

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – SEPTEMBER 21 EDITION

New book by Bishop Looney shares humor, inspirational stories from his life and ministry

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

Those who know Bishop Richard Looney know he doesn't take himself seriously, but he is serious about Jesus.

Well-known for his humor, Bishop Looney, who served the South Georgia Conference from 1998 until his retirement in 2000, has written a book of "holy hilarity" and inspirational stories.

"The purpose is to bring a little joy in the midst of all this darkness we're going through these days," he said. "I've always thought a little humor is helpful."

All proceeds from the book will benefit the Foundation for Evangelism, whose mission is to promote, encourage, and provide resources for Wesleyan evangelism, inviting all people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ. Bishop Looney served as president, as Episcopal Director, and continues to serve as Episcopal Director Emeritus of the Foundation.

"[The Fun of Being Looney](#)" is an autobiography of sorts, Bishop Looney said, and the book documents the humorous stories and anecdotes of his life and 66 years in ministry.

Blessed to have served in several places where the Church is alive and active – South Georgia, North Georgia, Virginia, Tennessee, England, Australia, Peru, Liberia, and Sierra Leone – amusing incidents seem to occur everywhere Bishop Looney ministers.

"I think the best humor is to laugh at yourself," he said.

In his book, Bishop Looney recounts funny stories about appointment making, shares the joy found in relationships, and even tells a story about the time he sensed God laughed at him and how it changed his relationship with God. South Georgia readers will recognize several familiar tales.

"[The Fun of Being Looney](#)' is a very appropriate title," said Dr. Don Kea, who, as superintendent of the Macon District, served for five years on South Georgia's Cabinet with Bishop Looney. "I can testify firsthand to the humor found in this book."

Laughter heals, said Bishop Looney, who has been entertained and amused by comedy shows during the coronavirus pandemic.

"I think laughter helps preaching, too. I don't mean telling jokes, necessarily, but seeing the humor in the religious and being able to laugh at ourselves. Most of us run from people who complain all the time and we're attracted to people who seem to enjoy life."

Quoting John 10:10 and John 15:11, Bishop Looney said Jesus came to give believers joy-filled lives.

“Jesus said he came to give us life and life abundant. Another time he said, ‘I tell you these things so my joy may be in you and your joy full.’”

A third-generation pastor who still preaches every Sunday at his retirement home, Bishop Looney enjoys life and people. He jokes that he’s now enjoying his fifth retirement. In addition to serving three churches and eight years as episcopal director at the Foundation for Evangelism, writing “[The Fun of Being Looney](#)” is just one more thing he’s done since he said goodbye to South Georgia 21 years ago.

The people and churches of South Georgia always remain close to his heart, though.

“South Georgia is a very special place to me,” Bishop Looney said. “The people spoiled us for 12 years.”

[Find “The Fun of Being Looney” on Amazon.](#) All proceeds will go to the Foundation for Evangelism.

Conference’s assistant disaster response coordinator lives faith through service

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

Whether pressure washing sidewalks at Dooley Campground, setting up a collection and distribution warehouse after a catastrophic hurricane, or clearing limbs after a tornado, Bob Grieco is a helper.

It’s just who he is, how he’s wired.

“I want to help, so that’s what I do. I’m pretty good at organizing things and I feel like I’m helping people,” said Grieco, who serves as South Georgia’s assistant disaster response coordinator.

That’s why Grieco, an Air Force and Army National Guard veteran, drove through the night to Baton Rouge, La. after Hurricane Ida tore through the southern part of the state. After spending the night in his Jeep, for two weeks he helped set up and run the relief supply distribution center at Broadmoor United Methodist Church.

When supplies came in, he made sure they were logged, organized, and then sent where they were most needed.

“I see God every time one of these trailers goes out and one comes in,” Grieco said. “I see God in the faces of the people we help.”

Grieco got his first taste of disaster response as a member of the Army National Guard when he and his unit were deployed to New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. After serving 22 years in the military – 14 with the Air Force and eight with the Army National Guard – he retired, but the desire to serve didn’t leave him.

“When you’re in the military you’re serving people,” Greico said.

Upon retiring from the Army National Guard in 2008, Grieco joined Team Rubicon, an international non-government organization that utilizes the skills and experiences of military veterans with first responders to rapidly deploy emergency response teams.

When Grieco learned The United Methodist Church has its own Early Response Teams, he took the class and became certified.

A member of Pinehurst United Methodist Church, Grieco views his disaster response service as a labor of love and an extension of his faith.

“What drives me to do what I do, to work the long hours, to make sure the job gets done, to sleep on a cot or in the back of my Jeep like I’ve done, is knowing that our faith in God is touching people and that God is leading us to the people who need to be helped,” he said.

Grieco’s expertise is recognized across the jurisdiction, said Conference Disaster Response Coordinator Luis Morales. “He had no qualms in responding to the call from the Louisiana Conference. He not only helped with post-hurricane damage assessment and helped set up a distribution center, but he also joined a chainsaw team to clear some debris. I am so proud of how Bob represents South Georgia’s disaster response team.”

God has placed him in this role, Grieco said, to help the South Georgia Conference and those who have suffered losses.

“God drives me to do what I do. He put me here, he put me in this ministry. He has a reason and that’s why I’m doing this,” he said. “The number one reason I do this is because I love the people we’re helping. God sent us to help them and God loves them. That’s why I do this and that’s why I’ll continue doing this until I can’t anymore.”

LaGrange College ranked in Top 10 by U.S. News & World Report

LaGrange College continues its run as an outstanding college in annual rankings released today by U.S. News & World Report.

The institution was rated in the top 10 among 93 Regional Colleges in the South, the only Georgia college in the category's top 20.

“It is always exciting to have an independent source like U.S. News recognize the value of a LaGrange education,” said college President Susanna Baxter. “It is also a validation of our mission of preparing students to become successful, responsible citizens who aspire to lives of integrity and moral courage.”

LaGrange College also was named a “best value,” a label the magazine says factors a school’s academic quality and cost after accounting for total expenses and financial aid. “The higher the quality of the program and the lower the cost, the better the deal,” the publication said.

More than 95% of LaGrange students receive financial aid, according to Dr. Baxter. “Families are often surprised at the amount of aid available to them, and many aren’t aware there is a HOPE Scholarship for Georgia residents.”

The value of a LaGrange education is evident at commencement, she said.

“More than 85% of the Class of 2021 had already received a job offer, internship or admission to graduate school by the time they crossed the stage to receive their diploma.”

KIDZQUEST is back! Register today

KIDZQUEST IS BACK!! And this time, with a twist! October 15-17, 3rd-6th grade children will come together with dozens of other church groups, learning how to worship, study God's Word, and understand what a relationship with Jesus really means. Did we mention it's AT THE BEACH? Join us on Jekyll Island for a once-in-a-KidzQuest experience! For more information, visit www.sgaumc.org/kidzquest

New BOTH/AND webinar offers hybrid worship training

After more than a year and a half of hybrid worship, many churches feel a mix of exhilaration and exhaustion when thinking about continuing to offer both online and in-person options for worship.

Now more than ever, both are needed to reach people for Christ, church leaders say.

Join Connectional Ministries and Jason Moore for a follow up to last year’s popular BOTH/AND webinar. [BOTH/AND: To Be Continued](#) will focus on why hybrid worship should carry on, how to continue to iterate, and will provide tangible handles on how to do it well. This brand new 90-minute training brings all new content focused on the why, how, and what we can do to run the next leg of this very important race.

“I am so proud of our clergy and laity who have risen to the challenge of creating powerful and transformative worship experiences where no one feels like they are an afterthought,” said Kelly Roberson, Connectional Ministries Team Leader. “Our local churches have made great strides over the last year and half as they have learned new skills, invested in new technology, and sought to reach people in new and creative ways. I’m excited to have Jason walk alongside us once again as we build on the things we have already learned and implemented and look ahead to what more we can be doing in this Both/And environment.”

