

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – OCTOBER 5 EDITION

Begun by a UM Sunday school class, Lawson Neel MedBank serves Thomasville citizens

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

Millions of Americans regularly have to choose between basic necessities and their medications: buy food or heart medication? Pay the rent or purchase insulin? A recent [Gallup poll](#) shows that nearly 18 million Americans can't afford at least one prescription medication in a three-month span.

Like Eliquis, a widely prescribed medication that helps lower the risk of stroke and blood clots and costs about \$600 a month. Or Ozempic, a diabetes medication that costs nearly \$900 each month.

That's why the Lawson Neel MedBank is so critical to southwest Georgia residents, said executive director Lisa Knapp.

Begun nearly 20 years ago by members of a Thomasville First United Church Sunday school class that bears the same name, the Lawson Neel MedBank's mission is to provide medicine to those who need it but can't afford it.

"It's really about improving the quality of life for our community," said Knapp, who gets choked up talking about her work and the clients she serves. "We hear such sad, sad stories sometimes. People are literally having to choose between medicine and food or not having a place to live and sleeping on a relative's couch so they can afford to buy their medicine."

Incorporated in 2001 and opened in February 2002, Lawson Neel MedBank serves as a facilitator between patients, doctors, and the pharmaceutical companies that furnish free medications through their Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs). Medical providers can refer patients to the MedBank or patients can refer themselves.

Knapp and her team use their years of expertise to navigate the cumbersome and confusing world of drug company PAPs.

"Those programs are set up for the patient to do themselves, but it's a lot more complicated than it sounds," Knapp said. "We've been doing this for 19 years and we know all the ins and outs and how to get the applications approved."

Since its inception in 2002, the Lawson Neel MedBank has helped more than 5,500 clients receive more than \$25 million in medications. Last year alone they refilled more than \$813,000 worth of medications.

The Lawson Neel MedBank refills about 200 medications each month, the majority of which are maintenance medicines for chronic conditions such as asthma, COPD, diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol.

The MedBank also refers clients to other programs and support agencies, like food banks, clothing closets, and other low-cost or free prescription programs. They've also begun gathering donated durable medical goods and equipment and giving them away to people who need them.

No fees are charged to clients or providers. The MedBank doesn't receive any state or federal funding; all funding comes from individual donations, church donations, or grants from local foundations.

"We do this in response to God's love for all persons," Knapp said.

Faye Barnes, a member of Thomasville First UMC, has served as a MedBank board member for the past four years. She also volunteers weekly, helping clients refill their prescriptions.

The work the Lawson Neel MedBank does is important, she said.

"The patients would not be able to afford their medications without the free drug programs that are available and they wouldn't be able to do all the paperwork themselves," she said. "Helping others is part of what Christians do, and that's what this does."

Connecting, communicating, collaborating are focus of Conference, district lay leaders

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

Communication and connection.

That's the focus for J. Knapp, who just [completed his first year as the South Georgia Conference's lay leader](#).

Knapp's goal – to train and develop district lay leaders who, in turn, will train local church lay leaders – will be realized through increased communication and better connection with district and church leaders, he said.

"The role of the lay leader in the local church is to help strengthen and develop the local laity," he said. "So we're trying to make this a continuous flow of information that can start at the conference level and flow directly down to the local church lay leader and also start at the local church lay leader and also flow directly up to the conference level."

One way that's happening is through the [South Georgia Laity Cabinet](#).

Made up of the six district lay leaders, the director of Communications, and the conference lay leader, the group meets monthly with Bishop Graves to learn, talk, plan, and represent the Conference's laity.

While the Laity Cabinet isn't a decision-making body, it is a collaboration and communications unit, Knapp said.

"It gives Bishop Graves direct access to the laity in the field, where the rubber meets the road. It gives him direct access to that perspective on a regular basis and he can get lay-led feedback and perspective which is really beneficial to him," he said. "It is a powerful tool for the conference."

The district lay leaders have sought to keep local church lay leaders connected and informed by using communication tools like newsletters, emails, phone calls, and video calls. They've conducted trainings and communicate regularly to keep everyone on the same page, said Debbie Hudgins, the Coastal District lay leader and a member of White Bluff United Methodist Church.

"During the past year, we decided the lay leaders of the six districts would focus on connecting, communicating, and collaborating," she said. "It is still an exciting time in South Georgia and lots of churches are simply focusing on being the hands and feet of Christ in their communities. The church is still being the church in South Georgia and that is where our focus has tried to keep our laity. J and Bishop Graves have really kept our focus on local church ministries. It's still an exciting time to be involved in the churches of our South Georgia Conference!"

Intentional and ongoing training for lay leaders is another major focus of Knapp's. When he served as the Southwest District lay leader, Knapp said he was constantly asked for training and resources. During each Laity Cabinet meeting, a tool or resource is presented that can be taken back to the district or local church.

"We're continuously putting information in front of them," he said. "Continuing to develop and train the laity is a big focus."

Knapp sees a need and an opportunity to strengthen the connections between South Georgia United Methodist congregations.

"We absolutely cannot allow our churches to sit out there like islands alone in the sea," he said. "They're not alone. What impacts them impacts the rest of us, and vice versa."

One way to foster the connection between local churches is through the lay speaker supply system.

"We're ... striving for the same goal," he said.

Knapp, whose enthusiasm is infectious and energy seems boundless, believes the Conference's biggest challenge is getting pastors and district superintendents to view their lay leaders as partners in ministry.

“The laity are not part of the church. The laity ARE the church, and we are to be partners in ministry with our clergy whose role it is to teach, train and equip us so that we, the laity, can then lead the ministry of the local church.”

But he’s positive, believing that progress has been made and will continue.

“I’m getting tremendous feedback from local church lay leaders. I see activity among district lay leaders that I’ve never seen before. I’m seeing enthusiasm and involvement from them in so many different aspects. We’re definitely getting some roots and we’re growing and strengthening the roles. It’s going to take time and consistency, but we’re seeing the connection and the communication strengthen.”

If you are a local church lay leader and have not established direct communication with your district lay leader, please contact your [district office](#) or [J. Knapp](#).



Kate Tyler joins episcopal office staff as executive administrative assistant

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

Upon Bobbi Googe’s retirement Oct. 8, Kate Tyler will join the South Georgia Conference’s episcopal office staff as executive administrative assistant.

Tyler succeeds Googe, who, after three years serving in the episcopal office, will begin a new role as a full-time grandmother.

Tyler currently serves as administrative assistant to both Conference Pastoral Counselor Rev. Deborah Wight-Knight and Assistant to the Bishop for Ministerial Services Dr. Jay Harris.

While this will be a new role for Tyler, she has been on staff with the Annual Conference for 13 years. She joined the Conference as administrative assistant to Rev. Wight-Knight in 2003 and five years ago also assumed the role of administrative assistant to Dr. Harris.

As executive assistant to the Bishop, Tyler will be responsible for coordinating Bishop Graves’ South Georgia schedule and travel, managing and coordinating his communications, correspondence, and calendar, assisting with long-term projects, communicating with conference committees, maintaining files, and more.

She will also continue to support the Office of Ministerial Services.

“I join the South Georgia Conference in thanking Bobbi Googe for her three years of service and ministry to the Episcopal Office. She has done her work with excellence while doing it with a servant’s heart,” said Bishop David Graves. “It is with joy that we welcome Kate Tyler into her new role as Executive Administrative Assistant to the Bishop and Office of Ministerial Services.

