

## **SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – AUGUST 15 EDITION**

### **River of Life mission experience is a catalyst for Christ**

By Rev. Stephanie Smith

Can youth inspire change in their community? Can they be a catalyst that motivates others to come together in worship and service for the Kingdom of God? That is precisely what happened this summer in Tifton, Georgia.

From July 12-16, 2023, over 120 middle and high school students gathered at Tifton First United Methodist Church for River of Life. In addition, these students were supported by more than 60 volunteer lay persons throughout the week.

River of Life is a five-day event where youth and adults serve as the hands and feet of Christ in the local community. Participants not only assist local homeowners with small construction, painting, and landscape projects, but they also form deep connections with the homeowners they serve.

Derek Harrison, Director of Youth Ministries at Tifton First UMC, began dreaming of bringing River of Life to Tifton over two years ago.

“Within five miles of the church, you can see a real need in our community,” said Harrison, who wanted a tangible way for his youth group to serve right in their own backyard.

With this dream in mind and hearts focused on serving the community, the prep work began. A River of Life committee began planning, selecting work sites, working on hospitality, worship planning, and raising funds for the event.

As with any event of this magnitude, there were ups and downs. Yet, the countless hours of planning and working with the various teams ensured that no detail was overlooked in making this year’s event impactful.

River of Life brought together youth groups from eight churches across South Georgia: Cordele First, Jesup First, Moultrie First, Perry, Pittman Park, and Tifton First United Methodist Churches along with Nashville and Wynnton Methodist Churches. The youth were divided into nine different teams, each focusing on one home for the week, where connections and friendships quickly formed with the groups.

Throughout the week, God moved in the lives of the homeowners as well as the students.

“One thing that others should know about the week is that special, life-changing things can happen anywhere,” said Elli Warren, a senior from Tifton First UMC. “I’ve lived in little Tifton my whole life and always believed that nothing special could happen here. But seeing how the church’s love for God changed some of those homeowners’ lives showed me that God’s grace is everywhere.”

The youth worked long, hard days in the middle of the July heat and then gathered together each night for meals, worship, and small group Bible study.

The week's theme was “Catalyst,” taking inspiration from Isaiah 43:19: “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.”

All those who participated experienced a new thing and were able to see how they could be a catalyst that motivates and encourages others.

“River of Life has encouraged and reminded me that ministry and mission work can be done wherever we are because we are always surrounded by people who are dying to know about the hope we have in Jesus,” said Emily Golden, a senior at Anderson University and summer intern at Tifton First UMC. “This week was saturated with forming new relationships that go beyond just one week. My group has been able to stay in contact with our homeowner through some highs and lows of her life. She was in the hospital for a few days but is now home, and we get to celebrate her 94th birthday with her! I pray that through the relationships formed, God would be glorified!”

The prayer of the River of Life leadership is that everyone leaving this week-long mission experience would be inspired to explore how God can use them right where they are.

“The church is alive and well, and there’s no better evidence of it than this week,” said Nicole Lawson, youth director at Perry UMC. “If you want to see Jesus move, spend some time serving with these youth. Jesus is using them to be the catalyst for revival and change in this world.”

*Rev. Stephanie Smith is the associate pastor at Pittman Park UMC in Statesboro and is working with district and conference communications.*



## **Hispanic clergy and laity focus on being disciple-makers**

On Saturday, July 29, 2023, the pastors serving in Hispanic congregations in the South Georgia Annual Conference and several of their local church members met in Cordele to receive training on “How to be a Disciple-Maker.” This program, which will be used in each of the congregations, promotes a system to develop leaders by training them to intentionally reach and disciple new persons and form small groups whose "disciples" will also reach others for Christ and their church.

The training was led by Rev. Alejandro Fernández, pastor in Uruguay and president of Making Disciples for Latin America. Rev. Fernandez was assisted by Rev. Carlos González, retired pastor of the Methodist Church of Costa Rica who resides now in the Macon area and is the coordinator for the southeastern USA.

This program is designed to help in the areas of evangelism, discipleship, friendship, and caring. Twenty-six people were trained, and they will begin this Fall gathering their small groups after they have received a second training. This program is being widely used in Methodist churches in Latin America where it has given great results.

*--Submitted by Rev. Daniel Medina, conference director of Hispanic ministries*



## **Priority Update: Disrupting and Dismantling Racism**

By Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed

Addressing diversity, equity and inclusion issues is paramount to disrupting and dismantling racism. The South Georgia Annual Conference is committed to this work so that our conference continues to thrive.

Since its inception, the Bishop's Task Force on diversity, inclusion and vitality began the work of developing a DEI strategy that South Georgia can be achieved.

At the 2023 annual conference, I shared with annual conference attendees three focus areas that will provide a contextual narrative and framework for addressing this priority.

**First focus area: connecting with community.** The task force determined that focusing on people and the mission of Jesus Christ includes the communities where we live and serve. Community engagement involves building relationships outside the walls of the local church. When local churches engage with their community, they will discover a myriad of ministry opportunities to help people find common goals around their shared faith. Connecting with our communities will help our churches reimagine their purpose within their ministry context.