The webinar, scheduled for Tuesday, October 12 at 10 a.m., will include:

- An invitation to determine your WHY for BOTH/AND worship
- 13 reasons why BOTH/AND must continue
- Answer to the “what if they don’t come back to the building” question
- How to create a BOTH/AND Think Tank at your church
- How to build an intentional chat strategy in order foster real relationships
- BOTH/AND pro tips
- Q&A

[More information](#) | [Register](#)

Bishop’s Initiative for Children and Poverty grants available to local churches

The South Georgia Conference, through the Office of Connectional Ministries and the Conference Outreach Team, is offering grants of up to \$2,000 to local churches for ministries focused on children and poverty.

The application deadline is October 15, 2021. Projects must be completed between December 2021 and July 2022. Ministries or projects may be ongoing or new.

“It is exciting to think about funding these projects which can have such a helpful impact,” said Dr. Derek McAleer, Director of Administrative Services. “This is another area in which being a connectional church is so good – we are able to jointly share in ministry, so our impact is broader. Every church in our conference has children of families in poverty nearby – and we can help! Plus, we can sometimes kickstart a ministry in a local church which then goes on for years.”

To apply, those interested must fill out an [application](#), agree to keep an account of how the funds are used and send the report to Connectional Ministries, write a one-page reflection to be used by

Connectional Ministries, submit at least two high-resolution photographs, and agree to be highlighted in South Georgia Conference publications and news releases.

Funding for the grants is available through the Bishop's Initiative for Children and Poverty, to which local churches have supported generously over the years.

"Our South Georgia local churches are doing incredible ministry as they reach out to their community with the love of Christ," said Kelly Roberson, Connectional Ministries Team Leader. "Through this grant, we want to invest back into the local churches as they continue ministry to children in lower income areas or dream of new ministry possibilities. It is exciting to think about how these grants can make a huge impact all across South Georgia."

[Apply for the Bishop's Initiative for Children and Poverty grant](#)

Praise for Salvation

Fall Quarter: Celebrating God

Unit 1: God's People Offer Praise

Sunday school lesson for the week of September 26, 2021

By Dr. D. Craig Rikard

Background Scripture: Acts 2:32-33, 37-47

Key Scripture (NIV): They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

Lesson Aims

1. To realize the importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in our salvation.
2. To realize the importance of personally accepting Jesus as Lord.
3. To realize the importance of becoming rooted in the faith.

Lesson Introduction and Context

The Acts of the Apostles

Luke, the physician and associate of Paul, wrote both Luke's Gospel and Acts. The book of Acts possesses a clear outline of the evangelistic ministry of the early Church. The book opens with an interesting choice of verbs. Luke wrote, "I write to you about all that Jesus began to do and teach." His gospel includes the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. Why did he not write, "about all that Jesus did?" Luke owned a very clear understanding that the Church was indeed the body of Christ in the world. The ministry of Jesus was not over after the ascension! It would continue through the Church, the body of Christ! One of the key verses in understanding

the ministry of the church is found in verse 8. The disciples asked Jesus, prior to his ascension, if he would reveal the time of the Kingdom's establishment. He answered it was not for them to know, only God knows and chooses the time. Then Jesus says, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. This is exactly the pattern of Acts. The Church's ministry begins in Jerusalem, then moves to the outlying area in Judea, and then to Samaria. As the book of Acts ends, the Church is moving into the uttermost parts of the earth. Our text occurs in the earliest moments of the Church's life. The disciples and followers are in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit has been given, and Peter offers the first sermon as they leave the room.

Do you believe your church is the embodiment, and is embodying, the life and ministry of Jesus? In what ways is your church the presence of Christ in the world? Does your church embrace a ministry of evangelistic movement? The early Church moved from Jerusalem, into Judea, Samaria, into the uttermost parts of the earth. Do we have such a ministry? If not, how can your church establish a ministry of outreach?

Pentecost

The events in our text occur during the festival of Pentecost. The feast of Pentecost is also known in the Bible as the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Harvest. In Jesus' day it was the celebration of the initial grain harvest for the year. Pentecost was celebrated 50 days after Passover and provided a time to thank God for the harvest.

In the early Church, Pentecost was observed 50 days after Easter. It is the day the Church was birthed through the gift of the Holy Spirit to all who believed and followed. It was a day of awakening to the power and meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. Pentecost was indeed a day of harvest; however, it was a harvest of souls.

When is the last time you witnessed a "harvesting of souls?" Is your church ministering to its membership only, or is it ministering to the membership while reaching the world about you? Does your church observe Pentecost? What are some ways your church can more meaningfully celebrate Pentecost?

The Upper Room

120 followers of Christ are meeting in one accord. Judas has been replaced by Mathias, and all are waiting for Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit. Tradition teaches this Upper Room is the same room in which Jesus ate his last supper. We are not certain of this. However, if true, the room of somber sadness became a dwelling of joy. Our lesson does not address the manifestation of the cloven tongues of fire, but it is important to realize, and it is quite obvious, they are the tongues (languages) of the people in Jerusalem who had journeyed to Jerusalem from all over the near eastern world. We have no idea exactly how many Jews were in Jerusalem during this Pentecost,

but some scholars claim it could have been 100,000 or more. Some offer numbers as high as a million. Nevertheless, a crowd walked and occupied the winding streets of the city.

Imagine being one of the 120 beautifully touched by God and receiving the promised Holy Spirit! You are just a common person experiencing the uncommon. A great crowd is milling around outside. The Spirit has come and you are filled with ecstatic joy. What do you do with your joy? What would you say to them, especially who speak another tongue? *The gift of tongues was not so much for the 120; it was for those waiting outside to hear!* And, the people did hear! Approximately 3,000 responded to Peter's sermon! The Gospel spread rapidly and quickly moved outside the city. Jesus was still moving in the world through the Holy Spirit!

Have we been so overjoyed in our faith we could not remain silent? Did we share our faith and experience? If not, what held us back? If we expressed our joy and shared our message, what was the result? Do we believe today's world is ready to hear the joyful, loving story of Christianity?

The role of Simon Peter in our lesson

The miracle in which Jesus touches a blind man's eyes twice is confusing to some. Was Jesus just tired? Hardly. Did the man not have enough faith? Hardly. Jesus performed the miracle in this manner for a purpose. Read Mark 8:22-25. Following this miracle Jesus asks the disciples, especially Peter, "Who do men say that I am?" "Who do you say that I am?" Peter immediately answered, "You are Messiah!" However, Peter's perception of the Messiah was fuzzy. Like the others, Peter expected a military messiah. He expected Jesus to lead Israel against Rome and reclaim the land. Therefore, when Jesus foretold his death Peter rebuked him. According to Simon Peter the Messiah would never die the death of a criminal. Such suffering belonged to the most sinful.

A second touch occurred for Peter at Pentecost. He is filled with God's Spirit and begins to see far more clearly. Jesus' death on the cross, which Peter initially rejected, is preached by Peter to be an act of God. He preached, "This Jesus whom you crucified God has made Lord and Christ." Our faith is a journey of "God's touches." Prior to accepting Jesus as Lord, God touches us in ways that draw us nearer. Then there is that powerful touch when we surrender our lives to Christ. Then, there is a lifetime of touches, each creating illumination and transformation.

Looking to the past, can you share God's touches upon your life that drew you nearer? Can you share that moment when you surrendered to Christ, when all former experiences of God's love overwhelmed you? How have the Lord's touches enlivened and illuminated you since choosing to follow Christ? Have you fully embraced such touches or have we quickly forgotten their meaning? In what ways does our life parallel Simon Peter's?

The Text

Jesus is Alive and Lord

Our lesson begins with the greatest proclamation on earth. God has raised Jesus from the dead, and Jesus is alive now! The apostles make certain the people in the streets of Jerusalem know this isn't just a wish; the disciples proclaim, "We saw him after his death!" For 40 days they witnessed the resurrected Christ and heard him teach. The phrase "exalted to the right hand of God," should not cause confusion regarding the trinity. Peter is inspired by God to preach. He uses the highest, most noble language possible. He uses images common to him and the crowd. Peter is proclaiming Jesus is all-powerful and all-righteous. He sits at God's right hand! Again, Peter is not being literal. He is expressing the Lordship of Jesus with the greatest vocabulary available to him.

