

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – AUGUST 3 EDITION

After a year off, South Georgia UM churches resume VBS

VBS is back.

A summertime staple, vacation Bible school has returned to South Georgia United Methodist Churches.

Most congregations canceled VBS last summer because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but as restrictions ease and more are vaccinated, many churches felt they could safely return to in-person vacation Bible school this summer.

Richmond Hill United Methodist Church's VBS has long been a huge outreach effort with hundreds of children and volunteers participating. Last year, church leaders adapted past years' curriculum to create a "Time Machine" virtual staycation Bible school. They created videos and provided families with a supply list and support to pull off an at-home VBS experience.

This June, they welcomed more than 400 children and volunteers back to in-person vacation Bible school, with a few modifications and practicing what they learned during the past year.

"We've spent the entire year doing in-person kid's worship and our afterschool JAM (Jesus and Me) program, so I knew we could do VBS safely with masks and distancing protocols," said Janine Blakeborough, Richmond Hill UMC's director of family ministries.

Instead of one massive opening celebration, they hosted five smaller opening events. Snacks were eaten outside, leaders instituted a car line for drop off and pick up, and they changed traffic patterns throughout the church.

"We plan to keep most of the changes because things we never would have tried before, ended up working better than we could have imagined," Blakeborough said.

While Centerville United Methodist Church wasn't able to host their VBS event last year either, lead pastor Rev. Tommy Odum said church leaders did learn a few things to take into this year's vacation Bible school event.

"Be prepared, be aware, and be fluid," he said. "We needed to be better prepared to meet the guidelines this year if we were still under restrictions, be aware of what's happening in the community and people's feelings of the pandemic, and be fluid enough to make changes on the fly. The last part was extremely important as things can change quickly in situations like these."

Excited to be able to host VBS this summer, the Centerville UMC congregation was ready to reengage the community in a meaningful way and provide an outlet for people who haven't been able or been ready to get out in the community.

“The most exciting part was the engagement with people after a year of separation and inability to meet in a larger setting,” Rev. Odum said.

While VBS attendance was lower than in previous years, the church still welcomed nearly 40 children and 15 volunteers each night. Social distancing was encouraged, as was mask wearing. Safety and cleaning measures were put in place and modifications were made, but food was served and the experience was as close to normal as possible, Rev. Odum said.

“The experience was somewhat of a sweet accomplishment,” he said. “We didn’t know how it was going to work out or what attendance would look like. The accomplishment of hosting the event and getting to reopen the facility in that way felt good. After we were finished we felt it was one of the best we’ve done, and, all and all, we felt good about getting the opportunity to host VBS.”

Park Avenue United Methodist Church simplified their vacation Bible school.

Eager to offer it again this summer after missing last year, director of children’s ministries Lynn Yost said this year’s event was pared down, without elaborate extras but with a focus on solid content and connection.

“We learned to appreciate the fact that we were able to have VBS,” said Yost, who welcomed nearly 200 children and 120 volunteers to the event. “We planned with the intention of having a simplified VBS in which there is no doubt Jesus is the main thing.”

Hosting an in-person VBS was important to the Park Ave. UMC congregation and the Valdosta community because it relayed a message of hope, faith, and God’s faithfulness, Yost said.

She also said it was an important time to be able to come together as a faith community and to share the love of Christ with one another and their neighbors.

“It’s important for people to connect in person, to see and experience the love we have for each other, and to share the love of Christ through service, worship, fellowship, and the study of God’s Word ... and fun!”

Wesley UMC hosts school uniform drive

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

Wesley United Methodist Church is showing the love of Christ by serving.

Each month this year, the congregation has chosen a mission project as a way to give back to the Macon community. For July, Wesley UMC collected gently used or new school uniforms and hosted a free uniform giveaway July 30 and July 31.

Families were lined up, waiting for the doors to open, said Natalie Nicholl, a Wesley UMC member who helped spearhead the event. One family of five drove about 30 minutes to choose uniforms.

“We want to help take this burden off families and make getting school uniforms one less thing to worry about,” she said.

Nearly 90 percent of Bibb County’s public elementary school students are required to wear some sort of uniform, Nicholl said. She has to buy two sets of clothes for her two children – uniforms and play clothes – and said it can be difficult for some parents to afford.

That’s why the idea of a uniform swap was so appealing to Nicholl and co-organizer Jessica Whittington. With five children between them, neither wanted to throw away the uniforms their children had outgrown and knew there had to be a way to put them – and others like them – to good use.

“I was going through our closets and I hated to just put them in the box at Goodwill; you don’t know where they go or if they end up in a trashcan,” Whittington said. “This (uniform swap) cost nothing for the church to do and it was a great benefit for the community.”

The mostly-older congregation was enthusiastic about the project; they shared sales and even pooled their money together to buy clothing at Goodwill, Old Navy, and other stores to donate to the uniform giveaway.

“The congregation really embraced this idea,” Nicholl said. “I thought it was really neat that they were sharing amongst each other where they could get affordable items to bring to the clothing drive since they don’t have children at home. They were finding ways to participate and be involved.”

The church’s mission focus is one way it’s giving back to the community that has supported the congregation in their efforts to pay off the church’s building debt. Since December, Wesley UMC has held fundraisers and raised support to be debt free.

“It was important that we’re as intentional about giving to our community as we are receiving from it,” said Rev. Josh Gale.

But more than that, said Whittington, Wesley UMC members want to be welcoming, loving neighbors.

“We’re trying to meet our community where they are and find the needs and meet them.”



