. I had been through all the agonies of that family. When the funeral was over and I went back to the parsonage, got down on my knees and asked, “Lord, are you really there?”

Of course, I took comfort in the fact that I wouldn’t have been on my knees if I hadn’t thought that God was there.

5:20: But for the speakers in the final poem of Lamentations, assurance of divine rule is not reassuring. Rather than continue with hopeful and flattering words of praise, they hurl their angry, unanswerable questions at the divine ruler. “Why do you keep forgetting us,” they ask. “Why have you forsaken us these many days?” Knowing that God is from generation to generation makes the question of his forgetting or forsaking all the more painful.

In verse 21, language of turning speaks of repentance. The people did not trust themselves to “return” to the Lord as they should. And certainly, their history proved that they struggled to return to God on their own. For this reason, then, they asked that God would give his grace to them by turning them himself. However, the ultimate answer to the plea of this half-verse before us is found in the church, where “we are transformed by the renewing of [our] minds.”

Though the “days of old” were full of disobedience, there were days when God showered his people with blessings in the land he had given them (Deuteronomy 28:1-13). We are informed that the desire was not simply to renew those days but for transformation by the repentance of the people.

Thus, after fleeting experience of hope, the people turned once again to what they feared was true. Could God be so “angry” with them that he would “utterly” reject them forever?

Concluding Thoughts

In Lamentations, scholars tell us, God is present but hiding. The wonder of this biblical book is its daring honesty about the One who hides behind clouds, seems to turn away prayers, and will not pay attention. We are informed and we see that Lamentations articulate a theology of absence and abandonment that is almost contemporary in its longing and emptiness. In its poems, however, Lamentations build a sacred space where suffering is seen, acknowledged and borne witness to. And to some degree, that in itself may be of comfort.

There is still something else of great importance here. Lamentations helps us find language to tell God the very deep, very real pain that we remember or still experience. The book serves as an invitation to take those things to God.

As Paul wrote, “Neither death, nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38, 39).

Though the inclusion of Lamentations in the Bible may seem strange, it does give evidence of the truth of Paul’s assertion. No siege, no famine, no cannibalism, no destruction, no forced labor, no exile could separate God’s people from his love.

God demonstrated this love in Jesus Christ, making a way for all people to turn to the Lord and experience his blessings. Through Jesus’ great suffering, we have become partners with all those people who one day will be freed from all suffering (Revelation 21:4).

Action Plan

1. What is the best course of action to take in light of whatever or whomever is now oppressing you or a loved one?
2. How would you comfort and guide someone who feels forgotten by God?
3. What is your strongest “take” from the book of Lamentations? Why do you think the book is included in the Bible?

Resources for this lesson

1. “2020-2021 Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching,” pages 289-296.
2. “The New Interpreter’s Bible Volume VI” pages 1013-1015; 1067-1072.
3. “The Abingdon Bible Commentary,” pages 709, 713.

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).

Speaking Truth to Power

Spring Quarter: Prophets Faithful To God's Covenant

Unit 3: Courageous Prophets of Change

Sunday school lesson for the week of May 2, 2021

By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: 1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-8

Key Verse: 1 Kings 22:14

Lesson Aims

3. Identify the roles of Ahab, Jehoshaphat, and Micaiah.
4. Compare and contrast how each of these three related to God's truth.
5. Create a plan to pursue and apply God's knowledge in the week ahead.

Have you ever sought out counsel that would tell you what you want to hear, rather than truth, so that you could proceed with your own agenda? The writer of the lesson says that herein is an important lesson we can learn from George Washington.

As the first president of the United States, Washington had no precedent to follow when choosing the men who would shape his thinking and the new government. Wisely, Washington chose an eclectic group of people to fill cabinet positions and be his closest advisers. They were from different parts of the country, and they had different views on how the government should operate. Instead of choosing advisers exclusively from his state of Virginia, Washington chose to surround himself with people who had the same ultimate goals in mind. The varied opinions about how to achieve common goals helped President Washington make choices that were more informed and wiser.

Unfortunately, Ahab did not make similar decisions. He surrounded himself with false prophets who told him whatever he wanted to hear. However, today's lesson focuses on the one prophet who refused to compromise the truth.

Walter Brueggemann says that at least on the surface, 1 and 2 Kings are historical narratives. That is, the text reports on the events and personalities that comprise the history of Israel (north and south) from 962, at the death of David, to 587 and the end of Jerusalem, together with a brief addition likely dated to 561.