Peter next preaches another powerful truth. Jesus has given the promised Holy Spirit to the followers in the Upper Room, and it is promised to all who believe and follow. Hearing the Gospel preached in their own tongue and witnessing the joy emerging from the Upper Room are signs of the Spirit being given.

Salvation begins with reality that Christ suffered and rose from the dead. St. Paul wrote "if Christ is not raised from the dead, our faith is in vain." The resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Before Peter addresses the signs and wonders people are seeing, he wants the crowd to realize that believing in the resurrected Christ anchors us in eternal substance. The resurrection occurred and the power and purpose of that moment continues. The Greek language possessed a tense we do not have in English. It is the *aorist*. This tense recognizes something has happened, but it continues. The cross and resurrection of Jesus occurred, past tense. However, they are as much a reality now as then. It is imperative for the Church to embody the sacrifice of Jesus and the power of his life over death. If not, we treat the holiest events as if they are "museum pieces." Each time we give of ourselves in sacrificial love, people can witness the reality of Jesus' cross. Each time we embrace a life that transcends our daily life we proclaim Jesus is Lord and alive now! When in spirit we rise above the most desperate circumstances, we proclaim the reality of the Kingdom of God!

Is the resurrection of Jesus a living reality for us as opposed to a past event that happened more than 2,000 years ago? Is the celebration and reality of the resurrection paramount in your church's worship and outreach? In what ways can we personally embrace the resurrected Jesus daily? How can your church's outreach better reflect the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection?

Repent and Be Baptized

The listeners were cut to the heart, asking, "What shall we do?" Notice, those asking this question use the term "brothers." They are identifying with Peter and the others as being "like them." If Jesus can save them and give them the Spirit, he can do the same for us! "What shall we do?" Peter had not just appealed to their minds and reason, he spoke to their hearts. This is a

beautiful witness to the presence of the Spirit in his life. When Jesus taught and preached, peoples' hearts "burned within them." Note, this is not a "captive audience." They can leave at any time. However, they listened because they stood in need of Christ. Peter's words were exposing and touching that need.

In response to the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter asks the crowd to repent and be baptized. Repentance has two meanings in Scripture. The first is the one with which we are most familiar. To repent means to turn 180 degrees and walk in the opposite direction. Peter preaches they should "save themselves from this corrupt generation." There is little doubt there exist "sinful cultures" that entice us to accept non-Christian values. As it was in Peter's day, it is in ours. Repentance involves a willful choice to turn from the destructive paths we walk and walk in the righteousness of Jesus. We should feel no romance with darkness. A destructive path doesn't always mean a deadly path. Any path that leads us toward hate, bigotry, revenge, etc. is destructive. Any path that leads us away from God's will for our life is destructive. The second meaning of repentance means "to prepare" for something great. When John the Baptist called people to repent he implied both definitions. The people were to turn from their sin and prepare for the coming of the Lord. When we repent, we turn from our sin and prepare ourselves to walk the new life made possible through Jesus. One should not just attempt to "stop sinning." We can only overcome sin and a destructive life through walking with Jesus into God's future.

Baptism is an important rite and sacrament in our faith. The call to be baptized meant to accept the death of Jesus and accept the new life made possible through his resurrection. Baptism also expressed becoming a part of the Christian community, the Church. For the infant it means to be brought into the Christian community for nurture and care until they one day accept Christ personally and embrace their baptism as their own. The crowd to which Peter preached on this occasion would have been mostly adults. They needed to express their faith in the living Jesus through baptism. They also needed to be brought into the newly birthed Church. Let us remember, the early Church did not argue over baptism. The only argument in the New Testament regarding baptism was related to "who performed the baptism." The early Church simply rejoiced that another person and household were accepting Jesus and walking in the faith.

Were you baptized as an infant? Were you reared in the church and in the faith? Did you choose for yourself to make Christ your own at confirmation? What did your confirmation teach you about baptism, the church, and personal faith? Were you baptized as an adult upon receiving Jesus? What did your baptism mean to you?

Do you understand the role of repentance in your life? Can you recall that moment when you chose to leave your lifestyle for Jesus? Did you possess a sense of expectation that you were embarking on a new, meaningful journey? Did your desires change? How is your life different in Christ?

Planting the Community through Word

It wasn't enough to simply win people to Christ, they needed to become rooted in their new faith. One of the difficulties some large evangelistic meetings experience is the inability to establish converts in a church. Leaving new converts to fend for themselves is akin to casting seed upon broken ground only to have the birds quickly consume it. It was vitally important to establish themselves and others in the faith and to establish Christian relationships.

The early converts devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. I love the word "devoted." The word means "very loving and loyal." They did not attend a couple of teaching meetings only to disappear, or show up now and then. They were devoted! They were passionate about Jesus and their new life together! Luke's reminder that they devoted themselves to the "apostles' teaching" informs us the only sources for understanding Jesus and his teaching the early Church were their experiences and the oral tradition taught by the apostles. There was no New Testament at this time, and no letters of Paul. The oral tradition was powerful. Great care was taken to transmit Jesus' words and actions accurately. There was great expectation Jesus would return immediately; thus we have no written documents in the very beginning. However, approximately 30 plus years after Pentecost the Church would have the Gospel of Mark. Also, Paul's letters began to circulate. The Gospels were actually the "oral tradition" in writing. Each author expressed the same Gospel from a different perspective, all complimenting each other. Mark was a bare-bones account of Jesus' ministry and life. Matthew uses Mark for a framework and adds a Jewish understanding of the Gospel. Luke also uses Mark, at least 70+ percent, and adds his Gentile-physician perspective. John is written years later and is the most mystical and philosophical. Consequently, God has given us a single Gospel from four perspectives that speak together as one. This is profound and remarkable in and of itself! The early Christians were rooted in Christ through the precious oral tradition, the Spirit's illumination, the authority of the apostles, and the testimonies of brothers and sisters in the Church.

What role has the Bible played in your Christian development? Are you devoted to its teaching? Are you thankful for pastors and teachers who devote themselves to sharing the Word? Do you pray for them? Does Scripture come to mind outside of church? Does a verse or passage come to mind as you walk through a particular experience? Are you aware of the Holy Spirit's illumination when you study Scripture? What role does the Christian community occupy in your study?

Planting the Community through the Breaking of Bread

The breaking of bread could mean a fellowship meal or the sacrament of Holy Communion. The early Church did observe this holy sacrament, for Paul alludes to it in I Corinthians. This was around 50 AD. It could also be a fellowship meal together. Yet, the fellowship meal consisted of important elements present in the sacrament. They ate joyfully and gratefully in the fellowship of Christ and the Spirit. The meal was blessed in prayer, and it was ensured there was enough for

all. Remember, Christians were far from a majority. Their togetherness provided incredible strength and consolation. It would have been dangerous and destructive for the Church to “forsake their gathering together (Heb. 10:25).” Gathering around the table was extremely important. The table has always represented a place of fellowship. Sharing a meal together still represents one of the greatest forms of fellowship. When we date someone we like or love we invite them to dinner. The family time for many families is observed daily at the table. Going out to eat with friends and colleagues remains an important conduit for fellowship.

The experiences at table in the early Church will later become “agape suppers.” The fellowship at the table will become known as an experience of God’s love and love for one another.

The sacrament of Holy Communion (the Lord’s Supper, the Eucharist) was established by Jesus during the last supper. The elements of bread and wine are consecrated through prayer. This time at table is a most serious moment, yet also an experience of great joy. It proclaims the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is within us! The broken bread would express his brokenness for our healing. The cup would express the pouring out of his life that we might be filled. Communion is both symbolic and a means of grace. God is present in this sacred meal. Those who partake through earnest faith experience that grace and God’s empowerment to live in Christ. This sacrament is to be done “when the Church is gathered.”

How important is Holy Communion in your faith? Does the experience help you realize the grace of God is present through the broken bread and cup? Do you understand the importance of observing this sacrament “within the church?” Does your church observe the sacrament regularly? Do you enjoy Christian fellowship with others around a table? Does your church offer opportunities to gather around a common meal?