Covid-19 Update: Watching carefully the rise in COVID infection rates

South Georgia clergy and laity,

Like you, the Cabinet and I are watching carefully the rise in COVID infection rates that are occurring in Georgia and around the nation. Hospitals in some areas are once again seeing higher admissions due to COVID. Schools and other public venues are having to re-consider what practices will be best for the safety of the community. Local churches are also impacted by these rising infection rates.

We commend the laity and clergy of South Georgia for the way you responded to the global pandemic over the past year. You acted quickly to fight this deadly virus through social distancing, increased hand washing, wearing a protective facial covering, checking on community and church neighbors, and adapting to do worship, Bible study, prayer, and mission outreach in fresh ways.

Once a vaccine became available many of you have led the charge in your church and community to encourage vaccinations for the purpose of saving lives and to enable us to move forward in overcoming the virus. In recent months, our local churches have demonstrated great care in determining when and what in-person gatherings could safely be resumed.

We cannot predict how COVID infection rates may increase or decrease in different parts of South Georgia. We recognize that decision making is best done at the local level and know you will make the very best decisions for your local congregation in your context. We ask pastors and church leaders to pay close attention to the infection rate in your own area. Monitor the health of your church members. Remember that social distancing, facial coverings, and a temporary return to virtual services are not steps backward. Rather, they are important resources to be used for the long term good of the church and community.

So let us not forget the practices we have adopted over the past year. Let us use the lessons we have learned to act responsibly as we continue to battle the COVID virus and the variants that are cropping up among us these days.

Flexibility is a key to moving forward. Over the past year you have demonstrated your ability to be flexible in order to remain faithful to the mission of Christ. Please stay in touch with your District Superintendent as you make these important decisions. This will enable us to be alert to the resources and actions needed in order to support our local churches.

Alive Together in Christ,

R. Lawson Bryan

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Special session of the SEJ votes to unite the Memphis and Tennessee Annual Conferences

Newly formed Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference will launch in January

By Sybil Davidson, adapted from a UMNS report by Heather Hahn

At a special session on Wednesday, July 21, the delegates of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference worshiped, received video updates from across the jurisdiction, and approved realigning the boundaries of Memphis and Tennessee Annual Conferences to create the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference.

Bishop James Swanson of the Mississippi Conference presided over the virtual session, with the theme “This I Know.” Opening worship included a message from Gammon’s President-Dean Dr. Candace L. Lewis.

Resolution Approved

Delegates voted overwhelmingly to approve the resolution to unite the Memphis and Tennessee Annual Conferences. The resolution passed by a vote of 335 to 3.

Preparations to unify the Tennessee and Memphis conferences, which together extend from Middle Tennessee to the Mississippi Delta, began in 2017. The two conferences long have shared a bishop and various ministries. Each conference approved the union by more than 87% in 2019.

“Our new conference is in the process of being born because we believe that the mission and vision and the ministry that we can do will increase and become fruitful in a way we couldn’t do alone,” said the Rev. Melinda Britt, co-leader of a team guiding the transition to the new conference.

Conference leaders plan to have an organizational meeting in December and take the final steps toward opening the new Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference in January.

The formation of a new conference will not affect the number of delegates to the coming General Conference and regular jurisdictional conference meetings. Both Memphis and Tennessee, as legacy conferences, will send their elected delegates to the gatherings.

Ministry Across the SEJ

Candler School of Theology Dean Dr. Jan Love presented a report on Emory University’s involvement in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, from vaccine development, to patient care, to vaccine rollout.

The Southeastern Jurisdiction also got a preview of a decision coming before it at its next regular session in 2022. [The Red Bird Missionary Conference](#) has proposed a new name – the Central Appalachian Conference – to better reflect its mission field.

Additionally, the delegates and viewers watched video reports highlighting the ways the Annual Conferences in our Jurisdiction have remained active during this challenging year, responding to the pandemic and working to dismantle racism across the jurisdiction. (Watch South Georgia's update on our response over the last year to dismantling racism: <https://vimeo.com/579430723>.)

South Carolina Conference’s Bishop L. Jonathan Holston told those gathered that the jurisdiction’s bishops call church members “to own the work of anti-racism that is so desperately needed in our world.”

“Between February 2020 and April 2021, our Southeastern Jurisdiction witnessed the tragic deaths of three persons of color, all of which made national news,” he said. He listed their names: Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, Breonna Taylor in Kentucky and Andrew Brown in North Carolina.

At the end of the session, the jurisdiction recognized [Bishops Lawson Bryan, Hope Morgan Ward, Paul Leeland and Mary Virginia “Dindy” Taylor, who are retiring Sept. 1.](#)

Read the United Methodist News Service article by Heather Hahn at <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/2-jurisdictions-plan-for-church-future>.

Farewell reception for Bishop and Mrs. Bryan set for Aug. 15

On Sunday, Aug. 15, the South Georgia Conference will host a farewell reception for Bishop R. Lawson Bryan and Mrs. Sherrill Bryan. The drop-in reception will be held from 3 – 5 p.m. at Vineville United Methodist Church in Macon.

The reception is a time for the Annual Conference to gather together to thank Bishop and Mrs. Bryan for their five years of service to the South Georgia Annual Conference, said Rev. Jimmy Cason, who for five years served as the chairman of the Conference Committee on Episcopacy.

“We want to take the opportunity to thank Bishop Bryan and Sherrill for their five years of ministry among us,” Rev. Cason said. “He signed up for four years but gave us five. While we are sad to see them go, we are grateful for their years of ministry.”

All are invited and encouraged to attend.

