

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – MARCH 7 EDITION

A new beginning for a retired pastor and United Methodists in Thomasville

By Allison Lindsey, Advocate contributor

In 2017, Rev. Leigh Ann Raynor retired after 36 years faithfully serving churches in the South Georgia Annual Conference. Enjoying retirement life between Thomasville, GA and Waynesville, NC, Raynor was content to take things one day at a time, preaching occasionally, caring for her pets, and traveling. Little did she know that God was not finished with her ministry and vow to The United Methodist Church.

This January, Raynor and other United Methodists in Thomasville found themselves displaced after their church voted to seek disaffiliation. Looking around and asking God, “How can I help?,” Raynor found that God wasted no time in responding. She felt a conviction in her heart and knew God was calling her once again to take a lead in ministry.

Raynor began receiving phone calls following her local church vote from those who wanted to remain in The United Methodist Church.

Dan Salveter, a lay person in the Thomasville area who has worked with high school and college students for the past 15 years in his local church, is one of those passionate about remaining United Methodist.

“I feel convicted in my heart that God has called me to live out my faith in loving one another,” said Salveter. “I believe this ‘new thing’ will best allow me to live out the call God has placed on my life, to love one another as He loves us.”

With God’s prevenient grace going before them, this new body of believers - now known as the United Methodists of Thomasville - found a space to meet at the nearby Episcopal Church. Their new faith journey began the first Sunday in February, and they have been meeting weekly ever since. The hospitality they found at Saint Thomas Episcopal Church has been gracious and inviting as this group gathers for worship, study, and to discern next steps.

Rev. Wallace Marsh, rector at Saint Thomas Episcopal Church, shared a Benedictine reflection about the importance of hospitality in preparing his church for their guests each week: “Just as we enrich our guests’ lives, so they enrich ours. We welcome men and women of every race and culture, rejoicing in the breadth and diversity of human experience that they bring to us. Their lives enlarge our vision of God’s world. The stories of their sufferings and achievements and their experience of God stir and challenge us. If we are attentive, each guest will be a word and gift of God to us.”

With people ready to meet and a location secured, Raynor immediately found herself posing the question, “How does one start a new church?” She admits to initially having been fearfully focused on all the things of which they would not have in this new beginning: no historic, beautiful sanctuary to meet, no magnificent pipe organ with a skilled organist to help enter into God’s presence, no choir singing beautifully and opening God’s Word to in song, no money, no committees, and no structure in place.

But God quickly revealed to her that it was time to stop focusing on the things they do not have and focus instead on what they do have.

“We have the presence of God, the love of our Savior Jesus Christ, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit,” said Raynor. “We have people who are committed to Him through a denomination that we love and to which we have devoted ourselves.”

The strength in the connection has been seen in friends and colleagues reaching out to encourage and support Raynor and members of this group through this challenging time.

“We have the prayers of faithful friends. We have the support of ministerial colleagues, many of whom have contacted me and one of whom has said his church will help support us financially if we need that,” said Raynor “We have a Bishop, David Graves, who reached out and reminded me that he is praying for us and is committed to us.

“So, yes, there is a lot we don't have but God has shown me that what He has provided is now, and has always been, more than sufficient.”

What the United Methodists of Thomasville found their first gathering and each Sunday since has been the very heart of worship as found in Acts 2 describing the early church. Time has been taken for the healing to begin, to share and give testimony to each other’s feelings of both hurt and hope, to break bread together through communion, for individuals to use their talents to play instruments, to sing special music, and to spend time together in God’s word as they learn and grow together.

Those gathered have shared just how meaningful the time to worship has been and the joy of witnessing the Holy Spirit at work among them.

“I find myself looking ahead to a future of discovery, one where my heart and mind are open to possibilities of growth and change, and for that I am very thankful,” said Lynn Stowers, a United Methodist in the Thomasville area who has been attending the gatherings. “I am also a little anxious, truthfully, but I know God is with us—after all He sent us Leigh Ann and the members of the Episcopal church. What better evidence could we have than those two facts? Our journey will be ongoing, one I look forward to with great anticipation, for we are experiencing the Way Jesus spoke about so often. What greater happiness is there in this life?”

The United Methodists of Thomasville are diving deep into the story of Exodus as God led the Israelites out of Egypt. They are even finding parallels as they feel their own sense of wandering in the wilderness, and, yet, they have seen how God continues to go before them and provide all that is needed to worship and serve him faithfully.

They are trusting an unknown future to their known God.

Bishop Graves and conference leadership are committed to walking alongside those whose desire is to remain United Methodist through [church revitalization and planting](#). There are several resources available for individuals and churches on the conference website through the [Moving Forward in Mission](#) page. Additionally, Anne Bosarge, Director of Leadership Strategies and Local Church Resources, has been meeting with groups across South Georgia to help them tap into the resources available, discern next steps, and plan for their future together.

Look for other new things springing up in Brunswick, Albany, Camden County, Folkston, Douglas, and Valdosta just to name a few! If you would like more information, please contact Anne Bosarge at abosarge@sgaumc.com.

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Garden City UMC offers prayer walk on Ash Wednesday

By Hollie Lewis, reporter from WSAV

Tens of millions of Christians from multiple denominations across the globe began observing Lent with the start of Ash Wednesday.

Each year, Ash Wednesday falls 46 days before Easter Sunday. Lent is a 40-day season (not counting Sundays) associated with repentance, fasting, reflection and ultimately celebration.

However, a local Garden City church is adding something new this year in observance.

“We wanted to open up Ash Wednesday to the neighborhood and to the community,” said Matt Stout, pastor of [Garden City United Methodist Church](#). “We just finished a sermon series called ‘Let’s Pray,’ and we talked about prayer.”

Stout said the series inspired a request for a prayer walk.

“We have these signs printed out, and we put them around the neighborhood just around the block around our church. We’re encouraging people to walk the neighborhood and to pray,” Stout said.

One of the stops on the prayer walk offered ashes.

“There’s a cross, we say, ‘Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. From ash you came, to ash you will return,’” Stout explained. “It means that we all have a limited amount of time here on earth, and we need to make the best of those days.”

There are several signs around the block, including a confession of sins and a prayer for community leaders.

“This community has meant a lot to me. It has been a very warm and inviting place for me,” Stout said. “I love Garden City, and I think one of the things that God wants us to do is to pray for the prosperity of our city.

“Some of the challenges that churches have is that a lot of the folks in our church have been here for a long time, and the neighborhood has just changed so much around us. So, we want to change with the neighborhood and to reach out to the folks who are here, not just the folks that have always been here,” Stout continued.

The Garden City United Methodist Church has done other community activities such as food drives, back to school drives and has partnered with other churches to do community work.

Hollie Lewis is a reporter from WSAV in Savannah, Ga. This article originally appeared on wsav.com on Feb. 22, 2023.

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Andrew College names Dr. William R. Kennedy as its next President

Andrew College has named Dr. William “Rusty” Kennedy, currently the Vice President of Admissions and Athletics at Midway University, as its next president. The announcement comes after a national search that began after Dr. Linda R. Buchanan, who has served as president for the last eight years, announced her retirement in September.