Kate's 13 years of serving the South Georgia Conference, her knowledge, skill set, and work ethic is a tremendous gift to me as the newly appointed bishop."

Tyler can be reached at kate@sgaumc.com or 478-738-0048.

Tips for including church members in your service

Laity Sunday is Oct. 17, 2021

By Darby Jones, *United Methodist Communications*

The word laity is from the Greek word, laos, meaning "people of God." It is used to describe members of a congregation or parish who are not a part of the clergy. By letting laity plan services and offer ideas for worship, the pastor and worship team members can get a little respite, and participating members may find a deeper connection within the church.

Laity Sunday is a specific day to include church members in the planning and execution of your service, but you could choose other days as well. Fall and spring breaks are a time when families may have more availability to participate together. Summer can also be ideal when parents may have more flexible schedules. If you have a worship planning team, make sure they're involved to approve the nontraditional plans.

Involve your mission teams

Congregation (and community) members who go on mission trips often host a post-trip meeting to share what they did. Invite mission volunteers to plan a Sunday service to allow even more people to experience the mission in worship, inspiring and motivating the entire congregation. Ask the mission team to plan a Sunday service that they will lead a few weeks after their return. Talk with them about planning and leading the service before they go, so they can keep that in mind during the mission trip.

Ask youth

Young people, especially teens, like to share their opinions and to be given an opportunity to lead adults. Planning a worship service provides a perfect opportunity for direct church involvement. Youth can pick readings that inspire them. They can select music that motivates them. As they experience all it takes to plan a successful service, they may gain appreciation for what happens in worship. They also learn valuable skills for college ministry. Additionally, your adult congregation can gain insight and appreciation for youth as they participate in a more youth-oriented service.

Go to families

Sure, moms, dads and children are busy, but they often worship together. What if families planned a service together? Don't just invite a couple of families you know well – extend the invitation to everybody. You never know who might be interested but won't volunteer unless they're asked. If interest is too great to fit your nontraditional service schedule, consider asking families to work together. Think about mixing it up – match a family of five (mom, dad, three children) with a family of two (mom, child) or a single-parent family with an older-adult couple. The varying perspectives will enhance the worship experience.

Trade churches or community organizations

Consider working with a neighboring church and exchange services for the day. Let the other congregation (or even a related community group) plan your worship service and offer to do the same for that group.

Although these worship services will be nontraditional, they still must be planned and executed to fit within whatever parameters your church sets. Here are some tips to ensure that happens:

Prepare how-to information

Decide how much freedom you want planners to have. Include time parameters and “must-haves.” Keep the information to a single sheet so the other planning team isn't overwhelmed.

Offer planning assistance

Some groups may want assistance; others may prefer to work independently. Provide a worship team contact to answer their questions.

Plan to review

In giving your worship planners a suggested timeline for completion, make sure to include time for your worship-planning team and pastor to review the plans. Don't micromanage service details, but ensure the planned worship doesn't have any obvious red flags.

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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

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Encounter Youth Retreat set for Nov. 19-21

[Encounter](#), the annual youth retreat sponsored by South Georgia's Connectional Ministries is set for November 19-21 at Epworth By The Sea. Designed for 6th - 12th grade students, Encounter will offer passionate worship, relevant Bible study and a hope-filled time away in community with other teens.

Online registration is available through November 10. Churches will register as a group and the cost for this event is \$150 per person which includes programming, insurance, food, lodging, and a t-shirt.

Adult chaperones with Safe Sanctuary certification must be provided by each church group. For more information, contact Event Coordinator Suzanne Akins at suzanne@sgaumc.com or (912) 638-8626 ext 107.

More information can also be found on the Encounter website: www.sgaumc.org/encounter.

BOTH/AND webinar is next week!

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 grant deadline is Oct. 15

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](#)

Go beyond what is asked of you

FROM THE BISHOP

DAVID GRAVES

In a [video message](#) to the South Georgia Conference, Bishop David Graves spoke about the On Boarding process, how it has helped jump start his time in South Georgia, and how, even during these challenging times, South Georgia United Methodists can be witnesses for Christ each day. Watch it [here](#).

Read the full transcript of his video message:

Well, it's just wonderful to be with the wonderful people of the South Georgia Conference. And I'm starting my second month and it's been a great 34 days meeting people. I've been doing what's been called an On Boarding process and I've kind of multiplied it out. But I had the opportunity to meet with about 30 of our conference staff and district superintendents and then I got to meet with pastors in our larger membership congregations. And then I also got to meet with the lay leaders, most of the lay leaders of the annual conference, the district lay leaders. And then I had the opportunity to move into districts and meet clergy and laity in those districts.

The laity were invited because of their leadership position in the district itself. Some people were able to come, some weren't. We had it in person. Some did not feel comfortable coming in person, but we're going to have steps to meet more laity after the first of the year. But it's been a way for me just to get the pulse and the DNA and the character of the South Georgia Conference.

And so I have been in three districts already. I'll be in three more districts before Thanksgiving. So I'll have made my rounds all across the South Georgia Conference and will have met a lot of people. And of course, there's many more people to meet, but it's been really been good for me, just for people to hear my story, who I am, my family, and what I've shared with people. They ask a lot of questions, of course. I tell people I'm going to answer your questions, but I hope you can hear my heart because if you can hear my heart and then I hear your heart, it's amazing when we have the heart of God, what we can do together in these somewhat challenging times, wouldn't you agree?

It's a little bit of a challenging time. People want to know my thoughts around the general Church, and human sexuality, and the Protocol, and we begin to have a dialogue about that. They want to know about my family and we have fun about our colleges, right? Because we're in the throes of college football, and I tell people that I graduated from an academic school up in Knoxville, Tennessee, called the University of Tennessee. And we're trying to get our football program back. And people kept telling me... we love our Georgia Bulldogs here in South Georgia. So can you imagine what it is to be raised in Tennessee and spend part of your time in

the Alabama-West Florida conference with the University of Alabama, and part of your time in South Georgia with the University of Georgia? So, we like to have fun around our college football and when you're in my position, you have a humble spirit. So we have fun.

I mean, we want to have fun together and we want to laugh together in these times, but what I've observed are wonderful people and that's where I feel so blessed because people say, "You're serving two annual conferences, Bishop, and that's hard, or it's just overwhelming?" And some days it is, but I just feel blessed because we'd be never having this interview right now. I mean, we would've never met, but we have, and we're all making the best of it. And wherever I've been, every church that I've served as a district superintendent and now, as I say, ... I'm a circuit-riding Bishop serving a two-point charge.

Each place is unique, but it's filled with God's people. There are beautiful churches here, beautiful towns and cities. And so Nancy, my wife, and I just feel like we have been so blessed by this opportunity. Now I will admit some days are a little overwhelming. Some days I wake up and I say, "Where am I today?" Because we've been in several hotels recently, as we've traveled. And so you have to do that but also we have a wonderful conference staff in South Georgia. Just very capable people, gifted people and just wonderful clergy and wonderful laity and we're all trying to do the same thing. We're trying to be focused on the mission that Christ has given us in this corner of the world.