Bishop Bryan was elected bishop by the 2016 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference and was assigned to the South Georgia Conference by the SEJ Committee on Episcopacy. He began his four-year term in South Georgia on September 1, 2016, and is serving an additional year due to the postponement of the 2020 General Conference and Jurisdictional Conference because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Registration open for fall children's and youth retreats

Registration is now open for KidzQuest, the Conference's annual fall children’s retreat for students in third through sixth grades, and Encounter, the Conference's annual youth retreat for students in sixth through twelfth grades.

KidzQuest is scheduled for October 15-17, 2021, at Camp Jekyll 4-H Center on Jekyll Island, Georgia for 3rd-6th grade students and is limited to 250 participants. [Information](#) | [Register](#)

Encounter Youth Retreat, for 6th-12th grade students, will take place November 19-21, 2021, at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. [Information](#) | [Register](#)

www.sgaumc.org/kidzquest

www.sgaumc.org/encounter

Apply today for Renfro Trust Grant

Connectional Ministries is accepting applications for the Southeastern Jurisdiction Renfro Trust Grant. This grant is a brick and mortar grant specifically for small, rural churches. Guidelines, requirements and applications can be found [here](#). Completed applications must be submitted to Outreach Chair Susan Hughes at susanjhughes17@gmail.com. The deadline for completed applications to be submitted is Sunday, August 22, 2021.

Pay attention to the processes that keep us Alive Together in Christ

**FROM THE BISHOP
R. LAWSON BRYAN**

To borrow a phrase from Charles Wesley, Sherrill and I wish we had “a thousand tongues to sing” our thanksgiving to God and to each of you for the privilege of serving the South Georgia Conference over the past five years. Your radical hospitality welcomed and supported us every step of the way. Thank you for the many ways you have included us, ministered to us, and blessed us. When we think of the South Georgia Conference we often quote Psalm 16:6, “the boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.”

I was elected and assigned to South Georgia in 2016. The understanding at that time was that I would have four years to serve before reaching mandatory retirement age for bishops. But the global pandemic prevented the meetings that were necessary to elect new bishops. I was given the opportunity to serve an additional year. This fifth year has been a gift for which I will always be grateful.

I came to South Georgia with an affirmation and a question. The affirmation is found in Ephesians 2:5, “even though we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive together in Christ.” Together we have explored what it means to be Alive Together in Christ: in worship; in the world; in witness; and alive together at the table. God created us to be Alive Together in Christ. We are more alive when we are together. As N. T. Wright says, “Not to come to the table is already to get the answer wrong.”

The question I have been asking is: what needs to happen during these years that - if it does happen - will propel us forward for years to come, but, if it doesn't happen, will hold us back in the years ahead? You helped me see that in this unusual season of our lives we need processes more than programs. Programs come and go. Processes are ways of living together that serve to refresh us and renew us for the mission of Christ in the world. So together we have introduced processes and groups such as: OnBoarding, Appreciative Inquiry, Strengths Finder, Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), the Compass Group, the Leadership Forum Task Force, the Laity Cabinet, the Bishop's Emerging Leadership Initiative, and Conscious Culture Building. These are propelling us forward, and they will continue to do so in the years ahead.

I am especially happy that Bishop David Graves will be providing episcopal leadership for South Georgia from September 1 until the next Jurisdictional Conference. He has served the Alabama-West Florida Conference for five years and will continue to serve that conference, too. David and Nancy Graves are good friends to Sherrill and me. You will love their commitment to Christ and their non-anxious presence. They will be living in the episcopal residence in Macon and will be visiting each district throughout the fall. Please pray for them as they take upon themselves the responsibility of serving two annual conferences. Your personal greetings may be sent to Bishop and Mrs. Graves at the conference office: PO Box 7227, Macon, 31210.

I want to take a moment to thank Sherrill for the constant love and encouragement with which she blesses me. She is an amazing person, capable of having six new ideas before noon each day! In June we celebrated our 48th wedding anniversary and now we are looking forward to the next chapter of our life together. We will be living in Montgomery, Alabama, and enjoying our son, daughter-in-law, and our two grandchildren. We will be involved in the life of First UMC, Huntingdon College, and the community at large. We will also be open to new ventures as the Holy Spirit prompts us.

The members of our conference staff and our conference agencies have been a special blessing to me. We have such talented professionals who serve this conference with devotion and passion. I thank God for those with whom I have worked so closely and who continually inspire me by their authentic devotion to the ministry of Christ.

I have often quoted the words of Margaret Wheatley about preparing for the unknown. She writes, "It is possible to prepare for the future without knowing what it will be. The primary way to prepare for the unknown is to attend to the quality of our relationships, to how well we know and trust one another."

In other words, pay attention to the processes that keep us Alive Together in Christ.

As I conclude my time in South Georgia, I invite you to join me in reflecting on some very special words found in the Order of Farewell to a Pastor. The pastor says to the congregation (and I say to you): *I thank you for the support you have shown me. I ask forgiveness for mistakes I have made. I commend you to God's care.*

Thank you and God bless you all.

Alive Together in Christ,

R. Lawson Bryan

A Necessary Faith

Summer Quarter: Confident Hope

Unit 3: Faith Gives Us Hope

Sunday school lesson for the week of August 8, 2021

By Dr. Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-8, 13-16

Faith Gives Us Hope

We are starting the third and final unit in this summer quarter. In many ways, the second unit helped us see how faith and salvation give us hope. In this third unit, we will spend the next four weeks learning not only how faith gives us hope, but also what hope does for faith. In today's lesson, look for the dynamic interaction between faith and hope. Today's lesson is entitled "A Necessary Faith." We will learn how faith is necessary for a hope-filled life.