But we do well to remember that no book of the Bible seeks merely to give us a history lesson. Every book in the Bible intends to tell us something about God.

The Old Testament narratives, 1 and 2 Kings included, were passed down with the intention of revealing truth about the relationship between God and his people. These books were read by the Babylonian exiles, who had many deep and painful questions regarding the benefits of being chosen by God. Jerusalem's destruction and the exile of its people raised questions about God's sovereignty and love. The point is that these books and others are more than history, though that is also reality.

First Kings 22 opens by describing a conversation between two kings: Ahab of northern Israel (reigned 874-853 BC) and Jehoshaphat of southern Judah (reigned 873-849 BC). Before launching a joint military initiative, Ahab decided to consult his prophets to learn whether God would give him victory (1 Kings 22:10). Consulting God (or false gods) before battle was customary (example: Judges 20:18, 1 Samuel 23:2).

Ahab followed this practice, but he sought divine guidance from about 400 false prophets. These men were charged with discerning God's will while having no access to God! Their counsel was united that God would grant victory in the expected battle (1 Kings 22:1-6). A favorable report, delivered from a unified front, would certainly seem convincing.

But King Jehoshaphat was unimpressed by the verdict of the false prophets. Jehoshaphat's reign was characterized by religious reform and the suppression of idolatry (2 Chronicles 17:3-6). But he found himself in a compromised position because he had entered into a political alliance with the spiritually lapsed northern kingdom. Consequently, in an attempt to do right, Jehoshaphat asked Ahab if he didn't have a prophet of the true God who could be consulted. Ahab admitted that Micaiah was such a prophet.

A Sarcastic Prophecy

1 Kings 22:15-16

Ahab despised Micaiah because of the series of negative reports the prophet had made against the king. The unnamed prophet in 1 Kings 20:35-43 was suggested by both the Talmud (the Book of Jewish Law) and the first-century Jewish historian Josephus to have been Micaiah. Little else is known about this prophet.

Specifically, the issue in the story is the territory of Ramoth-Gilead, rich land between Israel and Syria and a cause of endless conflict. It was located (the city) on a large plain, making chariot warfare possible (see 1 Kings 22:31-38).

In Ahab's day, the Arameans (later known as Syrians) held the city. Despite the fact that Israel had some ancestral links to the Arameans, the Arameans were often opposed to Israel, either instigating or experiencing war with Israel.

Now, Micaiah at first surprised the king, Ahab, by telling him exactly what he wanted to hear and what the other prophets had already told him. “Attack and be victorious,” Micaiah answered, “for the Lord will give it into the king’s hand” (1 Kings 22:15).

King Ahab knows, however, this is not the truth. He knows this, perhaps because of the tone and manner of Micaiah’s delivery. Or it may be that the king knows all too well that Micaiah would not say anything favorable to him (see 1 Kings 22:8).

At any rate, it’s hard to blame Micaiah for his initial response to Ahab. In all probability, Micaiah was exhausted from telling Ahab God’s sovereign truth just to have it ignored in the face of what Ahab wanted to do all along. How often do we ask God for his truth, realize it, and promptly choose what we wanted to hear instead of what he said? Basically, it’s time to start following God’s truth rather than simply asking for it. A lesson for all of us. But even though King Ahab heard what he wanted to hear, he interpreted Micaiah’s response as a bald-faced lie, not even meant to be believed. Ahab’s asking “how many times” implies that Micaiah had fallen into the pattern of disdain telling the king whatever it was he wanted to hear.

The king then ironically demands that Micaiah fulfill his prophetic duty and only give God’s word (Deuteronomy 18:18). But Ahab wasn’t really interested in hearing God’s actual will. He only used his prophets to legitimize the plans that were already in his heart (see 1 Kings 22:22).

As Walter Brueggemann reminds us, “Prophetic faith is useless if it is only an echo of what the powerful already think is truth. Prophetic truth is expected to go beyond acceptable pragmatism.” In other words, prophetic truth challenges the party line.

A Sincere Prophecy

1 Kings 22:17-23

In verses 17-23, the narrative arrives at its center. Micaiah drops his act, causing the atmosphere in the room to immediately darken. Israel would be thrown into as much disarray as “sheep without a shepherd (see 1 Kings 22:28). When they realized they had “no master,” the army would be scattered—each to his own home. Returning “in peace” might mean that, though leaderless, the army would be better off without their previous master. Or it might simply mean that the fighting would be over for a time.