“We are really excited about Rusty Kennedy becoming our next president. He brings an array of skills, experience, and character attributes that will serve Andrew and the community well. The trustees were unanimous in their vote to elect him, and we heard great things about him from faculty, staff, students, and community members. The Search Committee felt that he was a great fit and can bring exactly what we need at this point in the life of the College. We are grateful to Linda Buchanan for her vision and leadership over the past eight years, and we feel that Rusty will complement and build upon her outstanding contributions,” said George Flowers, Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

Kennedy has experience at several public and private institutions, and his portfolio over the past several years includes progressive experience in intercollegiate athletics, student services, and admissions/enrollment. He earned his undergraduate degree from Oklahoma Wesleyan University, a graduate degree from Southern Nazarene University, and a doctorate in business administration from the University of the Cumberlands. He will start his duties as Andrew College’s 30th president on June 5th.

Established in 1854, Andrew College is related to The United Methodist Church and is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. Situated in the rural southwest Georgia community of Cuthbert, Andrew College offers the Associate of Art, Associate of Science, Associate Degree in Nursing, Bachelor of Science and Certificates. For more information about Andrew College, visit www.andrewcollege.edu.

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Imagine It!

If you want to be part of the Fresh Expression movement here in South Georgia, make plans to join us for our Imagine Day April 15.

By Anne Bosarge

Imagine the South Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church expanding and growing in new ways to meet new people with the love and grace of the Gospel of Christ. Imagine seeing people coming to Christ where they work, in their homes, and in the places where they play. Imagine what it would look like to see new discipling communities popping up regularly across the conference as more and more people feel the call of God to lead others to faith in Him! Can you see it? I believe it’s about to happen in South Georgia in 2023!

There has been a seismic shift in the last few years in how people live, work, play, and grow. Instead of having distinct places for work, personal life, play and spiritual growth, the walls between these spaces are coming down. People are realizing they can bring their whole selves to each of these spaces without having to go to a specific place at a specific time for a specific purpose. This shift has affected how people desire to engage with a church community as well.

Instead of “going to church” like many of us have done all our lives, some people are now looking to engage in “church” right where they are at the very moment they need it. People are working from home and merging their work life and home life. People are worshipping with their families at home and merging their church life and their personal life. People are bringing their work into “third spaces” where they like to relax

and spend time. Walls are broken down and people are being invited to bring their whole integrated selves into each of these spaces. If this is where many people are, shouldn't the church be willing to meet them there?

Jesus did a lot of teaching and preaching outside the walls of the church/synagogue. He taught from boats and around water. He taught on the mountains and the plains. He taught on the roads and around the table. Jesus held "church" anywhere there were people who needed to hear the good news. So, what does that mean for those of us who desire to make disciples for the transformation of the world? What does that look like for churches who are seeking to make disciples the way Jesus made disciples?

It's time for the church to adopt an attitude of "go there" as well as "come here." It's important for us to be people who meet others where they are and point them to Jesus, not just pointing them to our churches. We need to show people they matter to God right where they are, and they can worship within their community in Spirit and truth; a specific location isn't required (John 4:21-24). We need to show them the church is alive and active outside the walls of our buildings, and Jesus is with us at all times, wherever we are.

If you can imagine this Fresh Expression of church and are ready to meet people right where they are, we invite you to join us in a movement to make South Georgia a conference of believers who aren't only gathered in church buildings but are also scattered around in their communities bringing the Gospel of Jesus to people right where they live, work, and play. **If you want to be part of the Fresh Expression movement here in South Georgia, make plans to join us for our Imagine Day coming up on April 15 at Epworth By The Sea.** Dr. Michael Beck, Director of Re-Missioning for Fresh Expressions US and Cultivator of Fresh Expressions for the Florida Conference of the UMC, will be here to lead us in a one-day workshop from 9am-3pm. We will learn how to cultivate accessible, transformative, and connectional forms of church in a distinctly Wesleyan movement of Christian communities. Interested in joining this movement in South Georgia? Join us by registering here: <https://sgaumc-reg.brapp.com/ImagineDay>.

Anne Bosarge serves as the Director of Leadership Strategies and Local Church Resources. Email her at abosarge@sgaumc.com.



God's NEXT

By Rev. Precious Hawkins

Change: some people love it.

Change: some people despise and resist it.

Change: for some people, well, it just depends. The nature of the change determines how they feel about it.

Change is a part of life, and you cannot avoid it. You can bury your head in the sand and try to ignore change, but change is all around us. Think about it: our lives and our surroundings change all the time. Our bodies change, our relationships change, and sometimes our opinions change. Homes and buildings are built, torn down, restored, or even relocated. People move in and out of communities. The South Georgia yellow explosion, known as pollen, that covers our vehicles and makes our eyes itch reminds us of the ever-changing seasons.

Change is always upon us. Even our churches change, whether it's the physical structure, the addition of new members, or the loss of dearly loved members. Change is a part of life.

The words of Hebrews 13:8, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever,*” are a reminder that we live with both stability and change. This awareness has been heightened in our lives, and the life of the church, by both the coronavirus and the current divisions in our United Methodist denomination. Much has changed, but many things have remained the same.

Our faith in God has been an anchor and a source of hope. God has been changing us, preparing us for what is to come, and yet God has not changed. We are still called to be disciples making disciples of Jesus Christ. That means we are called to be Christ-like disciples who model a life in Christ Jesus so that others may follow and come to know God through Jesus Christ. It is affirmed for us in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*” This is witnessing!

The Witness Team, one of the South Georgia Conference’s Discipleship Teams, assists local churches as they seek to fulfill their disciple-making mission. This includes helping congregations to acknowledge that we, the Church, are in changing times. The purpose of the conference Witness Team is to support congregations by:

- training and motivating growing Christians to share their faith and lead others to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior,
- equipping them to reach the unchurched in our communities with the gospel, and
- being intentional in showing hospitality.

We must be willing to embrace change if we - the children of God and the Church - are going to survive and thrive. This does not mean that we must throw out what is old and only embrace what is new. Our history, our heritage, and our experiences shape us and inform us. That is worth holding on to. Nevertheless, we must also be willing to adapt to and embrace change.

Let’s get back to the basics of being witnesses for Christ. That means sharing our faith with others by building relationships with people and the community at large. Getting back to the basics involves getting comfortable with your faith story, also known as your testimony and your witness. God will work through us and through our congregations if we are willing to be the disciples we are called to be. **There is power in your witness.**

Getting back to the basics of witnessing does not mean repeating past evangelistic strategies. Getting back to the basics of witnessing involves moving forward with a better understanding of how to creatively use witnessing tools to share the message of Christ with others. It means growing in our faith and having a hope-filled expectation of what God will do next. Being stuck in the past can lead to a lack of vision and a limited expectation of what God can and what God will do. Getting stuck in the past will stunt one’s spiritual growth and witness.

Isaiah speaks to us about not getting lost in the past but living with the expectation that God will bring about change. God will do a new thing. “*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland*” (Isaiah 43:18-19). We will not embrace God’s newness of vision or explore a new path if we close our eyes and choose to remain locked into what used to be. The God of creation takes what was and what is and forms it into what shall be. The old is transformed into something new.