Faith Is Necessary for Vision

Hope and vision are intimately related. Vision is the ability to see what is possible. Think how limited individuals and organizations are when they cannot see any possibilities in a given situation. Being able to see the possibilities gives us direction and also motivates us to move in that direction. What about the vision that arises from our faith? In this context, vision means seeing God's preferred future for us before it comes to pass. Faith is necessary for vision.

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible."

The dynamic interaction between faith and hope is suggested by the definition given at the beginning of our scripture lesson: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for." This assurance of things hoped for propels us forward in our faith journey. The assurance of things hoped for gets us out of bed each morning to see what awaits us. Our faith assures us that what we will be called to do will be worth it because we walk into a hope-filled future. Faith is necessary to have hope, and in turn, we can be assured that hope will motivate us every step of the way in our faith.

When it comes to faith and the assurance of things hoped for, we're talking about "the conviction of things not seen." What Hebrews says about faith, Paul said about hope in Romans 8:24: "Now

hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?" Seeing the unseen is central to the experience both of faith and hope.

The 11th chapter of Hebrews has been called the "Hall of Faith" because throughout this chapter we're given pictures of faith through the lives of those who have lived by faith. At the beginning of this beloved chapter we're given this brief definition of faith, seeing the unseen, so that we will look for this particular characteristic in each example. By seeing the unseen, our ancestors in the faith received approval from God.

We're also reminded that the worlds were created *ex nihilo*, created out of nothing. What is seen was made from things that are not visible. This belief shapes our Christian worldview. Seeing the unseen is a vital part of the faith journey. God delights when we, by faith, take the leap of seeing beyond what is seen. Envisioning a future before it happens propels us forward in faithful living. The importance of seeing the unseen is necessary to have vision and to see the possibilities.

Faith Is Necessary to Please God

Receiving approval from God and pleasing God are two sides of the same coin. In receiving approval from God, we're on the receiving end of something that is very relational. In pleasing God, God is on the receiving end of something that is very relational. Both depend on God being gracious, merciful, patient, and loving. What is required from us is a response to God that demonstrates our faith and love. The focus here is relational, and faith is a necessary part.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and "he was not found, because God had taken him." For it was attested before he was taken away that "he had pleased God." And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.

What do Abel, Enoch, and Noah have in common? They are among the earliest people of faith in the biblical record. There is something simple yet profound about each one's expression of faith.

We can only guess why Abel's sacrifice was more acceptable than Cain's sacrifice. Cain grew food from the soil. Abel kept flocks. Their occupations represented two rival ways of living in early civilization. Those who grew food from the soil represented a more settled existence. Their dwellings were more permanent. Those who raised flocks roamed around finding good grass for their flocks and lived in tents. Yet, both grain offerings and animal sacrifices became a part of the sacrificial system presented in the law of Moses. Perhaps the reason Abel's sacrifice was more acceptable than Cain's had to do with what was in each one's heart. You could make the

case for this based on what happened afterward when Cain's jealousy resulted in Abel's murder. The final point made is that Abel's sacrifice met God's approval and therefore it is Abel's faith that still speaks from the grave down through the centuries. Not even death could extinguish the simple way Abel pleased God.

The character of Enoch is even more enigmatic than Abel. He was taken by God without experiencing death because it was shown that before Enoch was taken away he had pleased God. What is said next in our scripture helps us understand why Abel, Enoch, and the next biblical character, Noah, are being lifted up: "Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." It seems obvious that whoever would approach God must believe that God exists, but it is good to state the obvious sometimes. Believing that God rewards those who seek God goes beyond simply believing God exists. There is a progression implied here. Step one is believing God exists. Step two is seeking God. Step three is believing that God rewards our seeking. It's one thing to believe God exists, but it is another thing altogether to seek God and believe that the journey will be worthwhile and rewarding.

This is how Noah's faith unfolded. He was warned about events as yet unseen. Noah had to start building the ark well before the first drop of rain in order to complete the project. Noah had to have faith and begin the project without evidence to confirm that this flood was going to happen. What was at stake was the human race. Things had gotten so bad that God had to make the difficult choice to begin the human experiment over again. God could have chosen that this experiment was not worth beginning again. Not to begin again would have ended in humankind's self-destruction. Because God is gracious, God used Noah and his family to make a new start. We are grateful that, out of the whole human race at that time, a vestige of faith remained in Noah. God could take that and use it.

Faith Is Necessary for God's Journey

The story of Noah leads to Abraham and Sarah. The story of the Tower of Babel made it clear that, left to humankind's own devices, humanity would descend into chaos again. A new intervention was needed. God made a covenant with Abraham and Sarah. That covenant began with a calling to take a journey.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going.

To be called to set out for a place not knowing the ultimate destination is the very definition of a faith journey. A journey of faith is one where we depend on God giving us the directions along the way. We do not know up front where the journey will take us. We trust God to shine a light upon the path. When we take a detour, we trust God to get us back on the path. In this sense, everyone who takes the journey of faith walks in Abraham's footsteps. This focus on journey is

why the writer of Hebrews pauses in the middle of Abraham's story and makes the following observation:

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Abraham, and the people of faith who preceded Abraham, and the people of faith who followed Abraham, all eventually died in faith without having received the complete fulfillment of all that was promised. This might seem like an embarrassing admission unless you know the whole story. God makes promises so big that they cannot possibly be fulfilled in one generation.