I have heard concerns about, "Bishop, how are you going to help some of the smaller membership congregations? We're really struggling. How are we going to be past... We're in the COVID era now. We're not past COVID yet but we've got vaccines and the numbers hopefully are going to go down, but we've had to deal with variants. But we are in this COVID era and what are people going to do? And how are we going to reach younger people? How are we going to get back to where we were?" And I have to say, "We're not going back." What's our future hold? It is challenging, but we have great opportunities too. What excites me is even though there's challenges, there's great opportunities to really be the body of Christ to a world that needs good news.

And we've also heard people... I've been saying this a lot. We, as the body of Christ, we as Christians, we as members of our churches, we've got to go the extra mile. Jesus told us that a lot in his teachings. One example, when a Roman soldier asked to carry your pack a mile, you carry it two miles. I mean, Jesus said, "You go beyond what is asked of you." And so I think that's what's kind of required of us in this day.

The Jewish people that Jesus was speaking to were persecuted people. In some instances, we may go through persecution, but nothing like they did. But we are going through a very divided time in our lives. Pick any subject and we're divided on it. I mean, it seems like it; how can we rise above that? How can we be that witness? And one of the things I've just talked about, we just need to be nice to people, even when people are not nice to us. I think we need to tip more in

restaurants, even when the service may not be good. But people that are in the restaurant business are really struggling today with workers and just the demands.

Teachers are having to struggle in their role, school administrators, anybody that's in leadership, working with people, it's not easy. So how can we rise above all of that? And so it's our Christian witness. I don't know what the future holds, but I know that God gives us this day. And I don't want this day to go by without trying to be a witness and trying to build the kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.

Praise for God's Ultimate Justice

Fall Quarter: Celebrating God

Unit 2: Called to Praise God

Sunday school lesson for the week of October 10, 2021

By Dr. D. Craig Rikard

Background Scripture: Psalm 9:1-12; Ecclesiastes 3:16-22

Key Scripture (NIV): "He rules the world in righteousness and judges the people with equity."
Psalm 9:8

Lesson Aims

- To understand the importance of acknowledging God in life.
- To understand God's constant love and care.
- To understand how best to discern God's will in our decisions.
- To understand the reality of the Kingdom of God.
- To understand the importance of verbal testimony.

Preparation for Lesson

Type of Literature and Structure

Like Psalm 100 in the previous Sunday school lesson, Psalm 9 is Hebrew poetry. It is written as an acrostic; that is, each line begins with a succession of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Acrostics were of great value in helping the listener to remember the psalm. It is always important to recall the Israelite people did not possess sacred scripture. Only the priests could handle the sacred books. Historically, the leadership had access to the sacred Word, thus, the common people were dependent upon them for spiritual knowledge. Still, psalms allowed people

to sing of the Lord and to remember what the Lord had done. Therefore, the book of Psalms proved extremely important for the Hebrew people. However, I do not call attention to the acrostic framework unless it is directly related to the message. With the psalm translated from Hebrew into English, we lose the acrostic. Like Psalm 100, the poet uses parallelism; that is, one line repeats the meaning of the first. It is just written with different words and images.

(Reprinted from last week's Sunday school lesson on Psalm 100)

“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. Poetic words more easily capture the human ear. Just as important, 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.”

Are there hymns and songs that you especially remember? What is the message of these songs? What does the hymn and song teach you about God and God's Kingdom?

Who wrote this Psalm and to whom?

David is the author of this Psalm. David was of the house of Jesse. David faced Goliath under the reign of King Saul. He was not a soldier or known warrior at the time. After listening to Goliath's constant taunting of the Israelite army, David grew weary of Israel's fearful cowardice. He borrowed Jonathan's armor which was the beginning of an extremely strong bond of friendship in the ensuing days. Jonathan's armor was not a good fit. David decided to fight as he knew best. As a shepherd he had protected the life of his sheep from wolves and predators using a sling. He slew Goliath with the sling.

David was both a warrior, poet and musician. He never sought to hide his feelings, good or bad. He wrote psalms of confession in which he bared his soul. We also hear his thanksgiving to God expressed in unrestrained joy and praise. In Psalm 9, David is recalling the great victory over Goliath and praising God for victory over all his enemies. We do not know when the psalm was written by David. Though Psalm 9 is recalling a major event in David's life, its message remained relevant in facing any enemy and celebrating victory over that enemy.

It is important to note that this psalm is written with one eye on the past and the other on the present. Israel understood their history as it related to God. One did not march into the future without an understanding of the past. *Because of what God had done in the past, we face today in confidence.* People who understand the past and present are confident as they walk into the future. To look only to the past is to become an inactive keeper of memories. The past is to inspire our movement forward in time. It is to teach us to seek and trust God in all matters to come. To look only toward the future without remembering the past primes us to repeat mistakes. John 13 expresses this *dual perception* expressed in Jesus. In verse 3 John wrote, “*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.*” As a community of faith, it is important for us to realize from where we’ve come as we walk toward what is coming.

How do you understand your journey of faith in terms of perspective? Do you understand what it means to have one eye on the past and one on the present? Can you describe the manner in which you understand God’s work in your life? How does your past with God give you confidence in the future? How does the past effect your perception in the present?

Theological Underpinning

We cannot ignore what is known as the *Retribution Principle*. This principle is evident in every Old Testament book and was embraced by the people of Israel during Jesus’ ministry. The principle expresses the belief that good, God-fearing people will prosper. They will escape illness, poverty, and suffering. Thus, the inverse was believed. If a person was a sinner, or if their family sinned, they suffered for it. The enemies of David and Israel were perceived as the unrighteous. They were perceived not only to be Israel’s enemies, they were God’s enemies. In the David and Goliath battle, David is the righteous and Goliath the ungodly. Read Psalm 1, for it expresses the retribution principle clearly.

How did Jesus change the retribution principle? Though we do not believe our sins cause all of our problems and pain, does our sin on occasion create our problems? How? Since good works do not insulate us from harm, can obedience to God help us in avoiding trouble? Do you believe obedience helps us move through a struggle? How?

The Text

Messages from the psalm

The Introduction:

In the introduction, David is presented as the author. The mention of the musical tune to be used in singing the psalm is most interesting. It reveals that certain melodies were known and, on occasion, repeated. The Israelites were a singing people. Early Methodists were also known as a singing people, and I am certain other denominations were as well. Understanding Israel as a

singing people reveals the power of song in remembering their history. As a nation, currently, we struggle in recalling our past. Our past has become a point of contention. Furthermore, our culture has moved farther away from the role of God and the Judeo-Christian ethic in our history. Thus, we are in a period of wandering. Israel too often ignored and neglected the role of God in their history. During these periods they, too, wandered. Renewal was experienced when, through a judge or king, they were reconnected to their redemptive history. David's reign, for the most part, acknowledged God in the past and present.

Do you think, as a people, in our culture, that we are disconnected from our redemptive history (a history of God working in and through His people)? If so, what makes you think we are disconnected? If not, explain how we are still connected. What do you think is the importance of remembering from where we've come? How can the Church be more instrumental in connecting people with their redemptive past? How do our hymns anchor us to our past?