Ahab’s response in verse 18 to Micaiah’s prophecy suggests that the prophet was brought to court more as a jester or curiosity than a legitimate adviser. Ahab’s heart was so hardened against God that he was able to dismiss Micaiah’s warning as just one more “bad” thing the prophet said about the king of Israel.

At the same time, King Jehoshaphat’s non-reaction is equally disturbing. Here’s a king who worshipped the God of Israel and took measures to stomp out idolatry in his nation. But at this point he failed to advise the other king to heed the word of the Lord.

Moving on, Micaiah then describes a vision of the Lord sitting enthroned in the celestial court, surrounded by members of the divine council (the “heavenly host”). So Micaiah has a word to speak from another source, and the source is a glimpse into the heavenly throne of God (see Isaiah 6:1-8; Jeremiah 18, 22).

As Walter Brueggemann asked, “who can argue with such a credential?” Micaiah’s message from the holy source is two-fold. First, there will be disaster: “no shepherd, no master.” That is, the king will be killed (v.17). Second, God so wants the death of Ahab that the false assurance of the false prophets are a play on the part of God to seduce Ahab into the death-trap of war (vv.20-23).

Ahab would die on the battlefield. Such a sentence was just since Ahab had followed the ways of his evil queen, Jezebel, and led the northern kingdom into the idolatrous worship of Baal (1 Kings 16:31-33). Unlike Ahab’s prophets, who all answered the king in unison, God’s court was filled with lots of ideas, giving various plans for how to lure Ahab to his death.

In Micaiah’s vision, God asks for a volunteer from the divine council to go and trick Ahab into going into battle, only to be struck down. One of the members of the council came forward proposing to be a “lying spirit” in the mouth of Ahab’s prophets. This is in order that these prophets might entice Ahab into going to war (see Jeremiah 20:7; Ezekiel 14:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:11). The volunteer is duly charged with the task by the Lord and is promised success. Micaiah then interprets the vision for Ahab telling him that the false prophets who give him what he wants to hear are speaking for the lying spirit.

Thus, Micaiah presented Ahab with a message of judgment. But implied in that message was the opportunity for repentance (compare Jonah 3). Mercifully, Ahab was given the opportunity to admit his sinful state, repent, and break off his doomed campaign.

Speaking of sin, Bishop Woodie White states in his book “Confessions of a Prairie Pilgrim” that we are to own our sin and accept responsibility for it. “Don’t make excuses or rationalizations. Don’t call it by sophisticated sociological or psychological jargon. Call it by its name. God already knows it. God wants you to claim it, to acknowledge it. Then with a penitent and contrite heart, give it to God. Leave it with God. There is no sin so terrible that God’s love cannot forgive.”

But back to Ahab! God used Ahab’s character and the deference of the king’s prophets to deceive the man. Important! God never lies, but he does work through humans to accomplish his purposes, whether they do good or ill. In this case, the “deceiving spirit” intensified human dynamics already in play to ensure that Ahab would be fooled. In truth, the king who resists God must die.

A Sure Prophecy

1 Kings 22:26-28

Now, Ahab's response was anything but one of repentance. Referencing "the ruler of the cities and the king's son" lets us know that Ahab was so determined to silence Micaiah that he evoked both local and national authorities to ensure the prophet's secure incarceration.

The question of whether Micaiah spoke the truth would be determined on the battlefield. If Micaiah truly spoke for God, then Ahab would die, never returning home "safely" as the king assumed. Micaiah, however, was so confident in what he'd heard from God that he challenged those present to be witnesses. Ahab's death would not only vindicate Micaiah, but God as well.

Ahab died, just as Micaiah said (1 Kings 22:29-38), while Micaiah's fate in prison is unknown.

Conclusion

Truth Displayed

Today's lesson has to do with the timeless struggle to relate to the truth properly. The characters in the lesson before us provide us with three stances that people exposed to God's truth can take.

The first character is King Ahab. It's so easy to hear what we want to hear rather than hearing the truth itself. Whenever we find ourselves willfully in rebellion to the truth, we can see shades of Ahab within our own spirits. And whenever we find ourselves in this precarious state and are then admonished by caring friends, we should realize that this is a form of God's mercy, even when their words challenge and/or inconvenience us (Proverbs 27:5,6).