No one illustrates this truth quite as literally as Moses. In the last chapter of Deuteronomy, the epic story of Moses comes to an end. Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo and the Lord showed him all the land promised to God's people. Everyone else in Moses' generation had died in the wilderness. It was the next generation, the children of the Exodus generation, who were about to cross the Jordan River and enter into the Promised Land. Moses was at the ripe old age of 120. As Moses stood on the mountain overlooking the Promised Land, the Lord said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there." Moses died in the land of Moab. It was time for him to die. It would be this next generation which was to take the baton and run the next leg of the journey. From a distance, Moses was able to see the Promised Land and "greet" it.

The great heroes of the faith confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth. They were passing through, in a sense. People of faith are sojourners. People of faith make it clear that the homeland they seek lies somewhere in the future. If they were thinking of a homeland that they had left behind somewhere in their past, they would have gone back there. Instead, they go forward. They desire a better country than any they have experienced before. The country they ultimately desire is a heavenly country. God is not ashamed to be called their God. God has prepared a city for them.

Faith is necessary for us to have vision – to see the possibilities that are not yet visible. Faith – this ability and desire to see the unseen – takes us on a journey where we must rely upon God. It is this element of faith and trust that pleases the heart of God so much. Faith is necessary for life to be what it was always meant to be – a journey of faith with God. Faith truly is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. It is the "hope" element of faith that makes a life of faith worth waking up for each day. Faith gives us hope, but we will also see over the next three weeks how hope sustains us in the life of faith.

Prayer

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, we thank you for the lives of our heroes in the faith. Grant us your vision, nourished by your word, that we may see the possibilities and be propelled in the journey of faith and hope with you as our Leader and Companion, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministerial Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at jharris@sgaumc.com.

A Patient, Persevering Faith

Summer Quarter: Confident Hope

Unit 3: Faith Gives Us Hope

Sunday school lesson for the week of August 15, 2021

By Dr. Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: Hebrews 10:23-36

Hope Sustains Our Faith and Growth

In this third unit, we continue to spend time learning not only how faith gives us hope, but also learning what hope does to sustain our faith. How does hope sustain our faith and growth after we say “yes” to the relationship God offers? Before we dig in, let’s review the arc our relationship with Christ takes.

When we say “yes” to Christ, we can look back and see all that led up to our profession of faith. In some ways, it feels like the culmination of a journey. In fact, it represents the culmination of our journey of prevenient grace. “Prevenient grace” is the grace that comes before our salvation – God wooing us into a relationship with himself. Think of prevenient grace as the courtship between God and us.

Taking this analogy further, when we say “yes” to this relationship, it is like a bride and groom saying “I do” at a wedding. A covenant relationship is formed. The same thing happens when we say “yes” to Christ. We repent of our sin and invite Christ to become our Lord and Savior. We believe that God receives this expression of our faith, and through the grace of God, we are justified by God’s grace and made right with God. We call this action of God “justifying grace.” There is a double acceptance: we accept Christ, and Christ accepts us.

Imagine for a moment a wedding without a marriage. It would be the same as thinking our “yes” to Christ is all God ever wanted from us. God wants a “forever relationship” with us. Just as the words “I do” at a wedding mark the beginning of a marriage, saying “yes” to Christ also marks the beginning of our marriage with Christ. The rest of our lives are spent growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So much awaits us. The operation of God’s grace that we associate with this phase of our relationship is called “sanctifying grace.” This is the grace where we are being sanctified through the power of the Holy Spirit. Being sanctified means being set apart, being made more holy, and being conformed more and more into the image of God’s Son. The sanctification phase of our relationship with God is the theological context with which we want to read today’s scripture.

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

We are told to hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, because it is often our tendency to waver from our confession. When we say “yes” to Christ, we use words like “on fire” to describe how we initially feel. Without some intentionality, however, there is a tendency for our faith to cool off, and before you know it, our faith has become lukewarm or cold.

One source of holding fast and not wavering is the reminder that God is faithful. Our promise-making and promise-keeping God has an awesome track record of faithfulness. God is faithful even when we are unfaithful, which makes God’s faithfulness all the more amazing and trustworthy. We can depend on God’s promises and God’s faithfulness.

Another important thing our scripture shows us is that we are not called to live a life of faithfulness on our own. Notice how the scripture says, “Let US.” Let US hold fast the confession of our hope. Let US consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds. This is why we should not neglect meeting together. One of the great purposes of the church is to meet in order to provoke one another to love and loving actions. We have this awesome opportunity within our local congregations to become laboratories of faith, hope, and love. We’re learning how to encourage one another at an exceptionally high level. We should not settle for less.

Do you hear the sense of urgency when the scripture talks about the Day approaching? It’s talking about that Day in the future when we want to be found by Christ being faithful. We don’t want to be found being unfaithful.

Willful Persistence in Sin

“For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire

that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy “on the testimony of two or three witnesses.” How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know the one who said, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

We don't want to be found willfully persisting in sin. We sometimes assume that God in the New Testament age simply decided to become more lenient. Remember, though, that God would be less caring if God simply swept sin under the rug. Sin is too destructive in our lives for God to turn a blind eye to it. God yearns for us to be set free from sin. We need to realize that when we willfully persist in sin we are spurning the sacrifice of the Son of God, profaning the blood of the covenant by which we were sanctified, and outraging the Spirit of grace. Sin, both before and after our justification, is rebellion against God. This is why we must keep a repentant heart. This is why sin should hurt our hearts as much as it hurts God's heart.