"With all my heart" (1)

The above phrase, along with phrases like "bless your heart," are used frequently without considering what it means. For the Israelites, the heart was the center of one's being. In their more primitive days they actually believed the biological heart contained one's love and mercy. If the heart stopped, everything stopped. Eventually the heart became associated with the core of our love, joy, and compassion. Thus, to praise God with all one's heart was to praise God from the core of one's being. Today we might say, "From the very life-source within me, I praise the Lord." To love and praise God with all of our heart can imply we choose to involve our entire being in praising God. Or, it can imply we are so full of gratitude and its ensuing joy that our entire being involuntarily must extol praise.

I was very touched during my visit to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. As I prayed at the wall, with head covered, I noticed many of the Jewish people rocking back and forth as they prayed. I later learned they believed in using every part of their being in prayer. They used heart, soul, will, and body. David has received God's care so powerfully, he must praise with "all his heart." I do think it is interesting to note that he uses the words, "my heart." Of course, he could say, "with all our heart." Certainly, we worship and praise God together. When the community of faith praises God with all its being it is remarkably powerful. However, each heart must understand for themselves what God has done in their life. Each person must be grateful for God's love and care. The New Testament parable of the 10 virgins has the virgins waiting for the bridegroom with lighted lamps. Five were prepared with oil for their lamps, five were not. When the bridegroom arrived, the unprepared five tried to borrow oil from the others (Matthew 5). One of the lessons of this parable is "some things cannot be borrowed." Each of us must be personally prepared. I cannot borrow faith, love, or praise from another. They must reside in me. Only then can I praise, "with all my heart."

Are we guilty of using terms like “heart” without considering its meaning? Can you recall a moment when you longed to have a faith like someone else? What have you done to cultivate the faith within you? What helps you to recall God’s love through Christ in your life? Can you recall when you truly praised God with all your heart?

“O Most High” (2)

In Genesis 14:18 we are introduced to Melchizedek. He predates all other priests and was described as a priest of the “Most high God.” The question in our lesson is, “Why did David use this title of God in the psalm?” David refers to God most often as “Lord,” especially in this psalm. However, in the opening of the psalm David uses the phrase associated with ancient Melchizedek. A change in titles within Scripture should not be overlooked. David had a reason for using this title. This psalm calls the singer (reader) to recall God’s mighty work in their past. David is proclaiming that the Lord whom they praise is the same Lord of Melchizedek. The Lord has been their sustainer throughout the years. The God we worship today, revealed in Jesus, is the God of Melchizedek. We are tempted to consider the people of the Old Testament as “them.” No, the Old Testament is the story of “us!” When David calls the people to praise the Lord, he is calling us as well.

Are you tempted to consider the Old and New Testament people in a disconnected manner? Do you associate yourself with the characters and people? Do you understand you are reading your “spiritual family history?” When you read this psalm, do you hear David calling you to remember and praise? If not, what keeps you from understanding the Bible as our story, and that you are a part of it?

“You have upheld my right and my cause” (4)

David believed his cause was God’s cause. In the battles Israel fought, it was believed the true God was on Israel’s side and against their enemy. It is comforting to know God is with us in our causes. It is another issue to recruit God to be on our side. A lot of prayer, meditation, and listening to others in our faith should precede such a claim. Some too quickly believe their personal wants and desires are God’s. I am unsettled by the claims of many that God is on a particular political side. Many card games have a “super trump card.” No card can defeat the super trump. A man once enticed me into a debate over scripture. His beliefs were often judgmental and harsh. However, when I pointed out the error in his thinking he simply said, “Well my Bible says. . .” This was his super trump. It meant the debate is over and he declared himself the winner. Many today use some type of super trump to justify their cause. They believe by attaching God to their argument all debate is over. Certainly, it is important to believe we are on God’s side. Thus, it is important to know what God’s side truly is!

At some point it is advised to use the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. In considering an issue we are to ask, “Is it biblical?” If uncertain as to what the Bible reveals, we follow the progression: *What does the tradition of the Church reveal? What does my reason think? What does my experience*

and the experiences of others reveal? If we would choose to walk our decisions through the quadrilateral we would better understand God's will.

Have you participated in a "God is on my side" debate? How do you understand that phrase when using it or speaking with another who uses it? What is the difference between the phrases "God is on my side," and "I am on the side of God?" How can we know if we are on God's side? When we are uncertain regarding God's side, how are we to respond? What do you think is the importance of listening to the counsel of others when seeking to know if we are on the side of God? Do you walk issues through the quadrilateral when discerning God's will? Why do you think the quadrilateral is a good method?

"Sitting enthroned as the righteous judge" (4,7-8)

There are two major threads that run through the Bible. The first is the Covenant. God has chosen to enter into a meaningful relationship with us. Secondly, the Kingdom of God is present in both Old and New Testaments. The Kingdom of God is the "reign of God." It is invisible and consists of God's reign and God's attributes. The Kingdom is one of peace, love, justice, mercy, joy, etc. When we witness the expressions of these attributes on earth we are witnessing God's Kingdom. It is possible to enact these attributes through a relationship with Jesus. When we embody these attributes we are revealing that kingdom which is here now and yet coming in all of its perfection in the future. The Old Testament provides images and expressions of God's Kingdom. In the New Testament we witness Jesus fully embodying the Kingdom. Paul's use of two phrases are in reality Kingdom phrases. Paul writes we are "in Christ" and Christ is "in us."

In the first, we have become a member of the kingdom. We have been elevated into another reality. We see what others fail to see. We are aware of that kingdom in us, others, and the world. In the second, Christ in us in the presence of that kingdom in the human heart and life. The Kingdom has moved toward us. The Old Testament vision of God's Kingdom reveals God as the one and only holy judge and dispenser of all righteousness. Israel is the seat of his reign. Israel believed this kingdom would literally be established on earth through the conquering of their enemies and the Messiah being placed on the throne. Jesus revealed this Kingdom is present in the heart. Christ is to reign in the heart and move us toward a perfect reality where the earth and heaven are redeemed (read Rev. 21)

Do you associate expressions of unconditional love or true justice as expressions of the kingdom in the here and now? Do you associate such expressions with the kingdom to come? How does your understanding of the Kingdom alter your life? How do you associate God's Kingdom with the ministry of your church? How can the Church best embody the Kingdom of God "on earth, as it is in heaven?"

"Even the memory of them has perished" (5-6)

Much of our studies are related to remembering and knowing God. This psalm reminds us of the importance of “being known” and being remembered. Long before a clear understanding of the afterlife was revealed, people sought ways to be remembered. The most horrible thought to many ancient people was to have lived, died, and not be remembered. All of us desire for others to remember us. We want to be remembered for who we were, what we believed, and what we did. Today we do not bury people without demarcation. Tombstones and plates attest to the lives of those passed. A funeral service provides a means of remembering. Grieving people need to hear that the loving impact of another’s life continues within them.

The worst punishment, according to David, was to be annihilated from the earth and never be remembered. We must understand the culture of the Old Testament. David’s world was hostile. Enemies could represent the death of the people and culture of Israel. They prayed that God would help them defeat their enemies and cleanse the earth of their influence and memory. There was always the fear a defeated enemy would rise again and cause them harm. Thus, when they defeated an enemy they tried to totally eradicate them. Naturally, Jesus more clearly defines what an enemy truly is and how we should relate to them.

Imagine the thought of never being remembered. Can you identify the emotions you feel when entertaining the thought? How can we be remembered as a child of God? Though many may never know our name, they might be the recipient of our “spiritual footprint.” What is a spiritual footprint to you? How do we touch future generations in the here and now?