Planted through Sharing

The Church began to meet at every available opportunity. Some of the faithful possessed more wealth than others. As a matter of fact, many of them were in need. The Church saw the importance, early in its existence, to take care of each other. People began selling their possessions and distributing them to those in need. We need to remember that they expected the imminent return of Jesus. Therefore, possessions had little value since the Kingdom of God would fully break into human history any day. Eventually, this “fully-committed” sharing created some dissension. Acts records the dishonesty of Ananias and Sapphira related to this activity. As they realized perhaps Jesus would return later, this practices of distributing their wealth diminished. However, the act of sharing and caring for one another and others became foundational to Church’s growth in grace and compassion. The manner in which sharing occurred may have changed, but the purpose and meaning found in sharing continued. Giving was an act that revealed Jesus was still giving and offering life. Jesus still cared for the poor and neglected. The believers discovered that giving nurtured one’s soul. Giving made it easier to withstand the temptation to idolize mammon. Giving established relationships with others. When

another received help face to face or through the fellowship of the church, everyone was touched. Personal and church giving to those in need is far more redemptive than receiving help from an impersonal organization or source. The act of giving is an act of worship. It is the response of a grateful and compassionate heart. We can understand why the Church grew so rapidly. People were witnessing the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection through those who joyfully gave of themselves and their purses.

Is giving an act of worship for you? How does your church celebrate the act of giving? Is giving understood to be a holy expression versus an obligation? Does your church care for those in need? How? Have you been blessed through giving? In what manner? Does our personal, and our church's giving, reveal the sacrifice and new life of Christ? How can we ensure this?

Summary

The early Church embodied a rich, deep fellowship. Amazing strength was found in their fellowship, and, their fellowship was anchored in eternal substance. All of the Church's activity was an act of praise. The oral tradition, fellowship, and prayers provided them the spiritual food necessary for living with grateful, loving, transformed hearts. They praised God for the Gospel itself and the new life being experienced by believers and the new life of the community. They indeed were the redeemed community. Christ lived, died, and lives again! This was their message, and this became their life. They lived while dying; they were dying to all that was destructive, dark, and ungodly. Their lives were so transformed they attracted people. Their compassion through Christ was so touching people wanted what they had. People were asking the early Church, "What shall we do to experience this Jesus?"

Are you able to share your experience through Christ? Are you so grateful for God's grace that your life is one of praise? Do people see Christ in you? Does your life proclaim Jesus is alive and moving in life?

Prayer

Almighty God, we live in awe and wonder. Your grace has abounded and we struggle to respond properly. Hear the praise of our life. May our actions reflect the presence of Jesus, and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. May our hearts offer silent praise when words are insufficient. We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit and your Church. We are thankful for our life in Christ and the life we live together in the body of Christ. May our lives be invitational to a hurting, broken, and wandering world. Help us to see the crowd gathered outside the walls who seek Jesus. Grant us courage to offer them Christ. In Jesus name, Amen.

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Praise God with Joy

Fall Quarter: Celebrating God

Unit 2: Called to Praise God

Sunday school lesson for the week of October 3, 2021

By Dr. D. Craig Rikard

Background Scripture: Psalm 100

Key Scripture (NIV): “Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are the sheep of his pasture.” Psalm 100:3

Lesson Aims

4. To understand *whom* we worship.
5. To understand *how* we worship.
6. To understand *why* we worship.

Preparation for Lesson

Who wrote the Psalm?

Tradition claims Moses as author. However, the mention of worship in the Temple indicates it was written after its construction by Solomon. Both most likely are true. The psalm could have been created by Moses. It was probably sung through the years and was slightly altered to allow the audience to better relate to its message. Most importantly, the meaning of the original psalm remained intact.

To Whom is it Written?

The original audience was the Israelites who were saved through the Exodus. The experiences of this psalm were also the experiences of later Israelites. Psalm 100 has spoken to every generation from the Exodus until today.

When was it written:

It was written between 9th and 5th century B.C.

What type of literature is it?

This is a psalm, one of many; thus, it is poetry. The book of Psalms represents the hymnbook for the Hebrew/Jewish people. The book of Psalms is divided into five sections, and Psalm 100 lies in the third section. It is important to understand the great role poetry and prose play in the sacred writings of the Hebrew people. More than 8,600 verses in the Bible are poetry and prose. In other words, 27 percent of the Bible is written in prose and poetry. This was not uncommon in ancient literature. Only Esther in the Old Testament contains no poetry or prose. The Old

Testament was not an era in which written documents were readily available. Poetry and prose could be shared orally and musically as well. Poetic words more easily capture the human ear. Just as importantly, prose and poetry were more easily remembered, especially when music was also involved. Today, most of us can remember the words and messages of songs better than what we have read in paragraphs and pages from a book. Poetry and prose possessed an aesthetic beauty. This aesthetic was welcomed in the violent Old Testament world. Rhythm and rhyme existed in this literature, allowing the listener and reader to more deeply experience the content. In Ephesians 2 Paul described us the *workmanship* of God. The Greek word employed by Paul was *poema*, from where we get our words “poem or poetry.” We are God’s poetry. Each of us possess the rhythm and rhyme of God’s will. When the *poema of God* experiences the prose and poetry of scripture, a beautiful spiritual transaction occurs. It is much like beautiful music finding its perfect lyric. Poetic scripture can resonate in the soul. The Book of Psalms allows us to experience the emotion experienced by that author. We can sense David’s serenity in Psalm 23 and his doubt in Psalm 51. Psalm 100 allows us to experience the awe and joy of the author after experiencing the Exodus. We can also sense the emotion of the faith community singing these songs of praise.

Psalm 100 was inspired by God. This does not mean God dictated each word. Poets write out of inner inspiration. They can be moved by something seen, heard, and experienced, and, using their words and images they write. Their inspired writing allows us, as closely as possible, to share the experience. In the Psalms, the authors are moved by God’s Spirit. This can occur when the author is overwhelmed by what God has done and revealed. God’s Spirit moved upon the author, and this inner stirring and illumination prompted the author to pen this song/poem. Therefore, though the authorship remains unknown, we are blessed because we know God inspired all involved.

Most Hebrew poets in the Psalms write with *parallelism*. Parallelism involves two lines of the poem or song. The two lines are intended to complement each other. Sometimes the two lines contrast and on other occasions they say the same thing, only with different wording. For example, Psalm 100 contains the parallel lines: 1. “It is he who made us.” It is followed by the parallel 2. “We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” We have the same truth in two different wordings. God made us and we are his! Repeating the same truth in poetry and psalms helps the listener grasp that truth. In God’s eternal wisdom, the Lord reveals himself through the power of music, poetry and prose.

The Text

Introduction

Psalm 100 opens with a line pointing to the major theme of the entire psalm. It is often called the title of the psalm. The phrase is: “*For giving grateful praise. Shout for joy unto the Lord, all the earth.*” The psalmist declares that this psalm is to call forth all the earth to praise the Lord.

Shouting in the psalm most likely means a literal shout. However, as the years passed, shouting is not the way many worship. Still, it is important to examine the motivation for shouting. Shouting means to emote the overwhelming remarkable joy that dwells within the heart. We do not have to shout. But, it is important to express the abounding joy and gratitude we feel in relation to God. The hymns and songs of worship offer us a vehicle for expressing our heart. When I am full of joy I tend to sing with gusto. Whatever the vehicle, let our expression emerge from a genuine, grateful heart.

Can you recall a moment when you felt you needed to sing? Have you ever wanted to just shout? What do you think occurs within us when we stifle praise unto God? What do you believe is the great effect within us when we express praise fully? What hymn do you most like to sing when overcome with joy?