An excellent example of that can be found at Hinesville United Methodist Church. Under the pastoral leadership of Rev. Tony Caldwell, this coastal faith community has discovered strength and value within the dimensions of diversity. As Rev. Caldwell so aptly stated, "Our church takes seriously our mission to the community." Rev. Caldwell further states that, "We open our doors wide at Hinesville First welcoming everyone. We actively work toward dismantling barriers that exclude or marginalize anyone."

This is just one example of growth in this area and supports the task force reporting that connecting with our communities is paramount to increase evangelistic gains and is essential to disrupting and dismantling barriers.

**Second focus area: faith formation through resourcing and education.** The task force believes that it is our responsibility to help our churches address this priority by championing resources that provide a practical expression of our discipleship and mission. In order to address the social justice issues of our present day, it is important to advise, inform, and inspire our churches by intentionally highlighting the nexus between discipleship and social justice.

As our local churches deeply engage with their community, significant moments may occur that will require a response of faith. As disciples of Jesus Christ, our witness in the marketplace must be effective, and by equipping our laity to live and serve within an increasingly diverse world this engagement can be created and ultimately thrive through resourcing and education. This focus will afford our conference the benefit of self-reflection, new conversations, and purposeful actions that affirms the image of God within all of us.

**Third focus area: supporting clergy in cross-racial/cross-cultural appointments.** The task force applauds and celebrates the gains in this area but acknowledges that there is opportunity for more, and it is essential for our future. We believe our conference can create and find success by implementing intentional diversity in new church starts.

Our first course of action can be achieved by strengthening existing relationships with seminaries and HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities) by cultivating relationships with diverse college and seminary students who are interested the candidacy process within the United Methodist Church and appointment opportunities within South Georgia.

Second, we need to encourage and celebrate more local church engagements as it relates to pulpit exchanges and congregations' partnerships across racial/cultural lines. Growth in this action step has already begun.

Epworth United Methodist in Columbus, Georgia is a congregation that mirrors the beauty and tapestry of a local church who celebrates cross-racial/cross-cultural strengths. Under the pastoral leadership of Rev. Earnestine Campbell, Epworth focuses on being missional in every aspect by utilizing the different gifts and

graces that are a part of the congregation and community. This is another example of growth, and it supports the task force reporting that strategic investment in cross-racial/cross-cultural resources is a missional and discipleship win to disrupting and dismantling barriers.

In South Georgia, diversity is our strength and is an asset that allows our conference to maximize our mission, creativity, and productivity.

*Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed serves as the South Georgia Conference Director of Diversity and Justice Ministries.*



## **Priority Update: “New Things”**

By Rev. Stephanie Smith

We are seeing the connection in South Georgia move in new and exciting ways in just over two months since our Annual Conference meeting. We see God moving in home churches, host churches, fresh expressions, new partnerships, and new church starts.

Established churches, serving as host churches, are working on their online presence. By doing so, they are creating an inviting connection for home churches to participate in the worship and life of the host church. This movement is stretching all the way across the conference. One example is Trinity UMC in Savannah, Ga, connecting with a home church meeting in Albany, Ga. This relationship continues to grow and bear fruit as both groups draw closer in their relationship with God and each other.

These “New Things” are bringing about a spirit of excitement and joy. How can you not be excited about the future of GAME church or BBQ church? These two Fresh Expressions are taking the church to where people are. They are extending the invitation for new people to gather in new places, share a Jesus story, and enjoy fellowship, games, and food.

New things are beginning to take root and grow as new church starts are making strides to charter as United Methodist Churches. These groups are discerning their mission, vision, and values, as well as the people God is leading them to do ministry with.

Our prayer in South Georgia is to preach the Word of God with great boldness (Acts 4:31). Sometimes, we feel called to do a new thing but do not know where to start or who to ask for guidance. The Office of Congregational Development offers many new opportunities to learn and grow as you share the work of God in your life. From Lay Planters Academy, to conferences for Rural churches and education about Fresh Expressions, God is equipping and calling us forward in new and exciting ways.

As the people of the South Georgia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, we celebrate the new things God is doing and come together as “one in Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.”

Interested in being part of something new? Contact Anne Bosarge at [abosarge@sgaumc.com](mailto:abosarge@sgaumc.com).

*Rev. Stephanie Smith is one of the cultivators for the South Georgia Conference.*

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## 2023 prayer emphasis: August prayer guide

### August Prayer Guide

The South Georgia Conference is centering itself around prayer in 2023. August's prayer guide, written by Revs. Julia Norman, Teresa Edwards, Grace Guyton, and Cathy Tucker, all deacons in the South Georgia Conference, is now available at [www.sgaumc.org/year-of-prayer](http://www.sgaumc.org/year-of-prayer).

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## Join us for KidzQuest 2023!