“The Lord is a refuge” (9-10,12)

Living in a hostile, violent culture made a place of refuge extremely valuable. A place of refuge means a place of escape, a place to be safe, and a place of shelter. Many of the psalms describe God as our refuge and strength (Psalm 46). One of the more descriptive expressions of God as refuge is found in Psalm 27. Psalm 27:5 reads: *For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.* David understood the value of refuge. He fled from the presence of Saul, who sought to kill him. David hid in the Cave of Adullam. David hid for almost 15 years prior to becoming King upon Saul’s death. When David describes God as a place of refuge he is implying his escape from those who sought to harm him. Who among us doesn’t understand what how it feels when we escape danger? For David, it was a place to remain safe and sheltered. David understood that our life is never more serene than when we rest in God. When we realize our life is no longer that of a solitary person making their way through a hostile, unkind world. At all times we are beneath God’s sheltering wing, as a hen gathers her chicks. Psalm 36:7 reads: *The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.* We do not escape harm or adversity. However, we are spiritually safe. God will lead us through the harm with greater understanding and wisdom.

Our culture values independence and standing alone. How do you believe our culture makes it difficult to claim dependence on God? Do you feel you are living on your own, or are you aware

you are never alone? What do you remember about God's constant presence in your life? Can you share a time when God led you through adversity? What did you learn?

“Proclaim among the nations what he has done” (11)

I listened as the late Dr. Billy Key from South Georgia shared an experience. He was walking past an African-American church when he overheard the preacher's voice. The minister would ask, “Do you believe God created the heavens and earth?” The congregation nodded their heads. Then the preacher quoted Psalm 27, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!” He continued this pattern, moving through God's mighty acts. Each time he would repeat, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.” It isn't enough to simply live a good life as a testimony. There are many good people in the world who act compassionately. However, we do so “in Jesus' name.” We want people to know the source of our love and compassion. It is Jesus within! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so! There is a repetitive pattern in the Psalms of the need to say aloud what God has done. This does not imply we should all be ministers or preachers. It is simply to acknowledge to another what God has done and is doing in your life through Christ. It should be proclaimed, not just to the Christian community, but to the world. The surrounding nations heard of David's God.

Are you uncomfortable sharing your faith verbally? Why? Do you recognize the need to verbally share what God has done in Christ for you? If afraid, what are some ways to grow more comfortable sharing? Does your church encourage you to orally share your faith? Do they provide resources to help you? How can you help the Church become for effective in training its members to “say so?”

Summary

This psalm encourages us to remember the mighty acts of God. We are to understand that in the present God is our refuge, as he has been to all in every generation. It calls to us to remember we are participants in a redemptive history going back to Melchizedek and beyond. Our past should help us understand God's will in the present as we seek to be “on God's side.” We are encouraged to realize our redemptive history is actually that of the Kingdom of God present in the world, and still yet to come in its perfection. Upon the realization of what God has done, is doing, and where God is leading, we offer praise. We are to speak aloud of God's greatness.

Prayer

Almighty God most high, we thank you for our spiritual lineage. We praise you for your eternal love and strength. Touch our eyes to see with clarity your Kingdom. Open our lips to proclaim your goodness and love for all the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Praise God for Past Deliverance

Fall Quarter: Celebrating God

Unit 2: Called to Praise God

Sunday school lesson for the week of October 17, 2021

By Dr. D. Craig Rikard

Background Scripture: Psalm 107

Key Scripture (NIV): “They cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.” Psalm 107:6

Lesson Aims

1. To understand the importance of spoken testimony.
2. To understand the importance of the redeemed community.
3. To understand the experience of being lost and wandering.
4. To understand the experience of being found and led by God.
5. To rejoice in the experience of walking in the Lord’s promise.

Preparation

Psalm 107 is believed to have been written between the 15th century B.C. and 400 B.C. Consequently, it is impossible to know the author. The psalm is concerned with the redemptive history of Israel. The author is describing the wandering after the Exodus, or a period of wandering during a period of the Judges. It is also concerned with God’s salvation and the blessed living in Canaan. Therefore, like many psalms, the content of the psalm is very important to Israel. Israel’s journey is always the story of moving forward, but only with an eye toward the past. For Israel, the past gives meaning and purpose to the present and future.

I earned a degree in marriage and family counseling. I quickly realized when someone came to me with a struggle, it was important to know from where they had come. I also realized the arms of the past reach forward and never disappear. In Israel’s case, the arms of the past are precious. They represent the right arm of God moving in and through Israel’s history. In our personal faith journey we need to frequently visit the past. God has led through difficulties and blessed us in a myriad of ways. We learned from both. Thus, we walk forward with greater wisdom, understanding, and confidence. God in our yesterdays is the same God of our today and tomorrow. Journaling is a great, useful discipline in our Christian walk. Keeping a record of God’s working in our life is of beautiful value. Though the psalms are poems and songs, they represent the collective journal of the Israelite people.

Can you share significant moments in your yesterday? Can you identify the thread of redemption that runs through your life? What have you especially learned from your past that enriches you today?

As usual, this psalm is a Hebrew poem/song. Psalm 107 opens the fifth and final section of Psalms. We do not know many of the authors who penned these psalms. However, their message proved invaluable for the Israelite community and now for the Church. Psalm 107 contains the same message as other psalms. We will read of God's redemptive history in the life of Israel and the blessing God brings. Many of the psalms call us to pray, praise, or both. This psalm uniquely calls to testify. The author calls the congregation to testify, using the memorable phrase, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." Again, parallelism is used by the author, the second line of a couplet enriching the meaning of the first. The reader of this lesson is encouraged to write out and explore the couplets of this psalm. However, in order to offer a broader understanding of the psalm, I offer reflection upon the psalm's major messages.

For the purpose of best understanding our lesson, I have created the following framework:

1. Spoken testimony (1-2)
2. The redeemed community (2-3)
3. Lost and wandering (4-7)
4. Struggle, redemption, and blessing (8-9; 29-43)

Spoken Testimony

Psalm 107 opens with a majestic call to offer thanksgiving for God's goodness and love. This call is followed by the call to testify to it. Each of us has a testimony of God's love and goodness. However, sometimes we forget to *thank God* for that testimony. We have a story! The church has a story! Thank God we have a story!

When I received a new church or preached a revival at another church, I always studied their history. I wanted to know from where that particular church had come and their major ministries in the community they served. My first church was actually a one room Presbyterian church in rural Kentucky. They had struggled over the years regarding attendance. Many of the people struggled financially, but they had heart. One day I noticed a ceiling door leading into an attic. One Sunday, after arriving early, I climbed into the attic. I was stunned. Every wooden beam had axe cuts. They had hewn the beams with axes. There wasn't a single nail in the framework. Wooden pegs had been cut to hold the beams together. As a young green minister, I had contemplated the means to move the little church forward. However, I had another idea. I informed the current congregation of my finding and we began to research our past. We discovered the original church, built in the early 1700s, had been burned by Native Americans who believed the church encroached upon their land. The church was rebuilt, again with axe-hewn beams and pins. We also discovered that we were the oldest Presbyterian church in the state of Kentucky. The more we understood our past, the more we felt a part of something special. We stood in the line of a great crowd of witnesses. When we left that church, we had more than tripled the attendance.