Notice, the psalmist calls to shout *unto the Lord!* God alone is worthy of our praise. This does not infer that we cannot praise individuals who have done something remarkable for us. I believe it is important to express praise in our home, among our friends, and in the Church. The U.S.A. has fallen in love with Olympic wrestler Tamyra Mensah. We were touched that she immediately offered gratitude for country, for people, and above all, for God. The people and institutions in our life are gifts from God. The foundation of our praise is and should be God. As a minister, people on occasion praise me for something I've said or done. However, I exercise extreme care to take that praise and point it toward God. Everything I do and say emerges from the life God has given me, which includes all experiences and people. The same is true for everyone. *All things have been working toward the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).*

What do you believe happens spiritually within us when we praise everyone but God? What do you believe spiritually happens within us when we receive praise and do not point toward God? Have you witnessed someone, who, after doing something heroic or awe-inspiring, offered praise to God? Who was it, and what did their praise mean to you the onlooker?

The Parallels

The most effective manner in which to study this psalm is to examine its structure. First, let us explore the parallels in the poem. The intended complimenting words or thoughts are:

A. Worship the Lord

a. Come before him.

B. Gladness

b. Joyful songs

C. He made us

c. We are the sheep of his pasture

D. Enter the temple with praise

d. Give thanks and praise his name.

1. The first parallel we read involves *worshipping the Lord*, and *come before him*. The most literal meaning of the Hebrew word for worship means to *bow before*. Naturally, as a person of faith, we bow before God. Bowing is one of the more humbling acts we can do. Bowing is recognizing the person before you is greater. They are the one to whom you are indebted. They are the one most respected. People for centuries always bowed before kings and queens. It is a touching posture. For one to drop to their knees implies the belief we are not worthy to stand before another. Not one of us can truly stand before the Lord in our own righteousness. Realize what we are saying when we bow at the altar of the church. We are praying to God in humility and reverence. We bow our head and close our eyes as though we would be blinded by the brilliance of God's light. The good news for us is that God has chosen and made us worthy to accept his love. God knows us, and we are important to the Lord. The Lord knows "*the number of hairs upon our heads.*" We kneel as deeply grateful people for what God has done for us in Christ. We kneel as blessed people who are intimately known by God.

In the following line, we are called to "*Come before him.*" The Old Testament people would have understood this call to be incredible, and for some unbelievable. Remember, the great divide of the eternal from the finite. Israelites were not allowed to see, touch, or hear God without invitation. Remember, they were not allowed to speak God's name. Standing before God was a frightening thought. Most, I am certain, would think, "Am I worthy to stand before God?" Notice Isaiah's response upon seeing the vision of God in the temple in Isa. 6. He exclaimed, "Woe is me!" However, in our text the invitation has been given. The invitation is always one of grace. In actuality, no one is worthy before God. Only God could declare them worthy, or overlook their sins. As a New Testament people, this call should fill us with joy and gratitude. The temple Holy of Holies is perhaps our best imagery of what it means to come before the Lord. The Holy of Holies was set apart from the remainder of the temple courts by a curtain or veil. No person could enter this sacred place, other than the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). However, upon Jesus' death the curtain ripped apart, opening the Holy of Holies for all to see. It was the eternal invitation for all who sought God and were justified by faith. Many of the hymns capture what we feel about his once-and-for all invitation. The hymn "*And Can It Be*" proclaims:

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood?

Died he for me, who caused him pain?

For me, who him to death pursued?

Amazing love! how can it be

That thou my God should die for me!

We have received the divine invitation through Christ! Come before him!

Have you ever felt disconnected or separated from God through your sinful actions? Were you reluctant, for fear of being unworthy, to serve or even attend church? Can you recall a moment when you sensed the divide existed no more through Christ? (This could have happened gradually, or in a moment.). Do you have a favorite hymn or song that proclaims the invitation of God for us to come before him unafraid? Can you share why this hymn is dear to you?

2. Next, let us explore the parallel of *gladness* and *joyful songs*. The inspired author of the psalm connects these terms as repetition. That is, *joyful songs* is a further expression of *gladness*. The Hebrew word for glad has as part of its definition, *to be filled with ultimate joy*. We all fall short of *ultimate joy*. In our fallen humanity we still miss so much in life. On occasion we fail to recognize God's goodness in a day. Our spiritual eyes are still not seeing as clearly as possible. If we could recognize every redeeming and loving act by God in our lives we would become so overwhelmed we would express our joy without restraint! We experience beautiful touches of God throughout life; thus, we possess many experiences of gladness. However, we are on a journey to live in a *state of gladness*.

What do you believe is the closest you've ever come to experiencing ultimate joy? When you have felt such joy, how did you express it? How can we experience joy when life is difficult? How can we, in relation to God, enrich our joy and our walk toward ultimate gladness?

Notice the next line in the psalm equates gladness with *songs of joy*. Once again, we encounter the power of music in our faith. Many a person has broken out in song upon realizing the love of God in their life. As a young man attending a church revival, I listened to a man sing. He was not a good singer. However, I heard every note and word. I was mesmerized. Later I discovered the man could not read books or music. He met Christ as an adult and felt he just had to sing about it. Yes, sometimes our great gladness must burst into song whether we can sing or not. Henry Van Dyke expressed his joy with a poem to be sung to Beethoven's "*Ode to Joy*." Beethoven wrote the unforgettable "*Ode to Joy*" as music to lift the human heart toward peace and brother/sisterhood. Against the backdrop of human conflict this music soars. When Van Dyke was full of praise and gratitude he wrote his poem. As quoted in an earlier lesson, "*Music is love in search of a word*" (Sidney Lanier). The love of Beethoven in "*Ode to Joy*" had found its word through Van Dyke. The music and lyrics were born in the human heart, inspired by the love of God. This great hymn of joy allows us to sing a song of joy over the goodness and love of God. The next opportunity to sing this great hymn, allow your joy and gladness to burst from your heart.

Joyful, joyful, we adore thee, God of glory Lord of love.

Hearts unfold like flowers before thee, opening to the sun above!

Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, drive the dark of doubt away.

Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!

Of the hymns, which one best expresses your joy? Can you share why you chose this one? In the words of the poet, your love is searching for its word. Your love has found its word in the divine Logos, the Word made flesh. What hymn best conveys for you the thought of “being found?” Can you remember when this hymn first spoke to you, and for you? Can you share this moment?

3. The third parallel consists of “*It is he who made us*” and “*We are the sheep of his pasture.*” Genesis opens with a mighty declaration. God made us! We are responsible to our creator. This is not only a mighty declaration, it is also a remarkable thought. Frequently I walk beneath the night sky. As I gaze into the cosmos, I try to consider where it all began. I contemplate the preexistence of God and struggle to do so. My mind cannot grasp the thought of someone who was not created, who has always been. Then, I think, “Yet I am here, staring into the night and asking that question.” On every occasion I become overwhelmed and awestruck that the creator of all made me. Since God made us, God knows us. Psalm 139 recognizes and proclaims this grand truth. “*You have searched me Lord and know me.*” Thus, there exists an eternal connection between God and us. It is a precious connection, held together through the unfailing love of God. Since we did not make ourselves, we are responsible to the One who did. Consequently, no person can escape the Lord’s love. They may neglect it, avoid it, run from it, etc. Yet, the connection is eternal. This is not a joyless relationship. In God we find all meaning and purpose. We experience the greatest of loves. This is the relationship that gives life, and gives it abundantly!

Do you often contemplate why you are here? Do you contemplate “Who” made us? What helps you most in recognizing we are God’s creation? Read Psalm 139. What does this grand psalm say about God? About us? What helps you to live daily, aware you and others are God’s creation?

The second line again enriches the first. “*We are the sheep of his pasture.*” In this beautiful psalm, the author uses the metaphor of sheep and shepherd in describing our relationship with God. The shepherd cares for the sheep with great care. After all, sheep were directionless and defenseless. They will never survive without the shepherd’s care in their hostile world of predators. Though our world is full of more light than darkness, we still encounter predators and risks to our way of life. Yet, as David beautifully stated in Psalm 23, “*The Lord is my shepherd.*” Let us offer praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord! We are being led through life even when we are unaware. A truly dedicated shepherd would risk his life for his sheep. Our shepherd gave his life, allowing us to experience his abundant life.