This year the South Georgia Connectional Ministries Council through the Discipleship Teams will offer opportunities to help us grow in our faith and witness. Information will be shared about new ministry pathways and the revitalization of ministries. Every member of the South Georgia Conference, both clergy

and laity, is invited to take advantage of these times to gather, pray, learn, discern, and encourage one another. Change is ever-present, and these gatherings can help congregations lean into change and grow as disciples of Christ.

We cannot avoid change in our personal lives nor in the life of the church. And we might not always like it, but we should expect it. Admittedly, change has not always been comfortable for me, but God has never been wrong! I am hope-filled because I have learned to trust God and embrace God's plans for the future. Jeremiah 29:11 says, *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

How can I embrace God's future (change) for the church if I remain bound and blinded by the past? Embracing the possibilities of God's plans means releasing a tight grip on what was and opening our palms in thanksgiving and preparation to receive God's "plans to give us hope and a future." The familiar gospel song "Follower of Christ" says, *"I want to be a follower of Christ. I want to be one of his disciples. I want to live in the newness of life, Just let me be a follower of Christ."*

Let's be disciples of Christ looking forward to God's NEXT!

Rev. Precious Hawkins is the senior pastor at Asbury United Methodist Church in Savannah and is a member of the conference Witness Team.



2023 prayer emphasis: March prayer guide now available

The South Georgia Conference is centering itself around prayer in 2023. March's prayer guide, written by Revs. Josh Gale, Jon Brown, Sara Pugh Montgomery, and Teresa Edwards, is now available at www.sgaumc.org/year-of-prayer. A bulletin insert is also available for local churches to use.

In addition to the prayer guides, four book studies centered on prayer and hosted by Connectional Ministries, will expand our minds, challenge our hearts and encourage our prayer walks. [Click here for a synopsis and links to register for these fruit-filled conversations.](#)

Book Two: "Praying with Our Feet" by Lindsey Krinks
Book talk hosted by Abra Lattany-Reed on Monday, May 22, noon-1pm

Book Three: "From Burned Out to Beloved" by Bethany Dearborn Hiser
Book talk hosted by Grace Guyton on Monday, Aug. 21, noon-1pm

Book Four: "Dynamite Prayer" by Rosario Picardo and Sue Nilson Kibbey
Book talk hosted by the author, Rosario Picardo, on Monday, Nov. 27, noon-1pm



Denman Award Nominations Sought

The South Georgia Annual Conference is now accepting nominations for The Harry Denman Evangelism Award for Clergy, Lay, and Youth.

The Harry Denman Evangelism Award program recognizes United Methodists in each annual conference

whose exceptional ministry of evangelism – expressed in Word (what), Sign (why), and Deed (how) – brings people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

Evangelism happens in many contexts and many settings; impacts and engages all generations; and requires relationship among a variety of persons. Persons who demonstrate the spirit of this award are ones whose life and ministry exemplifies the teaching of Christ and the Great Commission.

Recipients of these awards, nominated by individuals, churches, or districts and selected by the Conference Witness Team, live their call to “Offer Them Christ” daily as modeled by Dr. Harry Denman, founder of The Foundation for Evangelism that sponsors these awards.

Neither the size of the local church with which the person is affiliated, the age or gender of the person, nor the length of their service limits a person’s eligibility. What is important are the persons whose lives have been changed by the life and ministry of the nominee. (Note: the youth award is limited to individuals who would be considered students - college age or younger.)

The award is named for the late Dr. Harry Denman, who was a distinguished lay evangelist. The awards are made possible by The Foundation for Evangelism, which was founded in 1949 by Dr. Denman, who felt it was the business of every Christian to be an evangelist. It is most fitting that annual conferences today honor persons who carry on the spirit of Harry Denman.

To learn more about the award or to download nomination forms [click here](#) or contact the SGA Conference Witness Chair, Rev. Danita Knowles, at danitaknowles52@gmail.com.

Nominations must be received no later than April 20.



March 12 Lesson: The Greatest in the Kingdom

Spring Quarter 2023: Jesus Calls Us
Unit 1: Called from the Margins of Society

Sunday School Lesson for the week of March 12, 2023
By Hal Brady

Lesson Scriptures: Matthew 18:1-9

Key Verse: Matthew 18:4

Lesson Aims

1. Summarize Jesus’ view of greatness.
2. Compare and contrast Jesus’ view of greatness with that of the disciples.
3. State one way that he or she will practice childlike humility in the coming week.

As Jesus prepared to journey to Jerusalem to die, a serious issue threatened to disrupt the fellowship enjoyed by his men. They actually got into a squabble about which one of them was the greatest disciple and who of them deserved the privileged positions of power in the soon to come (so they thought) Jesus’ administration. Before proceeding further, let’s look at additional Lesson context. By the time of today’s text, Jesus’ disciples had witnessed his divine power through his acts of healing and exorcism, miraculous provision, and

control over creation. The apostles Peter, James and John witnessed Jesus' power personally as they observed Jesus' transfiguration before them (Matthew 17:1-13).

Later, Peter interpreted the transfiguration as showing Jesus' divine honor and glory (2 Peter 1:16-18). In that event, God's power was revealed in and through Jesus Christ.

Peter acknowledged Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). The title "Christ" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word "Messiah" (John 1:41). Both designations refer to the anointed one of God, a phrase describing God's chosen king (example, 1 Samuel 16:1, 12-13).

When acknowledging Jesus as the Christ, Peter had certain expectations regarding Christ's work. Hebrew Scripture, also called the Old Testament, traces the contours of God's anointed one liberating his people, sitting on God's throne, and ruling in righteousness (example, see Genesis 49:10; Psalm 132:11-12; Micah 5:2). Jews assumed that the Messiah would come with power and strength as the anointed servant of God (see Isaiah 42:1-4). However, they did not desire or expect a suffering and humbled Messiah (see Matthew 16:21-22; compare 20:25-28).

Now, the Gospel writers use different names for God's rule on earth as inaugurated by the Christ. All four Gospels include the designation "kingdom of God" (Matthew 12:28; Mark 12:34; Luke 9:2; John 3:5, etc). In addition, Matthew's Gospel includes a second designation: the "kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; etc). Though the reason for Matthew's designation is unknown, students propose that Matthew used it to avoid writing the holy name of God. Both designations refer to the eternal kingdom established by God where he rules.

It was and is Jesus' teaching and ministry that prepare people to receive this kingdom. To receive the kingdom requires that people be born again (John 3:3-8) and obey the will of God (Matthew 7:21). Today's scripture reveals a third condition to enter God's kingdom and parallel texts to this scripture are found in Mark 9:33-37 and Luke 9:46-48.

I. Measure of Greatness (Matthew 18:1-5)

The event that precipitates this discourse is a surprising question from Jesus' disciples about who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus had been teaching on the practices of "the kings of the earth" (Matthew 17:25). Although he was not teaching regarding God's kingdom, his disciples began considering "at that time" their own positions in that "promised kingdom." The 12 disciples had been arguing regarding who from among them would be the greatest (Luke 9:46). If the Messiah were to rule in the same manner as an earthly ruler, then he would require positions of lesser authority in his kingdom. The disciples assumed that they would fill such roles. Now, these disciples most likely have all sacrificed significantly for following Jesus around the countryside these last two to three years, and they want to attain to the highest level of commitment to Jesus' kingdom agenda (see, Matthew 20:20-28).