Notice the psalmist reminds us we are redeemed "head to toe." God's mercy and grace in Jesus has touched every facet of our being. We see differently. Our eyes see God at work in life, and

we see the value of every person in the world. Our hearing is enlarged. We hear the cries of the weak and hurting. We listen to music differently and our conversations occur on a more meaningful level. We often intuitively “hear” the whisper of God in our heart. We smell the sweet fragrance of sacrifice in life. We feel differently. Of course we emotionally experience faith and life. However, we feel differently about everything. Life is new and is becoming newer each day. We are indeed redeemed from head to toe. Christianity isn’t a “part of our life.” It becomes our life. All living occurs with the knowledge that we are never alone, and no moment is wasted. We belong to another reality greater than this life alone. Each person has a story, and each church has a story. Give thanks!

Are you acquainted with the history of your church? Are you aware of its struggles and accomplishments? Does your church understand itself as connected to a faithful lineage? How could your church benefit from understanding its past? What about your personal story? Are you grateful for God’s strength as you encountered struggle? Are you grateful for the many blessings in your life?

The Redeemed Community

In the western church we have placed, and continue to place, a high value on one’s personal relationship with God through Jesus. However, the Israelites and the early Church possessed a great understanding of the *community*. Whereas we might say, “I have faith in Jesus,” the Old Testament people would say “We have faith in Christ.” It is extremely important to give one’s heart to Christ. It is important to personally accept Jesus and walk in the new life Christ gives. However, God not only redeemed us personally in Christ, he also redeemed the Church. Notice the psalmist wants us to testify out of the rich experience of being “together.” God has called us “from every land, east and west, north and south.” We often fail to recognize that gravitation toward the Church is a redemptive act on God’s part. Our mind awakens to our need of the Church, our heart longs to be a part of something bigger and meaningful. This is the drawing of God. God’s redemption through Jesus was more than saving us as individuals, he saved us to live together. There are two prepositions related to Jesus’ death and resurrection. We are saved “from” our sins, and we are saved “to” live together in meaningful loving relationships. They are not exclusive; both are part of what it means to be saved.

Of course, the Church consists of individuals who are Christians. Still, we often fail to understand the importance of our “redeemed connection.” Many of the gospel songs we enjoy emphasize our individual experience with God through Christ. We love “Just as I am,” and “Nearer My God to Thee.” However, the great hymns also emphasize the community. “Bless Be the Tie that Binds,” and “The Church’s One Foundation” are two such hymns. Our lives in Christ are interwoven, and what affects some affects all in some manner. It is important to have a personal witness, but also important for the community to have a witness. Together we are the body of Christ, each part redeemed and called together for the purpose of revealing the Kingdom of God in the world. Many of us have worshipped with churches that possess great unity. Their

story is not only experienced in worship, it is evident to those outside. The Church most powerfully and clearly reflects Jesus when in unity. Yes, thank God we are personally redeemed by God, and have a story. But, let us also thank God for giving us a place in the redeemed community.

Does your church have a clear understanding of who they are together? How do you perceive your church as it relates to other churches? Does your church place greater emphasis on the individual than the congregation? How do you think the church can do both? How do you understand your faith as it relates to others in your church? Do you clearly understand your place in the body of Christ? If not, what can the Church do to help you? Can you identify God's drawing you toward the Church? What events or moments can you now see were used to bring you into God's family?

The psalmist calls the congregation to "Say so!" For many, the idea of sharing one's story is a terrifying thought. Thus, many like to claim, "I believe in sharing Christ with my life." However, this isn't a "one or the other" request. I cannot do justice to our faith with my life alone. My life remains flawed, and my journey is yet to be finished. Of course, speaking my faith also doesn't come close to fully expressing my faith. I need to live my faith and speak my faith. Speaking and living faith are companions. One strengthens and enriches the other. Many perform good deeds out of genuine love and compassion. They do so because of their Christian faith. However, it is important for the one to whom we minister to hear that we care for them "in Jesus' name." If I help someone and they are most touched, they might say, "He is a good man." Naturally, we love for people to think of us in such a manner. However, my love for others and my actions are birthed by God's grace within me. I want them to know that it is Jesus reaching out through me. In the words of the psalmist, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." Speaking one's faith does not mean a long, planned, testimony. It is simply acknowledging what is true at the time. We can simply say, "I care for you in Jesus' name." We have just allowed them to hear the intro to our story. The conversation may go further, or it may end for a later time. Our story is a natural part of who we are, and must be shared genuinely and naturally.

I once attended a weekend evangelism event in which we actually learned a printed testimony. We then were assigned addresses. We were to knock on the door, without knowledge of the person, and find a way to get that printed testimony into the conversation. Sadly, this "method" didn't work. Each of us is in many relationships. Many cross our path. Sometimes a question allows us to share our faith. On other occasions we have the opportunity to help someone in Jesus' name. These are great expressions of our testimony. We need to be a speaking people, a sharing people. Indeed, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!"

The Church must also have a shared witness. The Church must continue to find ways to share their story with the community. It isn't enough to simply print statements in the newsletter or hang them in the hallways of the church. Together we have a witness! A church's welcoming

spirit, unity, and outreach speak volumes to those outside. When this corporate witness is united with personal witness, amazing things can happen. Again, it should never be “one of the other.”

Do you struggle to share your faith with another? Can you articulate your fear? How can the church help you become a “verbal witness” in the world? Have you shared your faith with another? Can you describe the experience? What were the positives, and negatives if any? What did you learn? What role did another’s personal story play in your life and faith? Does your church help you in sharing your faith? Can you identify a united witness to the community in your church? Does it include both the church’s witness and the personal witness? Why do you believe both are important?

Lost and Wandering

Israel’s wandering in the wilderness was far more than a historical event. It is an existential event. Each person will wander in life at some time or another. Each of us understands the experience of feeling uprooted, directionless, and perhaps hopeless. Notice the psalmist’s phrase, “Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle.” Today, traffic, crime, and high prices have people beginning to shun the cities. However, in the day of the psalmist, a city meant togetherness. It implied community and the supplies needed for life. Early in life, God’s people learned the importance of living in connection. We survive more easily when we care for each other. Again, a rich facet of our salvation involves being connected. When we wander in our faith we tend to wander from people. We often live in greater isolation. Wandering implies fear. The world is frightening when we believe we are navigating it alone. In the Old Testament era, those who wandered feared starving and thirsting to death. Wandering meant the essentials of life were not present. When we wander in our faith we experience the loss of that which is essential to our life of faith. Again, we experience isolation and loss. The hunger and thirst of the wandering lead them to seek others. Little did they understand at the time that God was using their hunger and thirst to draw them into community. The same is equally true for those wandering today through life. Eventually, the heart, soul, and spirit will begin to sense lack. In response, the wandering person seeks that which is missing. Thus, we are being drawn by God toward the Church. It is imperative for the Church to provide that for which the human spirit longs. It is also important for those in the community to be thankful for God’s drawing us out of the wilderness and into the family of God. Notice verse 7: “He led them by a straight path to a city where they could settle.” God led them from their wandering and into a city/community.

Can you remember your personal wandering in the faith? Can you describe what you felt and what you believed? What called you to seek “another way?” Do you recognize the needs in your life as God’s drawing? Do you realize you didn’t just join a congregation on your own, you were drawn? Can you express how thankful you are for “being found” and finding your place in the family of God?