The second character is Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. In him we have a case study of a person who desired to please God but lacked faithful follow-through.

William Gladstone wrote in his diary on his 22nd birthday: "It matters not whether the sphere of duty be large or small, but may it be duly fulfilled."

However, any of us can find ourselves tempted as Jehoshaphat was – to fail to follow-through. So when we encounter a fellow believer in a similar situation, the correct response is to offer encouragement and wise counsel.

And the third character is the prophet Micaiah. He was bound by the simple adage that he was only to preach the word that God gave him and not add or subtract from that word (compare Deuteronomy 4:2). Here we see Micaiah's ability to think and speak independently in the face of a hostile crowd of 400 false prophets, two powerful leaders, and a prevailing climate of wickedness. The prophet's outspokenness reminds us that speaking truth can result in very negative consequences. Yet Micaiah was aware of this, but was still obedient and faithful to God. We, too, can build a life centered on truth through regular study of God's word.

When Jesus went to the cross, the centurion overseeing the execution said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39). How did he figure that out? He simply watched Jesus die as he had lived, exhibiting attributes that only the Son of God could possess. He saw Christ living the truth.

Action Plan

4. What are some proper ways to react to those who expect us to tell them what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear?
5. How should you go about testing the statements of one who claims to speak for the Lord?
6. Summarize how Ahab, Jehoshaphat, and Micaiah related to God’s truth.

Resources for this lesson

4. “2020-2021 Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching,” pages 297-304.
5. “The New Interpreter’s Bible Volume III” pages 160-164.
6. “1 Kings” by Walter Brueggemann, pages 98-102.

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Playing in your own sandbox

PATHWAY TO HIS PRESENCE

B.J. FUNK

There is an art to learning what you can do and trying to do it well. The tendency, however, is to put our hands in as many projects as we can, becoming a Jack of all trades, master of none. It’s taken me a while to figure this out.

When I was young, I used to think I could do it all. You know, like that lady on TV who sang, “I can bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan...” Or, Helen Reddy who brought us, “I am woman, hear me roar!” In that same song she sings, “I am strong! I am invincible!”

I thought I was. But then, life happened.

One of the nicest things we can do for ourselves is to find out what we like, what we’re good at, and stick with that. It’s taken me a while to appreciate that my sandbox is just right for me, while yours is just right for you. If you and I can figure this out, we will be amazed at the power behind our best selves. We will not even try to get into another’s sandbox.

Getting older has its advantages. Somewhere between “I can do it all,” and “Just let me sit in this lounge chair and put up my feet,” we begin to slow down and realize the fallacy of that kind of thinking. We never could do it all, even when we were young. But mix in a strong amount of youthful pride along with a large amount of an over-exaggerated ego, and we often find ourselves jumping out of our sandbox of comfort and trying to win the race the other sandboxes offer.

This understanding can be of great help when the nominations committee in our church begins to place church members on various committees at the beginning of a new year. For instance, if you are asked to be on the altar flower committee and you have never made a floral arrangement in your life, this is not the committee for you. Stay in your sandbox and do what you do best.

Jumping in and out of sandboxes is a futile effort. We end up discouraged and with lower self-esteem because we simply cannot do it all.

I have worn my sandbox out with responsibilities because it is hard for me to say NO. If good really is the enemy of the best, as Oswald Chambers says, then my best was being worn out by my good, driven into oblivion before taking its first breath.

Even grown-ups need reminders not to go where we shouldn't.

And with that, I must run. My comfortable lounge chair with the fantastic foot rest is calling my name.

And I am very comfortable in my own sandbox.

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

The USPS and the UMC

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

ANNE PACKARD

Quoting the United States Postal Service, “Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” The very same could be said of our itinerant Methodist ministers. It is our clergy who put the move into our movement and, as they prepare to pack up all of their worldly belongings and relocate to a new town, we'd like to highlight What's Old Is New Again!

The itinerancy is as fundamental to Methodism as John Wesley and merry, old England. In a letter to the Rev. Samuel Walker in 1756, Wesley wrote, “We have found by long and consistent experience that a frequent exchange of preachers is best. This preacher has one talent,

that another; no one whom I ever yet knew has all the talents which are needful for beginning, continuing, and perfecting the work of grace in a whole congregation.” Of course, England was developed long before the motor car and many villages are within a pleasant horseback ride if not a long walk.