But as this interaction indicates, the disciples have a different type of greatness in mind from what Jesus meant. When Jesus spoke of John the Baptist' greatness and the greatness of those who are least in the kingdom of heaven, he meant the honor of serving God by preparing for the Messiah and of experiencing the arrival of the blessings of the new covenant through his blood. The disciples understood Jesus to mean primarily the greatness that comes from human endeavor and heroic accomplishments. One of Jesus' primary goals in chapter 18 is to revise the disciples' understanding of "greatness" to the way God thinks about it.

Had the disciples comprehended Jesus' previous teachings, they would have understood how inappropriate this question was. Jesus had already defined the character of a person considered great in the kingdom "of heaven" (Matthew 5:19-20; compare 11:11). Simply stated, the disciples were unaware that this kingdom was already in their midst (Luke 17:20-21).

Jesus did not answer the disciples' question directly. He began the process with a visual aid by calling a little child and having him stand among them. During his earthly ministry, Jesus used a variety of teaching methods, including parables and physical illustrations, and his use of these teaching methods was one reason that his hearers were amazed at his authoritative teaching (Matthew 7:28-29).

As the child stands among them, Jesus makes a startling statement: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." "To change" in this verse does not refer to a person's conversion to salvation. Instead, Jesus was teaching of a general conversion of thought: a person's process of changing his or her consideration on a matter. The underlying Greek word occurs some two dozen times in the New Testament, and it is almost always translated as some variation of the word "turn" (example, Matthew 5:39). That is the same here.

Now, Jesus did not imply that his followers should "become" like immature or naïve children (examples, 1 Corinthians 13:11; 14:20). Rather, what is being implied is having a sense of being guileless and without pretense. The world's definitions of power and acclaim do not apply to God's kingdom (compare Mark 10:31).

Instead of pointing to the innocence of a child, Jesus uses the little child as an object lesson humility that comes from their vulnerability. Therefore, whoever humbles himself/herself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

The humility of a child consists of the inability to choose his own course apart from help and resources of a parent or guardian. Thus, Jesus celebrates the humility that comes from the child's weakness, defenselessness, and vulnerability. The child can really do nothing for himself or herself and will die if left alone. The child takes on an attitude of trust and dependence. Children demonstrate humility by trusting others for their survival and flourishing. They can do little for themselves in this regard.

Therefore, it is this kind of humility that Jesus uses as a visual aid to contrast the world's form of greatness to its greatness of the kingdom of heaven. Those who wish to enter the kingdom must turn away from their own power and self-seeking, and in childlike humility call on God's mercy to allow them to enter the kingdom of heaven. As we are told, the child becomes a metaphor to Jesus of the values of discipleship. Jesus, Himself, demonstrated a life of humility. Jesus, Himself, during his time on earth lived a life of humility (see, Mark 10:45) and because of his humility received exaltation from his heavenly Father (example, Acts 5:30). And yet today he commands his followers to humbles themselves. When followers of Jesus live with humility, they will be lifted and considered greatest in the kingdom of heaven (see James 4:10). Such people may not meet the world's standards of power, celebrity status, or influence. But when believers live with humility, they will receive greatness beyond what the world can provide (see Luke 1:52). Thus, the disciples needed to change their assumptions of greatness from the world's criteria to that of God's kingdom.

In verse 5, "one such child" does not likely refer to an actual child, but to a believer who shows the required child-like innocence. When Jesus' followers welcome others through practices of hospitality, they demonstrate the required life of humility. Although this verse teaches hospitality to other believers, God's people are to show hospitality toward all people (see Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9).

Believers receive their reward through humbling and hospitable acts that indicate the presence of genuine faith (see Matthew 18:40-42; Luke 14:12-14; compare Matthew 16:27). The resulting reward does not consist of worldly acclaim or wealth, but of Christ and the life that he offers (see I John 5:12).

II. Warning of Sin (Matthew 18:6-9)

In verse 6, Jesus switches from the term “child” as a metaphor of discipleship to the “little ones” who believe but the meaning is eventually the same. Here Jesus uses the phrase when speaking of his followers (see, Matthew 10:42; 18:10,14). We are told that two possibilities exist regarding the identity of these little ones. They could be other believers in general or they may specifically describe believers in less powerful positions. Jesus’ warning works for both possibilities.

The phrase “causes...to stumble” translates a Greek word from which we derive our word “scandal.” It can refer to something that causes a person to trip, as in a “stumbling block” (Romans 11:9). However, it can also refer to something more serious: an obstacle that breaks fellowship and causes sin (see Matthew 13:41). The offense that causes another to stumble is to treat other members of the community as less than oneself, or even as less than human, as children, slaves and women were treated in the larger society. Such behavior aggrandizes oneself and thereby denies God’s common mercy and grace toward all.

When Jesus warns of causing another to stumble, he means something very serious. He means something that results in another person’s transgressing God’s law. Stating it another way, Jesus emphasizes the seriousness of causing another person to stumble to sin on the path of discipleship.

Jesus illustrated his teaching by referring to an item that his audience would easily recognize: “a large millstone.” These stones were critical to turn grain into useable flour (compare Matthew 24:41). Such stones varied in size. Some could be held in a hand, while the larger stones could only be moved by beasts of burden.

We can only imagine the horror on the disciples’ faces as they imagine one of the larger millstones tied around a person’s “neck.” The images of being in “the depths of the sea” with this “necklace” millstone implied certain death by drowning. The picture here is one of unfavorable judgment. The point is that the followers of Jesus should not cause other believers to sin, and they should not abuse any authority that they might have. Either would lead to swift and certain judgment.

The crescendo of warning increases as Jesus pronounces the “woes” of verse 7. As in the earlier “woes” renounced on certain unrepentant cities (11:21), Jesus does not dispassionately pronounce a doom on the world. “Woe to the world” is a pronouncement of judgment on those who persist as instruments of causing others to sin. Listen carefully here! Even though such inducements to sin happen, no one is personally free from responsibility if he or she leads others to sin. This pronouncement later falls on Judas for his guilt in betraying Jesus (26:24).

A sidenote: Matthew’s Gospel directs most of its proclamations of woe toward the teachers of the law and Pharisees regarding their hypocrisy (example: Matthew 23:13-36).

However, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees are not the intended audience of this particular teaching. Instead, Jesus’ first “woe” is directed at the world, the present evil age that leads people to stumble and sin (see Galatians 1:4; 1 John 2:15-16). Jesus’ followers must not be tempted to adopt a position of world greatness and disregard the world’s abuses.

And Jesus second “woe” is not directed at a specific person. Rather, he is directing the second woe to any person who could cause another to stumble into sin.