Struggle, Redemption and Blessing

The psalmist could very well be describing Israel's life under the Judges. This historical period consisted of cycles. God would redeem and bless Israel only to encounter Israel's rapid neglect of covenant and the consequences of that neglect. One judge would lead them, with the help of God, out of a dark period into life in the Covenant. The next could lead them to "do evil in the sight of the Lord." Historically, as went the leaders, so went the people. Therefore, we hear the psalmist's strong words of judgement: "He who pours contempt on nobles made them wander in a trackless waste." Strong words indeed! Notice the vivid description of wandering in a trackless waste. The leadership led them to spiritual places that offered no direction and no life. However, God, as always, restores and renews his people. Certainly, God's patience is far greater than our own. Israel, as a rebellious people, abused their salvation and ignored the fulfilling life God provided. Choosing self-gratification and ease, they always eventually found themselves in a dark, miry bog.

Each of us has experienced such wandering following God's redemption in our life through Jesus Christ. How quickly we often revert to old patterns and destructive actions. Yet, God never forsakes us. God brought us into a sacred covenantal relationship through Christ, and God is not going to break his own promise. Such wandering is a part of our story. It is fine to share our story as long as it is not used to titillate. Many of us are familiar with wayward celebrities who found Christ. People would flock to hear their story, and sadly some were there to hear the dark side of their life. Our story should always point to God's rich mercy and love. It is important to realize our wandering is a part of our story. However, whether we need to share that reality depends upon the moment. We do need to know for ourselves that our wandering is a part of who we are today. We know where we were, the behaviors in which we engaged, the thoughts we contemplated, and the actions we took. Remembering the depths of despair is helpful when remembering from where God has brought us through his love. Again, sharing it requires prayer and sensitivity.

The enlarging of our families and flocks is covenant language. These terms imply the blessing of being in relationship with God and one another. When our blessing is so evident in our life and through our words, those who dwell in darkness will "shut their mouths" and listen. A real, natural witness, from the mouth of one who is genuinely faithful, is a powerful transformative testimony. We can use our past to better understand the struggle of others. We can use our present to reveal the blessing of belonging to God and the Church.

Can you remember your time of wandering after yielding your life to Christ? Can you recall the events that led you to wander? Can you remember when you began to feel "lack" in your life while away from God? Can you attest to a moment of renewal? Can you identify the testimonies that influenced your life most? What about the testimony made it so attractive to your heart? What can you learn from other testimonies regarding your own personal sharing?

Closing

Revelation reveals the final triumph of good over evil. It reveals the coming reign of God. This prophesy isn't afraid to mention the presence of struggle in life. However, we are told that the children of God will overcome. In Rev. 12:11 we read: "They (the redeemed) triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. . ."

It has always important for the redeemed of the Lord to say so. It remains important now and into God's future. Knowing our story and sharing our story brings light into our life and light into the world.

Prayer

Almighty God, in your great mercy you have lifted us from the miry clay, raised us to life, and filled our lives with purpose. We cried to you and you answered. We know where we chose to live without you and we bask in our life with you. Open our mouths to speak truth and light. Bless our words that they might be light and hope. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Anointed!

LEADERSHIP REALLY MATTERS

ANNE BOSARGE

REV. JAY HANSON

Many people from our Annual Conference participated in this year's New Room Experience. Here are just a few examples of the impact in some of their lives.

"The best conference I have attended in years - I fully plan to attend again!" – Rev. Roy White, St. Marys United Methodist Church

"After this last season, every pastor deserves the chance to breathe and receive – to breathe in passionate worship and receive Spirit-filled teaching. New Room provided that for me. I came away with an experience of confession and consecration that restores joy to my heart, my mind, and my ministry." – Rev. Scott Tucker, Isle of Hope United Methodist Church

"We loved New Room. The speakers and music are outstanding. And just seeing people in our Wesleyan tribe that are passionate about Jesus is so encouraging." – Rev. Jim Cowart and Jennifer Cowart, Harvest Church

"As a pastor, I have been or led retreats on the Walk to Emmaus, Catalyst, Passion, Camp Meetings, and Rock the Universe. None of these events did I experience quite the sense of

excitement and Wesleyan renewal like I did at the New Room conference this year.” – *Rev. David Donnan, Glennville United Methodist Church*

“I appreciate the opportunity to attend New Room. The worship time was very special, and I learned a lot from the speakers! One thing I heard from Jo Saxton that I keep thinking about is, ‘We don’t rise above what we believe to be true about ourselves.’ I will continue to contemplate that and more that I heard.” – *Denise Roy, The Chapel*

“One of the quotes that stuck out to me the most was from session one: ‘Innovation is to keep in step with the Spirit.’ The next best plan or strategy is not what we need as a body; we need the Holy Spirit. We need to find out where and how God is moving and join Him. That is what the world needs and the younger generation is passionate about. We learn to ride that wave or drown.” – *Josh Echols, Pine Forest United Methodist Church*

“New Room was a time of encounter with the Holy Spirit! I am so thankful for the time of refreshing and refilling. Come, Lord Jesus!” – *Jordon Echols, Pine Forest United Methodist Church*

“I have never been to a conference that stirred me to action so quickly. Whether it be repentance, prayer, or worship, I have been more excited for my personal time with the Lord because of the teaching I encountered at New Room.” – *Brooks Hanson, The Chapel*

“The New Room experience was just what I needed. I honestly didn't know how much the previous 80 weeks had affected me, dealing with the COVID situation in the Church. The honest dialogues and empowering worship and teaching gave me the opportunity to not be the pastor, but the participant. I was truly blessed. The panel discussion that I thought would be awful was for me one of the most impactful times as the speakers hit on the topics that had so touched my church in the last year. Next year I'd love to take some of my staff!” *Rev. Chip Grantham, Tifton First United Methodist Church*

“The prayer time and confession with others from our area was revitalizing. The worship was incredible. I'm so glad I went. It was well worth the time away and the extra work for the time missed.” – *Kris Dockery, The Chapel*

“An incredible time of powerful worship, inspirational teaching and strengthening connections with other clergy and laity from all over!” – *Rev. Jimmy Towson, Park Avenue United Methodist Church*

“Convicting and reassuring. New Room 2021 opened a door for spiritual healing and ministerial rebirth.” – *Shawn Wallick, The Chapel Online*

“The New Room Conference has been a godsend! It helps you realize the effective ways of sharing the word of Jesus Christ. And it's truly a high-voltage charge to your inner spirit. If you

have not been to this conference, you are missing out on a level that is very close to heaven!!” – *Shelly R. Sims, Future Church Planters cohort*

“Participating in New Room was truly an awakening experience. God’s timing was perfect in drawing me nearer to Him through this conference. At a point where the stress of ministry during these unprecedented times has felt immensely more than I could bear alone, I was reminded of not only my purpose, but also that I am surrounded by loving, supportive partners in ministry being sustained by an ever-present Father. New Room was soul refreshing and exactly what I needed at this point in my ministry journey.” – *Jessica Stanley, Talbotton and Olive Branch United Methodist Churches*

“The New Room conference was three tremendous days of Spirit-filled worship, prayer, preaching, teaching, confession, lament, repentance, rejuvenation, encouragement, and holy conferencing. God met me there, and I felt a fresh move of the Spirit unlike anything I’ve experienced in years.” – *Rev. Jerry Hudson Bemiss United Methodist Church*

“New Room was a great opportunity to experience refreshment from the wonderful speakers, worship, and fellowship.” – *Rev. Baxter Hurley, Forest Hills United Methodist Church*

“I was introduced to David Thomas and the New Room Conference a few years ago at a campus ministry academy. New Room’s heart for seeing awakening and revival come to our local churches keeps me coming back year after year. If your heart is for seeing God move in the hearts and minds of your congregation, if your heart yearns for the Kingdom of God to move with power, and for revival to once again sweep across our land, then New Room is the place you want to be.