What does the metaphor of shepherd and sheep say to you? About the shepherd and about you? In what ways are we directionless? In what ways are we defenseless? How does God, in Christ, provide for our need of direction and protection?

4. The final parallel is only fitting to follow all the previous parallels. *“Give thanks/ praise his name!”* We will treat them as a single line in closing. After all, after being reminded of our Creator’s knowledge, love, and redemption of us, it is only natural to give thanks and praise to the Lord. How can we not be grateful? How can we remain silent? God is over all, and knows all!

Prayer

Almighty God, we bow our head and kneel, recognizing you alone are God. You alone are our creator. We are filled with thanksgiving that you chose to know us, and above all, love us in Christ. Enlighten our often-weakened vision to see you in all the places we would otherwise never look. Teach us to sing with joy and praise with all our heart. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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

“Here Endeth the First Lesson”

By Dr. Hal Brady

Cannon Dick Sheppard was the minister at St. Martin-in-the-Fields in the heart of London right after World War I. It is reported that when he died, quite suddenly, one of the morning newspapers printed a large photograph of his pulpit. There it was, the same as ever, but empty. However, the Bible on the pulpit was still open with a ray of light across it. Beneath the picture were these words: “Here endeth the first lesson.”

The implication here, and rightly so, is that there is another lesson to follow. As someone observed, “So, is death when we go to sleep? Or is death when we finally wake up?”

The Apostle Paul addresses this subject of the “second lesson” (resurrection hope and life after death) when he says, “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). Notice that Paul doesn’t say that Christ is the “only fruit” of those who have fallen asleep but the “first fruits” of those who have fallen asleep. Stating it another way, the first fruits are always a sign of the harvest to come.

So, why this article on the “second lesson” or resurrection hope and life after death?

First, as a corrective to some modern-day excesses! While scripture teaches that eternal life begins in the present, it also teaches that it continues after death. Consequently, there is a present and a future aspect to God’s great promise.

But, for the most part, modern American Christendom seems to stress the present aspect of the continuum only. Certainly, we must be concerned with faith in the present – especially as we consider the nature of God’s call and the precarious nature of our world. Let us make no mistake – this is our primary mission and concern.

However, I ask you: does this negate the importance of also stressing the reality of faith's deeper levels, of stressing the reality of eternal communion with the One who lives on both sides of the grave? In other words, can we carry out the social mandates of the gospel while at the same time affirming our personal resurrection hope? For me and numerous others, the answer is "yes."

Second, as a pointer to the biblical witness! Right at the outset, let us be very clear about something! As the late Bishop Earl Hunt observed, "The New Testament itself gives us no blueprint of heaven...we possess only the beautiful phraseology of pictures, or as another described it, 'Appetizing hints' about the life to come."

Someone once asked a well-known minister, "Why didn't Jesus tell us more about life after death or for that matter why doesn't the Bible tell us more about it?"

The minister replied with two answers. First of all, he said, "If life after death is so amazing and humans knew of it, they might be tempted to go into it by their own act before they had usefully finished life here. And second, he said, "We just don't have the capacity to understand what it is like."

For believers, heaven is where the Master is. While we may not know what is beyond the grave, we do know who is beyond the grave, and that is sufficient.

Third, as a hope and comfort to people of faith! When all is said and done, our faith in the "second lesson" comes down to these things.

Our conviction about God and the nature of God! Because we believe in God's infinite goodness, love, and justice, we must believe that in other spheres God will straighten out the injustice and irregularities of earth. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"

I like the way Philip Yancey expressed it. He said, "I believe in the resurrection primarily because I have gotten to know God." Divine love will always find a way to overcome.

Our faith in the witness of Jesus! Our ultimate assurance of the reality of eternal life comes from one intentional act, faith in the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And then our faith in the witness of the church and the testimony of the ages! Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed by the Nazis on Sunday, April 9, 1945. As he was being taken from his cell, he reportedly said, "This is the end, for me the beginning of life."

Fourth, as a strength to our present-day ministries in the world! One of the reasons for the accelerated collapse of character in our time is that the concept of the hereafter has been largely dismissed.

In our revolt against selfish, individual and escapist "pie in the sky by and by," we've allowed "the pie in the sky" to drop from the consciousness of modernity to the detriment of the whole of human society.

Hear me now! If a human being is destined for a life beyond this one, if indeed this world is a “training ground for eternity...” then immediately all our conduct comes up for fresh evaluation. A person who is destined to live forever simply cannot escape the consequences of his or her life. Thus, in this light, the question of right and wrong takes on much added significance. So, what really matters now is to live a life of grace and good will.

As the words beneath that empty pulpit stated it, “Here endeth the first lesson.”

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).

Why the vision statement doesn't get a rise

By Dr. Derek McAleer, *Director of Administrative Services*

Sometime in the early '90s I began to learn about how critical it was for a church to have a vision statement. Somewhere in the intersection of business, academia, and the practical administration of the church the idea of a compelling mission or vision statement surfaced in the minds of pastors and other church leaders. Our annual conference got behind the idea, and soon we were merrily discussing the difference between a mission statement, a vision statement, and a statement of values. Of course, I got my local church leadership off on a retreat so we could discern our church's vision statement.

I did it again at the next two churches I served, convinced I was onto something good. Then I was appointed to an extension ministry in the same city where I had been serving a congregation. I moved to a pew in the same church, supported the new pastor, and all was well. Except now I began to see things from the view of laypersons in the church. For the first time as an adult, I lived through a change of pastors ... and then another change ... and then another change. My new perspective gave me some very interesting things to witness.

Those who have succeeded me have been very capable pastors. Their leadership has helped our church, and they have brought things to the table I could never have brought. I want to be very clear that my comments are not some veiled denigration of their ministry. Rather, I offer my opinion on one thing I have observed, and hope others more capable than I will help use this to guide us to more effective ministry.

Every new pastor to our church has led us in discerning God's vision for our church. Each pastor has sought to clearly hear what God is saying to our church, where God is calling us to serve, and how we should allocate our resources for effective ministry. In this, they have tried to exhibit faithful pastoral leadership. I did the same thing in churches I served.

At the same time, my church has had three different mission statements and three different ways of expressing God's vision for the church. We've had different logos and color schemes. And we've had laity who are glad to see whatever the new buzzwords are printed up on the bulletin and promotional pieces without it really impacting their engagement with the church. Oh, these laypersons love the church, honor and respect the pastor, and sincerely want to serve Christ. But the ever-changing landscape of vision and mission statements leaves them a bit disconnected from the power these could evoke.

Perhaps the pastors have been in the same place I have been (and perhaps you have been there, too). After all the work involved in discerning and delineating the new vision, mission, and values, it is disappointing to find that, after the initial rush, the laity do not rise up and follow with much enthusiasm. No one speaks against the new statements; in fact, most like them. But for some reason the statements do not bring the focus, energy, and motivation we hoped they would.

Put simply, if laity recognize that the "new" mission and/or vision statement will last as long as this pastor does (which experience says will be the truth), then how do they really key into these as expressions of God's desire for the church? If God wanted A with the last pastor, and B with the current pastor, has God's will changed, or just the pastor? Is this the *church's* mission and vision, the *pastor's* expression of what he or she wants for the church, some mix of the two, or something else entirely? Does anyone in the lay leadership care enough to parse through all that, or will they just let the new pastor do what they want with mission, vision, and logo?

Put a different way: if the mission and vision statement belong to the church, why would it change when the pastor changes? Would it be wiser for a pastor to align their own practice of ministry with the church's vision and mission? Does the pastor's unwillingness to do so reflect the burden on his or her heart to seek God anew, or just an unwillingness to receive what they perceive as the former pastor's vision? (If the latter, doesn't that reveal where they think the mission and vision come from!)

Naturally, the laity of the church expect the new pastor to have their own way of leading and their own gifts and graces. Of course we anticipate that a new pastor will lead us into areas that previous pastors did not go. This is one of the values gained from the itineracy. Should vision and mission be counted as part of a pastor's way of leading, or is there something about them tied more to the church than to the pastor?