America, with its abundant land and sparse population, added a whole new dimension to the moving of clergy. If it had been left to Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmore, the Methodist Episcopal Church may have become a settled ministry, but Francis Asbury would have none of that. Like St. Paul, Asbury believed ministers should travel and that these places weren’t empty of people but full of possibility. Asbury created the character of the church for the next 100 years by creating large areas requiring ministers to preach in all types of places. By focusing on the movement of the people, the Methodist Episcopal Church kept its focus on the frontier, and large camp meetings developed at the expense of class meetings, which were more prevalent in Britain.

In the earliest days of the South Georgia Conference, it was not only clergy who relocated, bishops moved each year, as well. From 1868 until 1873, the South Georgia Conference was led by Bishops Pierce, Kavannah, Wightman, Marvin, and Paine. The first of our bishops who stayed longer than two years did not occur until 1916 when Bishop Warren A. Candler was appointed for five years. I wonder if the fact that his older brother had owned Coca Cola and was developing Atlanta had anything to do with Bishop Candler’s longevity...

So, as spring turns to summer and our thoughts turn to the Annual Conference Meeting (in any form), we remember those who are moving, who have moved, or who will move in the future. We are grateful for your continued devotion to the Methodist movement and to the South Georgia Conference and wish you godspeed.

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.

Retired Clergy Birthdays – April 2021

- 4/01 – Ed Chance: PO Box 524; Wrens, GA 30833
- 4/01 – Danny Treadway: 1417 Peabody Dr.; Maryville, TN 37803
- 4/03 – Jennifer Sherling: 2447 Tuxedo Place; Albany, GA 31707
- 4/05 – O.C. Dean, Jr.: 265 Three Oaks Dr.; Athens, GA 30607
- 4/05 – Kay Stanaland: PO Box 905; Murrells Inlet, SC 29576
- 4/07 – Jim Hamlin: 322 S. Houston Springs Blvd.; Perry, GA 31069
- 4/08 – Terry DeLoach: 209 Dixie St.; Brooklet, GA 30415
- 4/09 – Sandra Henry: 111 Laurel Overlook; Canton, GA 30114
- 4/09 – Glenn McCranie: PO Box 493; Grandy, NC 27939

4/12 – Tim Bagwell: 192 Barrington Hall Dr.; Macon, GA 31220
4/12 – Gerald Goodman: 1572 Fluker Kiel Rd.; Coffeetown, AL 36524
4/15 – Leigh Ann Raynor: 212 Torrington Blvd.; Thomasville, GA 31757
4/16 – Nick Hazelton: 517 Ferncliff Terrace; Macon, GA 31204
4/16 – Wesley Kaylor: 855 Chokee Rd.; DeSoto, GA 31743
4/16 – Barbara Nelson: 1106 Merrill Dr.; Dublin, GA 31021
4/16 – Tom Nichols: 414 Cardinal St.; Pooler, GA 31322
4/16 – Jimmy Sharp: 2225 Teate Rd.; Vienna, GA 31092
4/18 – Frances Howell: PO Box 658; Midway, GA 31320
4/22 – Fred Maddox: 200 Highland Rd.; Statesboro, GA 30458
4/24 – Willie Lucas: 607 Holloway Ave.; Albany, GA 31701
4/27 – B.J. Funk: PO Box 187; Chula, GA 31733
4/28 – Bert Alexander: PO Box 964; Pine Mountain, GA 31822
4/29 – Sam Watkins: 1937 E. DeRenne Ave., Savannah, GA 31406
4/30 – Don Kea: 5300 Zebulon Rd., Garden Home 20; Macon, GA 31210

OBITUARIES

Mrs. Marguerite Buchan

Marguerite Ziegler-Buchan, 71, of Brunswick, passed away at Southeast Georgia Health System on April 5, 2021. Arrangements may be made at a later date. Cremation services were provided by Golden Isles Cremation Center / Brunswick Memorial Park Funeral Home.

Mrs. Sharon McMahan Atkinson

Sharon M. Atkinson was born September 28, 1945, in Lakeland, Fla. Later with her family they moved to Panama City, Fla. In 1954, she moved to Huntsville, Ala. where she went to 5th Ave. School and later, Huntsville High School. She was in the band and Mu Alpha Theta. She was a member of Trinity United Methodist Church. She graduated from Huntsville High in 1963. Following high school, she attended Birmingham-Southern College and was a member of Delta Zeta sorority. She graduated December 15, 1966, with a Bachelor of Arts in Math. Three days later, on Dec. 18, 1966, she married the love of her life, Rev. Jack G. Atkinson, at Trinity United Methodist Church.