“I am thankful for the South Georgia Annual Conference Leadership Development Team and its willingness to invest in opportunities like New Room to help clergy and laity find rest and be reinvigorated.” – *Rev. Jonathan Smith, Pittman Park United Methodist Church and Georgia Southern University Wesley Foundation*

“New Room this year was a powerful moment of respite in the midst of a season of treading water. After a long period of wanting God to speak, but not listening as faithfully as I probably should have been, to hear His voice so clearly once again was so wonderful and refreshing. I was grateful to be able to go, worship, confess sin, be forgiven, learn from anointed leaders, and to connect with friends and colleagues in ministry. Truly, it was a powerfully life-giving time.” – *Brett Maddocks, St. Luke United Methodist Church*



Disagreeing with John Wesley

JOHN WESLEY MOMENTS

DAVE HANSON

We must remember that John Wesley lived a long time ago and some of his ideas seem strange to modern ears. I find John's idea about the cause and cure of earthquakes especially disturbing.

In his sermon on this topic, he states that God causes earthquakes in order to punish sinful mankind for our sins. I don't believe that. In this sermon he describes in horrifying detail three powerful earthquakes in Sicily (1692, where 54 cities were destroyed), Jamaica (June 7, 1692), and Lima, Peru (Oct. 28, 1746, just four years before Wesley preached this sermon). He says the cure for earthquakes is to fear the awesomeness of God and repent, forsake our sins, and believe the gospel.

Did you know that there is an average of one earthquake per year in Georgia? The latest one was in 2020 in Chatham County. Most of these earthquakes are simply slight tremors that are hardly felt. The deadliest earthquake was in China in the 1500s when more than 800,000 people were lost. How can anyone believe a loving God sends such devastation on so many?

It is certainly true that we have all sinned and should repent and believe the gospel, and perhaps the fear of sudden destruction by an earthquake might encourage sinners to do so.

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

Retired Clergy Birthdays – October 2021

- 10/01 – David Haygood, Sr.: 100 Lindsey Barron Dr., Apt. 215; Newnan, GA 30263
- 10/01 – E. Warren Williams: 761 Myna Dr., Unit 7084; Ellijay, GA 30540
- 10/01 – Edwin Willis: 4847 NE Rocky Ford Rd.; Madison, FL 32340
- 10/02 – Ross Tracy: 3800 Shamrock Dr.; Charlotte, NC 28215
- 10/04 – Riley Middleton, Jr.: 5002 St. Francis Ave.; Columbus, GA 31904
- 10/05 – Earl Seckinger: PO Box 766; Springfield, GA 31329
- 10/05 – J.W. Womble: 2935 Cherokee St.; Waycross, GA 31503
- 10/06 – Donald Combs: 5572 New Jesup Hwy.; Brunswick, GA 31523
- 10/08 – Bill Dupree: PO Box 169; Americus, GA 31709
- 10/09 – Karen Kilhefner: 7 Mistletoe Court; Savannah, GA 31419
- 10/10 – Hugh Baxter: 1272 Smith Bedgood Rd.; Harrison, GA 31035
- 10/11 – Bob Shell: 210 Castlegate Rd.; Macon, GA 31210
- 10/13 – Bill Neely: 1780 Snug Harbor Dr.; Greensboro, GA 30642
- 10/14 – Jairo Franco: Calle 1a Sur #42a 18 Barrio la Ponderosa; Bogota, Colombia
- 10/16 – John Bacher: 400 South Main Ave. 106; Pine Mountain, GA 31822
- 10/18 – Madison Morgan: 599 Cloy-Kildare Rd.; Cloy, GA 31303
- 10/19 – Billy Oliver: 135 Hines Terrace, Macon, GA 31204
- 10/21 – Stanley Harrell: 319 Crescent Road; Griffin, GA 30224

10/23 – John Brodess: 803 Moore Drive; Americus, GA 31709
10/23 – Frank Danner: 1415 Sunrise Ave.; Moultrie, GA 31768
10/24 – James Duke, Jr.: 102 Clarksville Ct.; Macon, GA 31210
10/24 – Evelyn Duvall: 10502 Regal View Loop; Clermont, FL 34711
10/24 – Carl Howard: 154 Ridgeland Dr.; Valdosta, GA 31602
10/24 – Willis Moore: 2378 Caladium Dr. NE; Atlanta, GA 30345
10/25 – Jimmy Cason: 1321 Kermit Dr.; Statesboro, GA 30458
10/25 – Gene Cochran: 4707 120th Blvd.; Lubbock, TX 79424
10/25 – Martin Loyley: 1544 Harris Ridge Rd.; Young Harris, GA 30582
10/25 – Craig Rikard: 3428 Brandon Dr.; Valdosta, GA 31605
10/25 – Gil Tripp: 1203 Rose Ave.; Americus, GA 31709
10/27 – Bill Jackson-Adams: 17 Lands End Dr.; Greensboro, NC 27408
10/28 – Bob Hannah: 20 Putters Place; Savannah, GA 31419
10/31 – Bob Moon: 4760 Oxford Rd.; Macon, GA 31210

Scripture Readings – Oct. 5 edition

October 10

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Job 23:1-9, 16-17

Psalms 22:1-15

Hebrews 4:12-16

Mark 10:17-31

October 17

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

Laitiy Sunday

Job 38:1-7 (34-41)

Psalms 104:1-9, 24, 35c

Hebrews 5:1-10

Mark 10:35-45

October 24

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

Job 42:1-6, 10-17

Psalms 34:1-8, 19-22

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 10:46-52

Events in the South Georgia Conference – 10/5/2021 edition

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](#)

Laity Sunday – Oct. 17

Laity Sunday is a day set aside to remember that every person is invited to embody God’s restoration project of healing love, justice, and world-repair. It is a special Sunday defined by General Conference “to celebrate the ministry of all Christians” (2016 *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 264.2). Usually observed on the third Sunday in October (this year, October 17), Laity Sunday is one way we express the deep conviction that *all* are called to participate in God’s mission and live this calling through the ministry of the church. [Click here to read more about the history of Laity Sunday.](#) [Resources](#)

Advanced Lay Servant Ministries Training, Vidalia – Oct. 22-23

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. Registration fee for the class is \$40. (Note: Basic Lay Servant class must be completed before taking Advanced Class.) The class will meet at Vidalia First United Methodist Church, Friday, Oct. 22 from 6:30 p.m. – 9 p.m., and Saturday, Oct. 23. from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. For more information, contact Anne Bosarge at anne@thechapelministries.com. [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.

Encounter Youth Retreat – Nov. 19-21

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](#)