Remember that being sanctified means being set apart, being made more holy, and being conformed more and more into the image of God's Son. God did not credit to us the righteousness of Christ on the cross so that we could continue in sin. God wants us to experience the fruits of righteousness in our lives. God is merciful precisely because God does not want us to endure the habits, hurts, and hang-ups of our former life before Christ. Righteous living rescues us from a life full of heartache. It is difficult for us to contemplate God's wrath as it is described in our scripture, but not when we know this God desires to be on our side in our spiritual warfare against sin.

Preserving the Momentum of our Salvation

I was taught in my Wesleyan tradition that one could say, “I am saved,” “I am being saved,” and “I will be saved,” and all three statements could be true at the same time. When people say, “I am saved,” they are often talking about how they have been justified by God's grace and made right with God. They have obtained the gift of salvation, not by their own merits but by the merits of Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice on the cross. When people say, “I am being saved,” they understand that God is not through with them yet. They are referring to the process of sanctification. When people say, “I will be saved,” they understand that the process of sanctification will result one day, perhaps it will be through death and resurrection, in the sinless state we will enjoy in eternity. In this understanding, salvation and its power are ongoing. We should not think that the power of our salvation was given all at once back in time, only to wane in time. This is why it is important to be able to understand our salvation beyond the emotional experience that may have been connected to it in the beginning. It is good, however, to remember experiences of when our faith was confirmed.

But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting. Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward. For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

Think about those for whom the Letter to the Hebrews was originally written. Apparently, they needed to hear this word of admonition not to let their faith and hope waver. Listen though to how the writer challenged them to remember earlier days after they had been enlightened. They could recall that it was not easy for them. They endured struggle. Either they had endured public abuse and persecution personally, or they had partnered with those who had been treated this way. They had visited their friends in prison who were put there because of their faith. They had cheerfully accepted the plundering of their possessions because they knew they possessed something better and more lasting. Their faith had not been just a flash in the pan. Their faith had not been just an emotional experience they had one time in their lives. Their faith had been tested and confirmed. Their faith had withstood the hard times.

It is to people like these that these words were written: “Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings great reward.” During the time of testing, they had developed confidence in their faith. Think of a time when you came up against circumstances, your faith kicked in, you learned more about your resilience, and you developed confidence. Not only should you not abandon this confidence, you should cultivate it. Our own stories of resilience are as powerful as they are hard won. They are precious. Write these stories down somewhere. Tell people about them. Reflect on them from time to time.

If our faith can remain steadfast and even grow in the hard times, is it also true that good times or easier times in life can breed complacency? As the scripture says, we need endurance so that when we have done the will of God, we may receive what was promised. We need our faith for the long haul – good times and bad times alike. We need to pay as much attention to our faith in the good times as we do in the hard times. One way to do this is to take these good times and plan a season of intentional growth. Begin a long-term in-depth Bible study. Volunteer for a ministry. Get more involved in your community of faith. Get more regular in your devotional life with the goal of developing more intimacy with God.

Two good spiritual practices are called Examination of Conscience and Examination of Consciousness. They are, of course, interrelated. Your conscience has to do with your awareness of right and wrong, and consciousness has to do with your mindful contact with God. These can be done simply by asking two questions: 1) “When today have I felt most distant from God?” and 2) “When today have I felt closest to God?”

Examining your conscience often begins the process. Where have you sinned by the things you did that you ought not to have done, and when did you neglect to do those things that you should have done?

When you examine your consciousness of God, you will also want to examine how you used the means of grace available to you. These means of grace help us develop and sustain intimacy with God. The following list is not exhaustive, but it can get you started: simple prayer, reading of scripture, praying through scripture, devotional reading, public worship, Holy Communion, intercessory prayer, contemplative prayer, unceasing prayer, and participating in a small group devoted to any of these devotional practices. A small group of believers is the ideal setting for considering how to provoke one another to love and good deeds.

Prayer

A good prayer for this lesson is the third verse of Robert Robinson's hymn, *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*. He addresses the Lord in this way:

O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!

Let thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;

Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above. Amen.

Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministerial Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at jharris@sgaumc.com.

Be a Bridge!

LEADERSHIP REALLY MATTERS

ANNE BOSARGE

REV. JAY HANSON

I am a bridge towering high up in the sky.

Proudly I stand, spanning land to land.

Although many may not know

Without me progress would slow

For across me travelers must go.

I have a cause as noble as can be

My purpose is to allow people to walk over me.

*Trampled underfoot by people rushing past
Climbed by thrill seekers hoping to make a splash
Driven over by large trucks*

*Flown past by noisy planes
Run through by foreign ships
Pounded by changing tides*

*I continue to thanklessly be what I was created to be
A bridge that helps people move beyond me!*

Anne and I, Jay, live in an area with many bridges. Some are huge and others small, but all are needed. The mainland is connected to many separate islands. I guess you could reach these islands by plane or boat, but the usual way people get from one place to the next is over a bridge.

When the Church is at its best, it is a bridge which connects heaven to earth and humanity to God. When we are at our best, we are bridges. Bridges span divides and join people together. Our world is divided. The Church is divided and understandably so. A bridge doesn't seek to make two places become one. Quite the opposite; a bridge acknowledges the unique differences of each place but connects equally with them both.

We are thankful for the bridges. Yes, the literal bridges in our area, but also the figurative people who serve as bridges in our lives and have helped us progress on our journeys. Most bridges are not glamorous or appreciated. They often take a beating and go unnoticed. But we need more bridges. For those called and created to be bridges, may your tribe increase and may your soul be sustained by knowing you are being what you created to be!