**Questions: When is it appropriate for Christians to concern ourselves with greatness?
When we stumble, what steps can we take to lessen the offense that we cause to others?**

At this point (18:8-9) Jesus now addresses the disciples directly about their personal responsibility for their own actions. Lest they deceive themselves into thinking that all sinful behavior is the result of others causing them to sin, Jesus declares that they take responsibility for their own tendencies to cause themselves to sin. G.K. Chesterton, the journalist, was once asked to address the question, “What’s wrong with the world?” His answer was “me.” That’s what Jesus is getting about here with his disciples. He wanted them to recognize the “me” in their part in stumbling into sin.

Now, Jesus did not state the kinds of actions that would cause a person to “stumble” to sin. However, the inclusion of multiple body parts indicates various possibilities that might lead to sin.

For instance, a person’s hand or hands might grasp something that is not theirs to take or shed innocent blood. On “foot” a person might walk from God’s will and step toward deceit.

Jesus’ command to “cut...off” any offending body part is a metaphor and hyperbole. Although it was a pointed command, he was not advocating for physical self-mutilation. After all, sin can still be committed in one’s heart.

Jesus goes on to say that it would be better for people to experience life “maimed or crippled,” and without the things that cause sin, than to suffer eternal punishment (Matthew 5:29-30). Part of this punishment included separation from the Lord’s presence and his power (see 2 Thessalonians 1:9). Jesus desired that his followers evaluate whether their actions (or inactions) cause sin in themselves or others. If such actions are continued and willful, then judgment will occur.

With the eye in verse 9, a person might commit lust (Matthew 5:28; 1 John 2:16), show malice intention, or refuse take on a person in need. Eyes and vision are a means for temptation (see Matthew 4:8-9). Jesus’ inclusion of an eye with a hand and a foot highlights the numerous ways that a person might sin intentionally or unintentionally.

The command to “gouge” out one’s eye and throw it away was not a command requiring forced blindness. As in the previous verse, Jesus taught his followers to take strong measures to remove temptation. If willful and unrepentant sin continues, then people would experience eternal punishment in the fire of hell (Mark 9:47-48).

Sometime ago I read an interview of a reporter with a man who defuses bombs. The reporter asked this man how he felt when he was defusing a bomb. The man replied, “I am scared to death.”

Scared to death, but not paralyzed. Aware of the danger but moving carefully ahead. That is our task—we must remain vigilant.

In conclusion, through the power of the Holy Spirit, followers of Jesus must learn to embrace Jesus’ definition of greatness—it must include childlike humility. Further, followers of Jesus must remove those things that could cause themselves or others to stumble in sin.

Action Plan

1. What radical life changes might help you live a more Christ-centered life?

2. What role does your responsibility toward other believers play in deciding where you will rest your gaze?

Resources For This Lesson

1. “2022-2023 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Series, International Sunday School Lessons,” pages 241-248.
2. “The New Application Commentary (Matthew)”, by Michael J. Wilkins, pages 611-615.
3. “Preaching the Gospel of Matthew” by Stanley P. Saunders, pages 178-180.

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March 19 Lesson: Jesus Talks with a Samaritan

Spring Quarter 2023: Jesus Calls Us
Unit 1: Called from the Margins of Society

Sunday School Lesson for the week of March 19, 2023
By Hal Brady

Lesson Scriptures: John 4:7-15, 28-30, 39-41

Key Verse: John 4:39

Lesson Aims

1. Identify the barriers that Jesus ignored when talking with the Samaritan woman.
2. Explain the significance of Jesus’ discussion with the woman in light of the prevailing cultural, political, and religious taboos he ignored.
3. Identify elements of Jesus approach to evangelism that he or she will use.

More often than not, it suggests distinctive smells and dress. It also suggests substandard housing, particular voice inflections and diverse color. The actual railroad may or may not be a factor. Usually, it signifies a state of mind. But always—always—it is reserved for places and people who are different. What am I talking about here? I am describing “the other side of the tracks.”

In today’s text Jesus himself models breaking barriers in ministry. What will be the impact of reaching out to the wrong neighborhood—to the other side of the tracks?

Lesson Context

The Gospel of John was written later than those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, probably in the AD 80s or 90s. The Apostle John likely wrote his Gospel from Ephesus, according to long-held church tradition. John’s authorship is established primarily by his identification as the beloved disciple (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20, 24).

As our text in John 4 begins, Jesus and his disciples had left Judea and were heading to Galilee (John 4:3), where he made the headquarters of his ministry (Matthew 4:13-16). For this journey, Jesus chose not to take one of two longer routes that would allow him to avoid Samaria (John 4:4), as some other Jews would do.

Thus, we are told that Jesus simply had to pass through Samaria. Some scholars say that this was more a “theological necessity” than a “geographical necessity,” pointing out the fact that “God so loved the world.” As I said, most Jews travel around Samaria (the other side of the tracks). But not Jesus! Samaria was the central region of what had been the kingdom of Israel, with Judea to the south and Galilee to the north. Travel between Jerusalem and the region of Galilee would take about three days on the reliable Roman roads that run through Samaria.

I. The Stranger (John 4:7-15)

At the sixth hour (noon), Jesus came to this well that was known to have belonged to Jacob (John 4:5-6). It was uncommon for anyone to be at the well at that hour, as the day was at its hottest. From ancient times, women journeyed to draw water as a group in the morning or evening (example: Genesis 24:11).

However, while Jesus is resting beside the well a woman comes from a nearby town in Samaria called Sychar, and she’s carrying upon her head an empty jug. Look carefully at her. She’s a Samaritan. She’s hybrid. Her blood is both Jewish and Assyrian. Her ideas are a mix of Hebrew and heathen. She shares her people’s prejudices against the Jews. Why is she along? Why is she coming to the well in the heat of the day rather than the cool of the evening or early morning? The other women gather at the well in the evening to catch up on the news and happenings of the day. It is a social event, but this woman doesn’t share in it. Look at her again: added to her other woes, this woman is an outcast of society.

As soon as she approaches, however, Jesus immediately says to her, “Will you give me a drink?” That question does not seem an unusual request at a well. But John 4:9 reveals several levels on which this was a very surprising request.

Jesus and his disciples sometimes carried funds to buy what they needed along the way (example, John 13:29), though other times they depended on other means for their sustenance (example Matthew 10:9). This journey took them through Samaria, specifically the town of Sychar. Ancient Jewish tradition suggests that the disciples would have been careful about ritual purity and social boundaries when procuring “food” from Samaritans. Ordinarily they would not accept food as a gift from Samaritans but allowed for the need to buy from Samaritans.

Now, the reasons Jesus’ request for water is surprising are given in verse 9. One is a gender issue. Women were often viewed as “less than” by men in the ancient Roman world. For a Jewish man, this would be especially true for any non-Jewish woman. And Samaritan women were doubly stigmatized because of the animosity between Judah and Samaria.

Within this conversation, “the Samaritan woman” would be amazed that Jesus knew about her several marriages and the man she was living with at the time (John 4:16-19). Both Jews and other Samaritans would consider this pattern suspicious, if not downright sinful. We do not know why she had been married so many times. But the implication of living with a man she had not married suggests there were less than pure reasons for the ending of the other relationships.

Still, another reason why Jesus’ request is surprising is that Jews did not associate with Samaritans (John 4:9). Here, it’s only mentioned a few reasons why.