My own opinion, uninformed as it may be, is this: Something that changes every time there is a pastoral change does not belong to the church. If it does not belong to the church, then the congregation will not embrace it as completely as might otherwise be true. Laity do not commit themselves to short-term visions in the way they might to a long-term vision. The perceived short-term nature of the mission statement robs it of much of its power and motivational ability.

Are you in a new appointment? Take a look to see if there is a current mission or vision statement. Look at it carefully, consider it with your intellect, mull over it in prayer. Perhaps the Spirit will lead you to accept it as God's vision for that church, God's mission for the congregation. If the Spirit gives you freedom to work with the present mission/vision, do so with gusto. Claim it as the church's mission and vision, honor the statement, and move forward under its guidance. And see if the vision does not gain new authority over that congregation.

Universal Truths

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

ANNE PACKARD

Primarily, Christian love is gentleness. In other words, it is self-restraint. It is the ability and the power to check or to hold under mastery those natural tendencies of self-assertion which come boiling up out of our hearts. It is keeping pride and fretfulness and malice down. It is fairness of judgement. It is a kindly allowance for the mistakes of the other man. It is consideration for the feelings of people. That is love. Bishop Arthur J. Moore

The title of this sermon is "The Credentials of a Life Lived for Him" and it is taken from Galatians 6:17: "...for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Bishop Moore states that the three credentials of a life lived for Jesus are obedience, love, and sacrifice, and he ends the sermon by asking if we have marks from a life lived for Him. This sermon could be given just as easily today as it was 75 years ago. What's Old Is New Again.

Bishop Moore wrote not only for the people of his time, but for all time. He excelled in going beyond the news of his day, both good and bad, and seeing things as universal and timeless. And, make no mistake, there was news in his day. Between the year he was licensed to preach in 1909 and his death in 1973, the United States experienced World War I, the Roaring Twenties, Prohibition, The Stock Market crash, the Dust Bowl, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Women's Rights movement, and the Civil Rights movement.

However, Bishop Moore looked beyond these daily struggles to speak to the qualities that held his Methodist movement together: obedience, love, and sacrifice. It didn't matter what the members of his church faced, they could only and always triumph with their faith and the love of Jesus. This same faith and love will see us, and all future generations, through whatever trials and tribulations await. We just have to believe.

May we use the Ministry of Memory as it should be used and allow Bishop Moore to speak to us as clearly in 2021 as he did in 1935. Let us not be overcome by the struggles we are presented with this year, whether they are a global pandemic, political upheaval, or schisms within our denomination. Speak universal truths which will carry the members of the South Georgia

Conference through today, tomorrow, and beyond. Perform actions that show our obedience, love, and sacrifice to the Lamb of God, Emanuel, the Christ. Let us be a shining example to future generations of how to triumph amongst tribulation.

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 – September 2021

- 9/01 – David Boggs: 7715 Church St.; Bartow, GA 30413
- 9/03 – Fred Foster: 1964 Madison Hwy.; Quitman, GA 31643
- 9/03 – Guy Mathis, Jr.: 1108 Moore Dr.; Americus, GA 31709
- 9/04 – Earl James: 310 Avondale Circle; Warner Robins, GA 31088
- 9/05 – Gene Yelverton: 6345 Concord Church Rd.; Ellaville, GA 31806
- 9/06 – Cecil Hazen: The Phoenix at Milton; 13943 Hwy. 9 North; Milton, GA 30004
- 9/06 – Sanford Wills: 1021 Sunrise Rd.; Preston, GA 31824
- 9/09 – Richard Soper: 102 Ingham St.; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
- 9/13 – Bernie Khaw: 344 S. Old Middletown Rd., Media, PA 19063
- 9/14 – Tom Johnson, Sr.: PO Box 127; Oxford, GA 30054
- 9/15 – Elick Bullington, Jr.: Lakeside Senior Care; 1025 N. Chester Ave., No. 11; Douglas, GA 31533
- 9/15 – Buddy Cooper: 7005 Deerwood Lane; Upatoi, GA 31829
- 9/16 – Henry Bass: 404 Clyde Ave.; Valdosta, GA 31602
- 9/16 – Bob Norwood: 946 Old Wadley Rd.; Swainsboro, GA 30401
- 9/16 – Ray Youngblood: 214 Lee St.; North Augusta, SC 29841
- 9/18 – Burns Willis: 1815 E. Washington St.; Thomasville, GA 31792
- 9/19 – Wayne Moseley: 29 William E. Moseley Rd.; Collins, GA 30421
- 9/19 – Dan Pegram: 112 Tahoe Dr.; Pooler, GA 31323
- 9/21 – Robert Herrington, Sr.: 185 S. Sixth St.; Cochran, GA 31014
- 9/21 – Virgil Lee: 208 Yorkshire Crescent; Thomasville, GA 31792
- 9/22 – Edwin Chase: 70 Shipwatch Rd.; Savannah, GA 31410
- 9/23 – Steve Posey: PO Box 218; Reidsville, GA 30453
- 9/26 – John Irwin: 109 Deer Run Dr.; Macon, GA 31220
- 9/26 – Larry Sauls: 206 Westview Dr.; Dublin, GA 31321
- 9/27 – Andy Brownley: 34 South Broad St.; Alamo, GA 30411
- 9/28 – Donna Jordan: 404 Brentwood Dr.; Dublin, GA 31021
- 9/28 – William Ryan: 2138 Red Bank Circle; Sevierville, TN 37876
- 9/30 – Dennis Stalvey: PO Box 685; Americus, GA 31709

OBITUARIES

Rev. Raymond Yody, Sr.

Ray Yody, Sr., 80, of Lake Park, died Saturday, September 4, 2021, at his residence. He was born in Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Ohio on October 15, 1940, to the late Paul George Yody and Helen Schneider Yody. Mr. Yody was a retired United Methodist pastor and was a member of Lake Park United Methodist Church. He served in the United States Navy from January 22, 1959, until January 18, 1963, and the reserves until 1978. Mr. Yody enjoyed camping, traveling, model railroading and spending time with his family.

He is survived by his son and daughter in law, Raymond Jr. and Susan Yody of Tifton and grandson, Ryan Ethan Yody. Mr. Yody is predeceased by his parents and his brother, Tom George Yody.

Carson McLane Funeral Home is serving the family and expressions of sympathy may be conveyed online at www.mclanecares.com.

Mrs. Jane Ellen Bass

Jane Ellen Bass, 80, of Valdosta, passed away on Saturday, September 4, 2021, at her residence. She was born in Birmingham, Ala. on February 28, 1941, to the late Herbert Edwin Bryan and Dessie Mae Gann Bryan. Mrs. Bass was married to the love of her life, Reverend Henry Bass, for 50 years. She was a minister's wife for 41 of those 50 years, and worked in various jobs supporting their ministry. She enjoyed reading, all things Christmas, and going to the beach. Mrs. Bass was always "piddlin" in her yard and decorating her home. She loved cheering on her favorite team, Alabama, "Roll Tide," but she truly loved spending time with her family and being "Maw Maw" to her grands and great grands.

Mrs. Bass is survived by her husband, Henry Charlie Bass, of Valdosta; her children: Stephanie Newton (Greg Marbut) of Athens, AL; Laura Susan George and Shawn Bass, both of Valdosta; and Jody (Reuben) Self, of Roanoke, AL. She is also survived by 10 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren: Christopher (Shelby) Newton, Emily (Cody) Lewter, Arcadia Lopez, Alyse Lopez, and Blake Bivens, all of Athens, AL; Abby (Richie) Nagel, of Hartselle, AL; Jacob (Elizabeth) Self and Regan (Juan) Vargas, both of Carrollton, GA; Alexis (Brad) Young, of Charlotte, NC; and Scott Perry, of Ackworth, GA. Her great grandchildren include: Colton, Chance, and Cullen Lewter, Brock Newton, Zoe and Tripp Nagel, Abbie and Marli Self, and Charlotte Rose Young. Mrs. Bass was preceded in death by her parents, two brothers: Charles and Barry Bryan, one daughter, Christy Lopez, and a stepson, Andy Bass.