Jay Hanson, Director of Congregational Development and Lead Pastor of The Chapel Ministries, and Anne Bosarge, Associate Director of Congregational Development and Campus Pastor of The Chapel Online, serve at The Chapel Ministries. They love sharing about the ways God is moving in their church. Contact them at jay@thechapelministries.com and anne@thechapelministries.com.

John Wesley and the American Revolution

JOHN WESLEY MOMENTS

DAVE HANSON

John Wesley was initially opposed to the American Revolution for four basic reasons:

1. He felt that the American colonists enjoyed many freedoms under British rule. Why should they “destroy ship-loads of tea when settlers of other British territories around the world did not have representation in the English Parliament?”
 2. Americans are “foaming with rage against England, the king, and their own neighbors who remain loyal to the motherland!” They stand ready to “run a sword through anyone who disagrees.”
 3. The Revolutionaries allow no “liberty of conscience.” None dare “Print a page, or a line, unless it be conformable to their sentiments.”
 4. How can Americans “proclaim freedom and still practice slavery?” “The only people who have a right to fight for freedom in America are those who are bound in slavery!”
- John Wesley loved the American people, but he was always loyal to England and the crown.

The Rev. Dave Hanson is a retired pastor and John Wesley scholar.

Retired Clergy Birthdays – August 2021

- 8/02 – Roger Mays: 1418 Eason Stalvey Rd.; Hahira, GA 31632
- 8/05 – Gordon Dukes: 126 Nelson Ave.; Garden City, GA 31408
- 8/05 – Joe Romigh: 3055 Cabernet Court; Cumming, GA 30041
- 8/06 – Rick Holt: 286 Knoll Rd.; Thomasville, GA 31757
- 8/07 – Wayne Anthony: 5830 Wiltshire Dr.; Columbus, GA 31909
- 8/07 – B.G. Roberts, Sr.: PO Box 3207; Brunswick, GA 31521
- 8/07 – Ricky Varnell: 11025 Sunbury Rd.; Claxton, GA 30417
- 8/08 – Don Adams: 1104 Wingate Street; Dublin, GA 31021
- 8/08 – Jim Nelson: 3584 Hidden Acres Dr.; Atlanta, GA 30340
- 8/09 – Creede Hinshaw: 719 Mulberry St.; Macon, GA 31201
- 8/09 – Byron Scott: 740 Bethel Rd.; Surrency, GA 31563
- 8/10 – Allison Rhodes: 18 Lenox Pointe NE, Suite B; Atlanta, GA 30324
- 8/10 – Shareon Womack: 404 Bobby Ray Rd.; Reidsville, GA 30453
- 8/13 – Mike Huling: 514 Earl Ave.; Claxton, GA 30417
- 8/15 – Nathan Godley: 322 E. Oglethorpe Ave.; Savannah, GA 31401
- 8/15 – Charles Houston, Jr.: 505 Fort King George Dr.; Darien, GA 31305
- 8/16 – Dick Reese: 6593 Patriot Dr.; Columbus, GA 31909
- 8/17 – D. Eugene Pollett: 30 Branson Mill Dr. NW; Cartersville, GA 30120
- 8/19 – Jim Giddens: 4 Cottenham Circle; Savannah, GA 31411
- 8/19 – Jeffery Seeley: 3301 Stinsonville Rd.; Macon, GA 31204
- 8/19 – John H. Stephens: 881 Nesbitt Rd.; Pavo, GA 31778
- 8/20 – Cleo Gilchrist: 108 Easy St.; Dublin, GA 31021
- 8/20 – Dave Hanson: 106 George T. Morris Cir.; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
- 8/20 – Bev King: 140 Long Pines Circle; East Dublin, GA 31027
- 8/21 – John Eckert: 237 Bartholomew Blvd.; Jeffersonville, IN 47130

- 8/22 – Jesse France: 514 I.G. Lanier Rd.; Pembroke, GA 31321
 8/22 – John Powell: 2728 Moore’s Station Rd. #17; Dublin, GA 31021
 8/22 – Steve Vinson: 3212 Norcrest Dr.; Oklahoma City, OK 73121-1842
 8/23 – Joe Johnston: 2109 W. Gramercy Dr.; Green Valley, AZ 85622
 8/24 – Jim Burgess, III: 661 East Plum St.; Jesup, GA 31546
 8/24 – Sam Lamback, Jr.: 821 Wesleyan Dr.; Macon, GA 31210
 8/25 – Charles Puryear: 106 Sandra St.; Thomasville, GA 31792
 8/25 – Elliott Sams: 6400 Poplar Ave.; Memphis, TN 38197
 8/26 – Ashley Randall: 801 Silver Leaf Dr.; Winston-Salem, NC 27103
 8/28 – David Carter: 102 Rivoli Oaks Circle; Macon, GA 31210
 8/28 – Robert Clark: 2022 E Pinetree Blvd.; Thomasville, GA 31792
 8/30 – Jenny Jackson-Adams: 17 Lands End Dr.; Greensboro, NC 27408
 8/31 – Lynn Hurley: PO Box 26; Attapulgus, GA 39815
 8/31 – Willie Beasley: 4451 Mahan Dr.; Valdosta, GA 31632



OBITUARIES

Rev. Dr. James “Jim” T. Trice Jr.