The antagonism between Jews and Samaritans dated back over 700 years to the Assyrian Conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The ten tribes of Israel living there were taken captive in 722 BC, including the people living in the region called Samaria (2 Kings 17:1-6). The Assyrians habitually moved conquered people around the empire, so some Israelites remained while many foreign people settled in the land. When

Israelites mingled well with foreign peoples, the result was a syncretistic religion in which the Lord was worshipped in addition to other gods (2 Kings 17:24-33, 41).

All this religious turmoil resulted in a Samaritan religion that revered only the books of Moses (the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch). Samaritans excluded any history, poetry, or prophecy that was written later. And the Samaritans believed that God should be worshipped on Mount Gerizim (see Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:12), not in Jerusalem. They also expected a Messiah like Moses, not David.

In addition, the Samaritans opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple and the city walls following the exiled Jews' three waves of return that began in 538 BC (Ezra 4:8-24; Nehemiah 4:1-2).

There were other atrocities that Samaritans and Jews committed against each other, much as the Jewish destruction of the temple on Mount Gerizim and the Samaritan attempt at defiling the temple in Jerusalem during Passover by sneaking in and scattering dead men's bones on the temple's grounds (compare Leviticus 21:1, 11, Numbers 5:2; 9:6-7, 9:13).

In reply, Jesus chose not to engage in an ethnic-oriented debate with the woman but rather turned the focus to "the gift of God" (4:10). While some commentators interpret this gift as the living water, it is more probable that the gift is Jesus Himself, the Messiah, given by God (John 3:16). The expression "gift" should be viewed as one of the many descriptive titles of Christ. And we are told by scholars that the word "kat" here translated "and," can also be translated "even," in which case Jesus would be identifying Himself as even the gift of God. Paul declared that Christ is the undeniable gift of God (2 Cor. 9:15).

As a resident of Shechem, in Samaria, the woman knows the location of every water source. But here, Jesus says something unexpected: he is able to provide "living water" (4:10b). "Living water" refers to water that flows in a spring, river, or stream, that is "moving" water. Other waters stood still, and it could be found in a well, cistern, or pond. Living water was precious and valued and according to rabbinic law was the only water that could be used in ritual washings to make unclean worshipers pure.

Now, everyone knew that Shechem had no rivers or streams. Even Jacob had to dig a well in order to water his flocks here (4:12). So how could a Jewish outsider, someone who barely knew the terrain, offer water that no one else had found? There was no living water in Shechem.

But the woman stumbles on the metaphor and misunderstands. However, she is curious about the possibility of a nearby stream or spring (4:11b). But Jesus wants her to look beyond to the spiritual significance of what this water means. This is water that eliminates thirst (4:13), a water that leads to eternal life (4:14). It is no surprise that in this arid country something so precious as running water would take on symbolic meaning. Simply stated, living water is life nourished by God.

For historical significance, I want to backtrack a minute to verses 11b-12. The well itself had long been associated with "father Jacob," who lived about 2000 years prior to the encounter of today's text. Jacob had bought the land of Shechem, eventually deeding it to his son Joseph (Genesis 33:18-19; Joshua 24:32). Although no well was mentioned. The Samaritans traced their lineage through Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

But because of the divergence of Israel's ten tribes from the southern two, collectively known as Judah, the Jews thought of Samaritans as a foreigner (Luke 17:16-18). This well can still be visited today, and I've had the privilege of visiting it.

One more thing here! Like Jews, the Samaritans had great respect for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and the woman thought that Jesus could not be greater. Based on her faith, we cannot fault the woman for asking this question.

Jesus said in verse 14, "...Instead the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." "Welling up" suggests especially vital properties in the living spiritual "water" Jesus referred to. Perhaps this is a formula at this point: "eternal life" comes only as a gift of the Father through accepting the invitation of Jesus and the daily work of the Spirit. As scholars suggest, "the gift" of God also refers to the Holy Spirit. Explanation is found in John 7:38 and 39, which is consistent with other New Testament usage and nuance.

"What do you want?" An exasperated waitress asked a couple of tired businessmen who sat down at the lunch counter at the airport. One of the men looked up and said, "Lady, I want a slice of life."

To this, the waitress slammed down the menu and responded, "Buddy, that's the one thing I ain't got to give."

"A slice of life" – the waitress didn't have it to give, but the Lord Jesus does. Not just a slice but the whole thing given through the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

In summary of verses 7-14, some scholars believe the writer or writers of John's Gospel understand "living water" as Jesus revelation and teaching. Others argue that the writer understands the living water as the Spirit commissioned by Jesus. But whichever it is or both, there is really no need to focus over it because in the thought of John's symbols generally there are several meanings. The point is that the "Living Water" is the "gift of generosity of God" as Eugene H. Peterson put it in "The Message."

In verse 15, the woman's request demonstrates her confusion about Jesus words. She is in search of literal, physical "water" to meet her immediate needs. But even with her misunderstanding, she admirably continues her inquiry and search for understanding.

The dialogue in John 4:16-27 (not in our printed text) continues between Jesus and the woman. She rapidly progresses from considering Jesus to be a prophet to wondering if he might be someone even greater than that.

II. The Promised One (John 4:28-30, 39-41)

"Leaving her water jar behind" indicates that "the woman" left in a hurry or she could have planned to bring her man back to meet Jesus. At any rate, the town she went to was Sychar, which is only mentioned by name in John 4:5. It is located in proximity to both Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. Though its location is unclear, there is reason to associate it with the modern village of Askar. Located about one half mile from Jacob's well, the name Sychar might also indicate a close relationship with Shechem, a better-known settlement in the same area. First mentioned as Abraham entered Canaan (Genesis 12-6-7) the land became part of Ephraimite territory in northern Palestine (Joshua 7:8-10).

The woman's invitation to "come see" is reminiscent of Jesus' invitation when he called his first followers in John 1:39. Describing Jesus knowing about her marriages and current living situation as having "told" her everything that she "ever did" reveals something about the culture this woman was living in. Her life's summary (at least in her mind, and likely in the minds of her community as well) would be told in terms of the men she had associated with. However, instead of using this information to shame her, Jesus uses it to further her understanding regarding his identity. He was at least a prophet (4:19) and even more.

In confirming Jesus' accurate and supernatural knowledge of her life story, the woman's testimony reveals that she was fully impressed by him. Given the culture and her reputation, it would seem she would be a bad witness—not someone who could be taken seriously as she was.

Now the woman anticipates a positive response, partly based on Jesus' own assertion that he is the Messiah (4:25-26, not in our text). The Samaritan expectations of the Christ differed from Jewish expectations because of their adherence only to the first five books of the Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled prophetic and kingly expectations, though not in the way either Samaritans or Jews had imagined (examples 6:15, 41-42; 7:25-27, 52; Acts 1:6).

One sign of discipleship is the testimony given to others—words that eagerly spill out because of the preciousness of discovery. "Come see," as I mentioned earlier, is a Johannine phrase of invitation. Potential converts do not need more information about Jesus—note that the woman is even tentative about Jesus' identity as the Christ, they need only to come and have their own experiences with him. It has been said that the Christian life is based on the twin pillars of discovery and communication, and it is.