A memorial service was held on Thursday, September 9, 2021, at First United Methodist Church. Rev. Dr. Anthony McPhail and Rev. Dr. John Walker officiated. The family will receive friends prior to the service from 10-12pm. Donations in Mrs. Bass' memory can be made to: Magnolia Manor, League of Good Samaritan Fund, Magnolia Manor Development Office - 2001 S. Lee St.- Americus, GA 31709. Condolences to the family may be conveyed online at www.mclanecares.com, Carson McLane Funeral Home.

Mrs. Merrie Freeman Posey

Merrie Freeman Posey, a beloved wife of 48 years, mother of four children, and grandmother to 11 beautiful grandchildren, resident of St. Simon’s Island, Georgia, passed away on Monday, September 6, 2021, at the age of 71.

Merrie is survived by her husband, Reverend J. Stephen Posey, her sons Stephen and John Posey, her daughters Rebekah LaBouff and Sarah Long, siblings Joye Hancock and Reverend George Freeman, in addition to many loving extended family members.

Merrie was a thoughtful, loving homemaker and an indispensable ministry partner to the numerous church communities she and Steve served together in each of the last six decades (’70s-’20s). Merrie’s sweet smile and calming presence brought encouragement, hope, and a sense of peace to innumerable family, friends, and church members through her years in ministry, both in person and via her daily words of encouragement online (from her favorite red chair). Merrie deeply loved her kids and grandkids, constantly keeping them in her prayers, undoubtedly saving them from all sorts of trouble down through the years.

Merrie was, perhaps, the world’s most prolific yard sale shopper. She’d go out with friends to hunt for thrifty treasure just about every weekend, only to give away the spoils of her conquest to friends and family, finding particular joy in sharing just how little she actually paid for each useful thing. Anytime she was home, Merrie had a canine friend by her side. Parker was the latest tail-wagging, treat-craving companion of hers. He was with her to the end and misses her dearly. Merrie lived in all sorts of places over the years, but her favorite place to be was always the beach. She was so thrilled that she and Steve moved to St. Simon’s to spend this new chapter of their retired life together.

Ultimately, Merrie sought to honor God with the humble, fruitful way she lived, bringing people closer to the source of her eternal hope – Jesus.

A celebration of Merrie’s life was conducted on Saturday, September 11, 2021, at the Chapel of the Glennville Funeral Home.

Glennville Funeral Home is serving the Posey family.



Scripture Readings – Sept. 21 edition

September 26

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22

Psalm 124

James 5:13-20
Mark 9:38-50

October 3

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Job 1:1; 2:1-10
Psalm 26
Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12
Mark 10:2-16

October 10

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Job 23:1-9, 16-17
Psalm 22:1-15
Hebrews 4:12-16
Mark 10:17-31

Discussion series explores what it means to be United Methodist

“Tuesdays at the Table: Should I stay? Or should I go?” is a new discussion series for United Methodists, presented by the Connectional Table (CT) in cooperation with general agencies and contributors. Weekly segments will explore topics aimed at helping viewers better understand their faith, their church and themselves. The sessions will premiere every Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. CT from October 5 – December 21 on [Facebook](#), and will also be available for later viewing at [UMC.org/ComeToTheTable](#) and the [UMC YouTube channel](#).

“This new series seeks to help us think through the issues that are confronting our church,” said the Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai, Chief Connectional Ministries Officer. “As the church navigates the realities presented by tensions within the denomination and the global coronavirus pandemic, it is essential that United Methodists explore and understand who we are, what we believe and how we live as people of God.”

Bigham-Tsai will host an introductory session on Oct. 5, 2021, with Dr. David Field, renowned author, theologian and Ecumenical Staff Officer for Faith and Order and Theological Dialogue. Dr. Field will share why he is a United Methodist and how he is thinking through the issues facing the world and church today.

The following four weeks, Oct. 12 through Nov. 2, will be hosted by the Rev. Dr. Jacob Dharmaraj, a CT member and a retired clergy member of the New York Annual Conference, and will explore the question, "How can we know God?" Dharmaraj and guests will talk about the

role of the Bible in our lives, the part reason plays in our spiritual lives, our experience of God in a complex world and whether we have to believe a certain way to belong.

From Nov. 9-23, the discussions will center on the question, “What is grace anyway?” Dr. Ashley Boggan Dreff, General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History, will host these discussions about God's love, Wesley’s thoughts about holiness and our grateful response to God’s grace by living as disciples of Jesus Christ.

On Nov. 30 and Dec. 7, CT member Michelle Hettmann, Communications Director at Burke United Methodist Church in Virginia and certified candidate for ministry, will lead conversations about what it means to be the people of The United Methodist Church. Those sessions will center on the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion to talk about what it means to be a person of faith connected to others.

A live panel with a question and answer session will take place on Dec.14. Speakers will address frequently asked questions received over the weeks. Viewers can submit questions and the panel will address a number of those live as time allows.

To wrap the series, the Wesley Covenant Service, focused on COVID-19 relief, will prepare members for the new year through recommitting to God and the ministries to which United Methodists are called.

To access full session and speaker information, visit [UMC.org/ComeToTheTable](https://www.UMC.org/ComeToTheTable).

Events in the South Georgia Conference – 9/21/2021 edition

Basic Lay Servant Ministries Training, Vidalia – Oct. 1-2

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. Basic LSM Training includes a basic foundation of the faith and an introduction to leadership. The class is a Friday night AND Saturday session. The Friday evening session is from 6:30-9 p.m. and the Saturday session is from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at Vidalia First UMC (209 Church Street, Vidalia GA 30474). If you’ve not had training within the last three years (or ever), sign up for this Basic Training; otherwise, sign up for an Advanced Training. You must complete all of the scheduled dates above to complete your training. Registration fee for the class is \$40. This cost covers all training materials and lunch on Saturday. (Note: Basic Lay Servant class must be

completed before taking Advanced Class) For more information contact Anne Bosarge, anne@thechapelministries.com. [Register](#)

UMW District Officer Training – Oct. 2

South Georgia's United Methodist Women will host a District Officer Training at 10 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 2. The training will be held virtually via Zoom. [Download Flyer](#) | [Register](#)

World Communion Day – Oct. 3

World Communion Sunday is one of the six churchwide Special Sundays of The United Methodist Church. Our church is at its best when we reach out to sisters and brothers in need. World Communion Sunday calls the church to reach out to all people and model diversity among God's children. United Methodists relate to [World Communion Sunday](#) by celebrating communion with other Christians around the world on this special Sunday. Churches are also encouraged to receive an offering to support scholarships for ethnic undergraduate and graduate students. Our gifts often enable first-generation students to attend college.

BOTH/AND: To Be Continued Webinar – Oct. 12

Join Connectional Ministries and Jason Moore for a follow up to the popular BOTH/AND webinar. BOTH/AND: To Be Continued will focus on why hybrid should carry on, how to continue to iterate and will provide tangible handles on how to do it well. This brand new 90-minute training brings all new content focused on the why, how and what we can do to run the next leg of this very important race. We are living in an incredible "Great Commission" moment in the church. Let's lean in and continue to iterate forward. The webinar, which begins at 10 a.m., will include: an invitation to determine your WHY for BOTH/AND worship, 13 reasons why BOTH/AND must continue, the answer to the "what if they don't come back to the building" question, how to create a BOTH/AND Think Tank at your church, how to build an intentional chat strategy in order foster real relationships, BOTH/AND pro tips, a Q&A session. [Register](#)

KidzQuest Children's Retreat – Oct. 15-17

[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](#)

UMW 2021 Annual Meeting – Oct. 16

South Georgia's United Methodist Women will hold their annual meeting Saturday, Oct. 16. The meeting will be held virtually via Zoom. The guest speaker will be Susan S. O'Neal, Development Director, The Vashti Center, Inc. [Download Flyer](#) | [Register](#)

Early Response Team training, Dublin – Oct. 23

An Early Response Team training is set for October 23 at Dublin First UMC. [Click here for details](#). To schedule and host an ERT training/chainsaw training, please contact Luis Morales at morhill@gmail.com.