She and Jack moved to Atlanta where he was enrolled at Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Following his finishing his Master of Divinity and Master in Christian Education they moved to Tuscaloosa, Ala. In 1975 they moved to South Georgia where Jack served in various churches until retirement in 2008. They bought a home and moved to Adel, Ga. where they have lived for 18 years. During their lifetime of moving for ministry, Sharon taught high school math for 32½ years. She was well loved for her support of Jack but also for her personal love of the Lord and her generous heart. Her purpose, as she proclaimed it, was to “love the Lord and help others,” and that she truly did.

Sharon was a loving wife, mother, and grandmother who loved her family, friends and her church. Sharon was married to Jack for over 54 years, before becoming ill. She is survived by her husband, Rev. Jack G. Atkinson, daughter Helen Virginia “Gina” Bowles (Matthew), son

Jack, Jr. "Jay" (Angel), grandchildren Jennie Beth Prinkey, Maggie Mae Prinkey, Eve Atkinson, Jachin Atkinson, and Zoe Atkinson. She is predeceased by granddaughter Terri Ann Prinkey.

Rev. Bob Dixon

Archie Bob Dixon passed away at Archbold Memorial Hospital on April 10, 2021. He is the son of the late Bernard and Pearl Dixon. Mr. Dixon was valedictorian of his high school class of 1951. He's studied at Emory of Oxford, Emory at Valdosta, Candler School of Theology, Emory University in Atlanta and received the Master of Christian Education degree. He served 65 years of ministry in the Methodist Church as Diaconal Minister of Christian Education, serving churches in Montgomery, Ala.; Albany, Ga., Macon, Ga.; Savannah, Ga.; Atlanta, and Thomasville, Ga. He became an ordained minister after retirement in 1999 and continued to serve part time until 2019. He served on numerous committees at the local, state, national, and global level of The United Methodist Church. His passion was the ministry for older adults where he created an older/retired adult ministry group in each church he served. He was an Eagle Scout and the first recipient of the God and Country award in Georgia.

Being well known for his artistic abilities, Landmarks Inc. and Archbold Hospital of Thomasville commissioned him to draw two major series of Georgia Plantations and historic buildings. In 1987 he was invited to the White House to present a watercolor of the Mister Lincoln Rose to First Lady Nancy Reagan in honor of the designation of the rose as the National Flower. In 1988 he was commissioned by Georgia Citizens for the Arts to paint and present a watercolor painting of the Georgia state flower, The Cherokee Rose, and presented the painting to Gov. Joe Frank Harris. In 1991, a print of the Cherokee Rose painting raised over \$70,000 for Georgia Rotary Student Program. The Georgia District #6900 of Rotary International also commissioned prints of this painting as a gift for citizens of Japan, Australia, and Germany. In 1989 he was commissioned to paint the Queen Elizabeth Rose that was presented to Queen Elizabeth II for the Buckingham Palace Collection. In 1993 he was awarded Georgia Rotary Student Program Will Watt fellow award and the Thomasville-Thomas County Chamber of Commerce Man of the Year. He illustrated seven books and presented solo art shows in Tallahassee, Columbus, Thomasville, Fitzgerald, Macon and Albany.

"I paint for my own enjoyment and because of a spark within me that drives me to the process. For me, this is that creative image of God in which we were all created. I let the subject dictate the medium and make extensive use of my camera. The process is a visual investigation of nature, be it a flower, trees, or a landscape. When the image comes into focus I always catch my breath at what I see. As I begin the process of painting, I believe the elements of nature are signatures of God and my desire in painting them is to help others read the signatures."- A. Bob Dixon.

He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth Betty Dixon; children, Robin Dixon Strong of Tacoma, WA, James Jeffrey Dixon of Tallahassee, FL, Laura Kyle Dixon Burton of Thomasville, GA, and Dennis Nolan of Tallahassee, FL; 4 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren and sister Bernardene Dixon Lesbirel of Crystal River, FL.

There are no services planned at this time. A celebration of his life will be held when considered safe. Contributions may be made to The First United Methodist Church older adult ministry, 425 North Broad Street, Thomasville, Ga 31792. Family and friends are invited to visit his online tribute at allenfh.com.