In Jesus' ministry, people living on the margins sometimes made the biggest influence on their communities (example: Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 19:1-10). This ostracized woman turned evangelist reaching out to her community, which resulted in "many of the Samaritans from that town" believing that Jesus was the Christ. Significantly, her testimony was that Jesus "told me everything I ever did"—a substantial claim when looking for a prophetic Christ.

The evangelization of a Samaritan town emphasized the power of a testimony. No doubt the woman was well known in the town, and the change in her life resulted in many people believing in Christ simply because of what she said. They invited Jesus to stay in their town, and He did so for two days, and many more believed. As the Samaritans encountered Jesus for themselves, they confess that Jesus really is "the Savior of the world" (14:42).

We cannot help but ponder how large the community of faith grew in Sychar. In Acts 8:4-25, the gospel spread in the land of Samaria through the work of Philip the evangelist, the ground-work for that success undoubtedly prepared by the events of today's text.

In summary, Jesus' earthly ministry did not include limits based on typical human barriers such as "on the other side of the tracks." His encounter with the Samaritan woman is a prime example. In Jesus' presence, many of the boundaries that we have never put up or that others have put up around us disappear.

As we find our identity in Jesus, we can become the conduit of mercy and grace to those we encounter. The living water Jesus gives us is available now and will continue to "well up" in us until we reach the age to come.

So, how do we communicate the Gospel best? Here are three suggestions:

1. by lifting up Christ,
2. through incarnational witness,
3. and by serving with compassion and love through social action.

Action Plan

1. What hurdles does your congregation face when reaching out to a community that might be mistrustful of your motives?
2. Are any of your prayers "small" compared to what Jesus offers you?
3. How can you become more open to Spirit-led opportunities to share Christ?

4. What challenges do you find in the passage?

Resources For This Lesson

1. "2022-2023 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Series, International Sunday School Lessons," pages 249-256.
2. "The New Application Commentary (John)", by Gary M. Burge, pages 138-145, 148-150.
3. "The Gospel of John Believe and Lives" by Elmer Towns, pages 37-42.
4. "The Gospel of John Volume I, The Coming of the Light (John 1-4)" by James Montgomery Boice, pages 276-281.

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A Theology of Love

JOHN WESLEY MOMENTS

DAVE HANSON

John Wesley was an evangelist, not a systematic theologian. However, he did stress several basic doctrines: salvation by grace, not by good works; free will, not predestination; sanctification, being made perfect in love in this life; and the power of the Holy Spirit. His passion was to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land. Wesleyan theology stresses personal and social holiness, purity of life.

Some of us tend to come down hard on those who do not live pure lives. John Wesley urged his followers in the Methodist Movement to work for holiness, but his main emphasis was love. He urged us to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love others as Christ loved us.

One of my favorite statements is, "Holiness without love is not holiness."

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



Obituary: Mrs. Ruth Khaw

Ruth Khaw, a resident of Middletown Township, passed away at Crozer-Chester Medical Center on February 21, 2023. She was 73 years old. Ruth will be deeply missed by her family and friends everywhere.

Ruth was born and raised in Yangon, Myanmar. She was a graduate of Rangoon Arts and Science University where she obtained a BS in Chemistry. She was a lifelong learner and global citizen living in Taipei, L.A., Chicago and Portland. She obtained her BS in Biology from Evergreen State College while working as a Lab Tech at Mason General Hospital in Shelton, WA. Ruth later moved to Georgia where she received an Associates Degree in Information Technology from Altamaha Technical College. She spent some time in Thiells and Brooklyn, NY before ultimately settling in Media, PA.

She was actively involved in United Methodist churches throughout her life, culminating in 12 years as an indispensable partner to Bernie at Zoar United Methodist Church, Melton's Chapel UMC, Millen UMC, and

Thiells Garnerville UMC. Ruth was a member of First United Methodist Church of Media. She played the piano and organ and was always engaged in church activities and helping those in need. She was a member of P.E.O. In her free time she enjoyed cooking, gardening and spending time with her family.

Ruth is survived by her beloved husband of 49 years, Bernie Khaw; her children Bliss Khaw (Dan Washburn) of Media, PA and A.J. Khaw (Christina Joy) of Philadelphia; and two granddaughters.



Conference Happenings

2023 Lay Servant Ministries & Certified Lay Ministry

Check out the [dates & registration for the 2023 classes](#).

Clergy Ethics Training – March 16, April 11, April 20

Every three years, according to the South Georgia Conference Sexual Ethics policy, persons serving under appointment by the bishop (clergy, local pastors, extension ministers, appointed lay speakers) are required to attend a Sexual Ethics Workshop. Under the guidance of the Office of Ministerial Services, the South Georgia Conference will offer Clergy Ethics trainings in March and April 2023. For more information and to register, [click here](#).

Clergy Spouses Retreat – March 17-19

The 2023 Clergy Spouses retreat is set for March 17-19 at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. Meeting under the theme “Let’s Be Real: Being Authentic as Clergy Spouses,” this weekend promises to be a great time together worshipping, learning, sharing, and having fun. Rev. Laurel Griffith, Associate Pastor at Albany First UMC, will be the speaker. Contact Cindy Rollins, retreat chair, at 706-326-4862 if you have any questions. For more information and to register, visit www.sgaumc.org/clergyspouses.

United Women in Faith Spiritual Growth Retreat – March 24-26

The 2023 United Women in Faith Spiritual Growth Retreat is set for March 24-25 at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. This will be a weekend of worship, growth, connection, and fun. Meeting under the theme "Fully Rely on God," this year's retreat features speaker Sue Owens. For more information and to register, visit www.sgaumc.org/umw.

ERT & Chainsaw Operator Safety Training – March 25

An ERT & Chainsaw Operator Safety Training is set for Saturday, March 25, 2023. The training will take place at Pierce Chapel UMC (5122 Pierce Chapel Road, Midland GA 31820). The basic ERT class will begin at 8am with the chainsaw safety to follow. Lunch is included. This training is a collaborative effort of the United Methodist Committee on Relief and United Methodist Volunteers in Mission. Mac Woodridge from Pierce Chapel will serve as the host. [Register now](#) For more information, contact Mac Woodridge at macdaddy1977@gmail.com or Glenn Martin, Northwest District Coordinator, at Gmartin0704@gmail.com or 912-312-6341.

Eagles Fish Fry – April 13

The South Georgia Conference Eagles After-Easter Fish Fry is set for April 13, 2023, at 12:00 noon at McRae UMC in McRae, Ga. All retired pastors and spouses are invited to attend. The McRae United Methodist Men will cook fish, grits, fries, hush puppies, and provide the tea. Attendees are asked to bring salads, vegetables, and desserts. To RSVP or if you have any questions, please email me Rev. David Tart, Eagles President, at revdtart@bellsouth.net.