Dr. James T. Trice, Jr. (Jim) was a son, brother, uncle, husband, dad, Pop and friend. He held other distinctions and titles, but to his family and friends he distinguished himself, most, by the way he dedicated himself to these. His mild, comforting presence, his loving compassion, his warm embrace of all walks of life and beliefs, his level head, rational thought and deep abiding faith are all marks of the human being that his God created and whom he called to serve by ministering to others. In his service, through The United Methodist Church, Jim touched lives and set an example and defined a life of Servant Leadership. He never questioned where he was planted, instead he chose to grow brilliantly wherever the Sower scattered. His was not a life to receive accolades but rather to lift others and strengthen their faith, their person and their relationships. Through ministry in United Methodist Congregations in the South Georgia Annual Conference that included Harmony UMC in LaGrange, The Geneva Larger Parish in Geneva, Aldersgate UMC in Columbus, Buena Vista UMC, Forest Hills UMC in Macon, First UMC in Bainbridge, First UMC in Valdosta, District Superintendent of the Columbus District and Isle of Hope UMC in Savannah; he ministered by being himself and offering unconditional love, as Christ would, to others. And this was his greatest witness. His infectious laugh, huge grin and sense of humor comforted, held your attention and put you at ease. He was a gifted listener and used the gift to guide and never to ridicule or criticize. He was proud that his faith allowed him to question and constantly grow and he used that to counsel others through their own life challenges.

Jim graduated from Columbus High School, received his undergraduate from LaGrange College and earned the Master of Divinity from Candler School of Theology at Emory University. Always seeking to grow his knowledge and skills, he obtained a Doctor of Ministry from San

Francisco Theological Seminary where his dissertation was titled “A Strategy for Middle Age Marriage Enrichment in the Church.” Jim gracefully slipped away long before his body gave out. Even struggling with Alzheimer’s, his gentle, kind spirit and wonderful grin never left him or us. He ministered even when it was most difficult, yet it was such a part of him that nothing could cause a separation. He preached a funeral a number of years ago and on that day, he remarked about the life being celebrated: “the God that I know, and love would never allow this man to just cease to be! He was too vibrant and too much of a character to simply cease being.” We celebrate the fact that Jim will not cease being and that love always lives on!

Jim was preceded in death by his parents, Truman and Jeanette Trice and his son Chris Trice. He is survived by his wife Mavis Trice, his son Matt Trice and granddaughter Cali Trice. He is also survived by his brother Jerry Trice and his sister Joan Colquitt, several nieces and a nephew.

A memorial service was held July 29, 2021, in Savannah at Isle of Hope United Methodist Church. Interment followed in the Isle of Hope Memory Garden. A celebration of life was held July 31, 2021, at Carlyle Place, 5300 Zebulon Road, Macon, GA 31210.

Memorial gifts may be made in Jim’s memory to LaGrange College: 601 Broad Street, LaGrange, Georgia 30240-2999.

Visit www.snowsmacon.com to express tributes. Snow’s Memorial Chapel Bass Road is in charge of local arrangements.

Scripture Readings – Aug. 3 edition

August 8

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33

Psalms 130 (UMH 848)

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

John 6:35, 41-51

August 15

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14

Psalms 111 (UMH 832)

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

August 22

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 8:(1, 6, 10-11) 22-30, 41-43

Psalm 84 (UMH 804)
Ephesians 6:10-20
John 6:56-69

Events in the South Georgia Conference – 8/3/2021 edition

Farewell reception for Bishop and Mrs. Bryan – Aug. 15

On Sunday, Aug. 15, the South Georgia Conference will host a farewell reception for Bishop R. Lawson Bryan and Mrs. Sherrill Bryan. The drop-in reception will be held from 3 – 5 p.m. at Vineville United Methodist Church in Macon. All are invited and encouraged to attend.

Golden Cross Sunday – Aug. 15

Golden Cross began in 1908 with the commitment of Methodists in Dallas, Texas to provide the first health care to persons who could not afford it. They began to receive offerings for the expenses of the poor patients at Methodist Hospital in that city. By 1930, the concept was officially adopted throughout the predecessor denominations of The United Methodist Church. Today, Golden Cross is a ministry that reaches out in love to the laity in our Annual Conference who are experiencing financial difficulty due to excessive medical expenses. Through Golden Cross, United Methodists care for members of our local churches in time of emotional stress and financial need. Each church is asked to observe Golden Cross Sunday to receive an offering and send it to the conference treasurer.

Online Basic Lay Servant Ministries Training – Aug. 17, 19, 24, 26

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. [Register](#)

Fall 2021 Certified Lay Ministry Training, Leesburg – Sept. 11, Sept. 25, Oct. 2, Oct. 23, Nov. 6, Nov. 20

In this six-session course, held at The Pointe in Leesburg, participants will develop a team of leaders and supporters within their current congregation who will encourage them throughout the course and beyond. Through the classes, they'll build relationships with other South Georgia lay leaders and learn, practice, implement, share, and be inspired to take what they've learned and put it into action. The coursework includes holistic ministry training covering the following topics: worship, discipleship, preaching and teaching, congregational care, communication,

organizational and personal leadership, and the United Methodist connection. The cost for the class is \$300 per person, which includes lunch, snacks, and curriculum materials for the entire course. If you have questions or need more information, please contact Anne Bosarge at anne@thechapelministries.com. [Register](#)

Online Advanced Lay Servant Ministries Training – Sept. 14, 16, 21, 23

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. Advanced LSM Training includes learning how to put your spiritual gifts into service. This training will be offered via Zoom. 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. (Note: Basic Lay Servant class must be completed before taking Advanced Class.) For more information contact Anne Bosarge at anne@thechapelministries.com. [Register](#)

Methodist Children's Home Work Day Offering – Sept. 19

Every local church in South Georgia is encouraged to receive a special Work Day Offering to support the ministry of The Methodist Home for Children and Youth. To learn more about this incredible ministry of our conference visit www.themethodisthome.org.