Mrs. Eleanor Howard Walton

Eleanor Howard Walton, 82, passed away at Phoebe-Sumter Hospital in Americus, Georgia on April 13, 2021. She was born on July 30, 1938, in Albany, Georgia, to the late Elbert Kelly Howard and Mary Belcher Howard.

Eleanor is preceded in death by both of her parents, her husband, Asbury Bernard Walton, a sister, Ginger Beck, and a brother-in-law, G. W. Riles.

Survivors include her two daughters, Merri Lynn (Jimmy) Babb of Lumpkin, Georgia and Kelly (Steve) Horne of Gray, Georgia; five grandchildren, Ashley (Randy) Perryman of Lumpkin, Georgia, Steven (Alicia) Babb of Webster County Georgia, Stephen (Kodie) Horne of Macon, Georgia, Kristen (Mark) Humphrey of Fayetteville, Georgia, Amanda Horne of Gray, Georgia; eight great-grandchildren, Andrew and Payton Perryman; Kyle and Michael Krull, J. W. Babb; Joseph Horne; Holly and Cooper Humphrey; sisters-in-law, Dorothy (Wayne) Whitton of Bremen, Georgia; Ann Bell of Carrollton, Georgia; brother-in-law, E. M. Beck of Athens, Georgia; sister, Carol Riles of Tampa, Florida.

Eleanor and Asbury Bernard Walton were married on August 12, 1958. Asbury was a United Methodist minister and they lived all over the South Georgia Methodist Conference. Eleanor was a dedicated Christian, wife, mother, minister's wife, educator, grandmother, and friend to all who knew her. After Eleanor and Asbury retired to Americus in 2005, they became members of the First Methodist Church in Americus, Georgia.

Eleanor taught school in most of the communities where they lived, totaling about 35 years. She had her Master's Degree in Education. Eleanor was dedicated to her students, making sure they received an excellent education.

Eleanor was a true character, full of love and life, and put all her touch on everything that she did, from "cleaning" to "directing" to "loving" her family and friends. Eleanor had a way to draw in people with her laugh, that sweet smile and the twinkle in her eyes. She never met a stranger. People tended to gravitate to wherever Eleanor was holding court!

A graveside service was held Friday, April 16, 2021, at Northside Cemetery in Lumpkin. The Reverends Dan Smith and Daryl Brown officiated the service.

In lieu of flowers: Northside Cemetery Fund (PO Box 394 Richland, GA 31825) or League of the Good Samaritan, 2001 South Lee Street, Americus, Georgia 31709

www.baldwinfuneralhome.com to sign the guest book. Baldwin Funeral Home, 50 Charles Overby Dr., P O Box 394, Richland, GA 31825, was in charge of all arrangements. 229-887-2750.

Scripture Readings – April 20

April 25

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 4:5-12

Psalm 23 (UMH 754 or 137)

1 John 3:16-24

John 10:11-18

May 2

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 8:26-40

Psalm 22:25-31 (UMH 752)

1 John 4:7-21

John 15:1-8

May 9

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 10:44-48

Psalm 98 (UMH 818)

1 John 5:1-6

John 15:9-17

Events in the South Georgia Conference – 4/20/2021 edition

Alive Together at the Table with Bishop Bryan, Zoom – April 20

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 conversation will begin at noon 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](#)

Online Basic Lay Servant Ministries Training via Zoom –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.

Online Advanced Lay Servant Ministries Training via Zoom – May 4, May 6, May 11, May 13

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 advanced class, based on Cokesbury's book, "Each One a Minister," by William Carter, is a study of the book of Ephesians and what it teaches us about how we are called to use our spiritual gifts. 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. Note: Basic Lay Servant class must be completed before taking Advanced Class. Registration fee for the class is \$25. For more information, contact Anne Bosarge at anne@thechapelministries.com.

Magnolia Manor Sunday – May 9

Magnolia Manor is a South Georgia Conference ministry that serves older adults of all faiths in eight locations throughout South Georgia. On this Special Sunday, South Georgia United Methodists are asked to take up a special offering to support this vital ministry. To learn more about Magnolia Manor visit www.magnoliamanor.com.

Alive Together at the Table with Bishop Bryan, Zoom – May 11

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 conversation will begin at noon 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](#)

Peace with Justice Sunday – May 30

Peace with Justice Sunday enables The United Methodist Church to have a voice in advocating for peace and justice through a broad spectrum of global programs. [Peace with Justice Sunday Pastor and Leader Kit](#)