Men's Spiritual Life Retreat – April 21-22

A Men's Spiritual Life Retreat is set for April 21-22, 2023, at Epworth By The Sea on St Simons Island. This in-person event is sponsored by the United Methodist Men of South Georgia and is open to all Christian men of South Georgia to attend. The retreat will be a time of spiritual renewal through: solid biblical teaching by Rev Tommy Mason, dynamic and uplifting music led by the Goshen Travelers Band, shared fresh testimonies of God's Grace, worship, prayer & fellowship, and a brief annual business session of the South Georgia United Methodist Men. [Click here for more details.](#)

Called Annual Conference Session – May 21

A special called session of the annual conference has been set for Sunday, May 21, 2023. The meeting will begin at 4 pm using the Zoom Webinar platform in conjunction with an online voting system. The sole purpose of the special called session of the Annual Conference is to complete the process of ratifying the current requests for disaffiliation of local churches who have met the requirements outlined in ¶2553 of the Book of Discipline and who have met the published South Georgia Conference deadlines. [Click here for more information.](#)

Annual Conference Session – June 4-6

The 2023 South Georgia Annual Conference session will be held Sunday, June 4, 2023, through Tuesday, June 6, 2023. The conference theme will be: *When They Prayed*, based on Act 4:31. [Click here for full Annual Conference details.](#)

2023 Summer Camps

Don't let your kids miss out on this summer's Camp Connect - the South Georgia Conference Camping Ministry at Epworth By The Sea. These week-long residential camps are offered for elementary, middle and high school students in June and July. For more information, [click here.](#)

2023 Georgia Pastors School – July 17-20

Georgia Pastors School is set for July 17-20, 2023, at Epworth by the Sea on St. Simons Island. This spiritual formation event for pastors will feature Rev. Juanita Rasmus, co-pastor of St. John's United Methodist Church in Houston, TX, and Johnny Sears from The Upper Room as this year's teachers. To register and for more information, visit www.georgiapastorsschool.org.

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Resource Roundup – March 2023

Resources for UMCOR Sunday

UMCOR Sunday is March 19. Gifts offered on this churchwide Special Sunday underwrite UMCOR's administrative costs, freeing up 100% of Advance donations for people in need. [Downloadable resources available online.](#)

Podcast episode looks at new anti-racism series

In an episode of "Expanding the Table," the United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race's podcast on anti-racism, staff members discuss the agency's newest resource series, "What Is?" The series looks at the definition and evolution of terms such as accent bias, colonialism and gaslighting. [Listen to podcast](#)

GCORR book study - [Tempered Resilience by Tod Bolsinger](#)

The General Commission on Religion and Race remains committed to supporting and resourcing the Church in its journey of dismantling racism. To this end, they are launching a series of book study guides that correspond with books based on themes ranging from equity and ministry sustainability to how to fight

racism. [The first book study guide is on *Tempered Resilience* by Tod Bolsinger.](#) In his book, Bolsinger discusses a key characteristic all leaders must possess if they are to sustain great leadership – resilience. Bolsinger lays out a process for a leader forming resilience within themselves and the practice of leadership – recognizing the crises present in leading change, formation in the act of leading, self-reflection, relational security, handling stress well, practicing the act of leading, and engaging rhythms of leading and not leading. [Download the *Tempered Resilience* Book Study](#)

Make your outreach count: Supercharge your digital strategy with metrics

Even if basic math gives you the chills, it is vital when it comes to measuring the effectiveness of your outreach efforts. Fortunately, there are tools in place to help ease the head-scratching. Marketing "professor" Jane Massey takes us through the importance of metrics, and why you need to be paying attention in class.

[Read more](#)

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Your church's website is your digital front door — your chance at making a good impression. Boost your chances with a great website! If you don't have one or you have room for improvement, our Local Church Services team can build you a fully customized website experience at an affordable price to enhance digital ministry and outreach. Our packages include:

- Five custom web pages and branded email addresses.
- One year of web hosting and domain name registration.
- WordPress online training and 1-on-1 coaching.
- Plenty of storage and top-of-the-line ID protection.

[Learn more](#)

New studies and devotionals for Lent

Embrace the spiritual journey of Lent with fresh perspectives and inspiration. Brand-new studies and devotionals from Abingdon Press, the Upper Room and the Society of St. Andrew offer a chance to discover meaning in this season of reflection and renewal. Most come with a leader guide or are available in bulk, so you can use them for congregational, small group or personal study. The perfect opportunity to discover a deeper sense of purpose and peace is here! [Learn more](#)

Quick way to search Wesley's sermons

John Wesley, Methodism's founder, was a prolific writer and powerful preacher. ResourceUMC now has a free database of Wesley's published sermons indexed by number, title and scriptural reference. [See sermons](#)



Retired Clergy Birthdays – March 2023

- 3/01 – Ralph Bailey: 9650 Lehigh Ave.; Savannah, GA 31406
- 3/02 – Gene Yates: 705 Curl Rd.; East Dublin, GA 31027
- 3/03 – Ricky Bishop: 292 Timberwind Dr.; Byron, GA 31008
- 3/05 – Tim Paulk: 104 Lee Rd. 2153; Salem, AL 36874
- 3/06 – Ellison Whitt: 443 Lee Smith Rd.; Ellaville, GA 31806
- 3/08 – Jerry Lillard: 253 Paul Lockley Rd.; Lyons GA 30436
- 3/08 – Bill Bagwell: 112 Asbury St.; St. Simons, GA 31522
- 3/10 – Joey Cannon: 146 Callaway St.; Leesburg, GA 31763
- 3/15 – Brenda Iglehart: 305 Palm Club Circle.; Brunswick, GA 31525
- 3/16 – Truett Leveritt: PO Box 15893; Savannah, GA 31416
- 3/16 – Vance Mathis: PO Box 222; Bonaire, GA 31005

3/17 – George Durham: 844 Woods Hole Circle; Statesboro, GA 30461
3/17 – David Seyle: 304 Causton Harbour Dr.; Savannah, GA 31404
3/18 – Tom Oliver: 509 Sunset Drive; Waynesboro, GA 30830
3/20 – Ronnie Culpepper: 2848 Sue Mack Dr.; Columbus, GA 31906
3/20 – Dan MacMinn: PO Box 1325; Ellaville, GA 31806
3/22 – Beverly Flowers: 390 Brook Hollow Dr.; McDonough, GA 30252
3/22 – Tommy Mason, Jr.: 7321 US Highway 41; Vienna, GA 31092
3/23 – Dwight Bishop: 15 Blue Magnolia Dr.; Alapaha, GA 31622
3/23 – James McIlrath: 748 Old Jesup Rd.; Brunswick, GA 31520
3/23 – Jackie Thomas: 204 Glacier Trail; Warner Robins, GA 31088
3/23 – Jimmy Pennell: 2257 S. Lakeshore Dr.; Lake Junaluska, NC 28745
3/24 – Larry E. Bird: 325 Langston Chapel Rd.; Statesboro, GA 30458-3773
3/24 – Rob Grotheer: 4 Druid Court; Savannah, GA 31410
3/28 – Hal Brady: 36 Lullwater Estate; Atlanta, GA 30307



Scripture Readings – March 7 edition

March 12

Third Sunday in Lent, Year A

- [Exodus 17:1-7](#)
- [Psalm 95](#)
- [Romans 5:1-11](#)
- [John 4:5-42](#)

March 19

Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year A

- [1 Samuel 16:1-13](#)
- [Psalm 23](#)
- [Ephesians 5:8-14](#)
- [John 9:1-41](#)