KidzQuest, the annual children's fall retreat sponsored by South Georgia's Connectional Ministries, is for students in 3rd-6th grades. Children and adult leaders from all around South Georgia 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. Amidst beautiful coastal scenery, amazing adult leaders (that's you!) and time away from home - these children are given an opportunity to experience Christ in brand new ways! This year's weekend retreat is set for September 22-24, 2023, at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island, Ga. Visit [www.sgaumc.org/kidzquest](http://www.sgaumc.org/kidzquest) for more information and to register.

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## August 20 Lesson: Judgment in the Kingdom

Summer Quarter 2023: The Righteous Reign of God  
Unit 3: God's Eternal Reign

Sunday School Lesson for the week of August 20, 2023  
By Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:1-6, 17-21

**Key Verse:** "Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God." (1 Corinthians 4:5)

### Lesson Aims

- To tie today's theme, "Judgment in the Kingdom," together with our emphasis on God's reign
- To give some quick background on the congregation in Corinth and Paul's ministry there
- To shed light on the divisions in the church in Corinth
- To show how Paul was lifting up himself and Apollos as examples to follow toward unity
- To learn what it means for God alone to be our judge and consciously live under God's authority
- To examine how certain Corinthians were acting out arrogantly in Paul's absence
- To explain how this talk amounted to a power play that was antithetical to the kingdom of God
- To explore the right ways to involve our brothers and sisters to help hold us accountable to God

## **Judgment in the Kingdom**

The theme of this lesson is “Judgment in the Kingdom.” All summer long, we have been studying scripture passages that help us explore the theme of God’s righteous reign. Whenever we speak of the reign of God, we also speak of living under the righteous rule of God or “will of God.” Whenever we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” God rules over the universe. God’s rule holds everything together, whether we are speaking of the physical universe, human lives, or human societies.

As ruler of all, God is also Judge. To people of faith, who ponder this long enough, the news that God is Judge is good news. This means that God is upholding the universe and its processes in countless ways at all times. It also means that when things are not right, God, at times, sets them right. This also is good news. It also means that one day in the future, God will set all things right for eternity.

For instance, oppression will cease. This is why many of the prophets devoted a part of the message to God’s judgment of the nations. The judgment of the nations was good news to those being oppressed, and it was meant to put the oppressor on notice. Jesus also spoke of judgment in his parables, as we have studied in this series. The judgment at the end of time will be when God and his angels sort out the good and the evil and vanquish evil.

Our key verse says, *“Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God.”* (1 Corinthians 4:5) We will examine the tendency to pronounce judgment before the time. We will also explore the conditions that cause us to get out of our lane, and get in God’s lane as Judge.

We will also examine what it means when the scripture talks about the coming of the Lord, and how the Lord will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and disclose the purposes of the heart. Finally, we will examine how to seek God’s commendation and stop living with an unhealthy dependence on other people for their commendation.

## **Paul’s Letter to the Church in Corinth**

We are indebted to Paul for giving us an inside view of a New Testament congregation in its early stages of development. His first letter to the church in Corinth is among the earliest New Testament writings. We are able to gain insight into this church with its potential and also its problems. The congregation is filled with new Christians who need to be taught much.

Most of the members of this congregation were gentiles who had once felt very much at home in the Graeco-Roman culture for which Corinth was known. As gentile Christians, they had not grown up being formed by the story of God’s people, but they were nevertheless being grafted into the story of Jesus the Messiah. Although the majority of the members were gentile Christians, there were a handful of influential Jewish Christian leaders who helped provide the foundation upon which they were being formed as a church.

Paul was one of these leaders who felt a special calling to share the gospel among the gentiles and form them into the church. Paul became the founding pastor of the congregation in Corinth on one of his missionary journeys, most likely around 50 A.D. In this letter, he refers to a previous letter he sent and one that was sent to him with a list of issues for him to address. He probably wrote the letter that we call First Corinthians a few years after he helped birth the church. He also anticipated returning to the church in person some day in the future to strengthen them as a congregation.

## Divisions in the Corinthian Church

Let's begin examining the culture of the church that was causing an epidemic of people pronouncing judgment on one another before the time when the Lord is supposed to come and rightly bring the truth to light. Early in the letter, Paul wrote, *"Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be knit together in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been made clear to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters."* (1 Corinthians 1:10-11)

What holds the church together for Paul is how people are living under the common confession that "Jesus Christ is Lord." An important sign for Paul is the unity of the church and their ability to come together over differences. He had been getting news from reliable sources that there had been serious quarrels going on in the church. A spirit of partisanship was taking over the congregation. Partisan camps had formed in the church that attached themselves to various leaders with whom they had a connection. One group said, *"I belong to Paul."* Another group said, *"I belong to Apollos."* Still another group said, *"I belong to Cephas"* (Cephas is another name for Peter.)

It was not that Paul was jealous of Apollos or Peter. Paul asked them, *"Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"* (1 Corinthians 1:12-13) Paul would have the congregation be united in Christ, not himself, or any other Christian leader. It seems that even in the New Testament era of the Church, there was a tendency for congregations to place too much emphasis on the personality of their leaders, whether it be a current leader or past leaders.

Ironically, the leaders themselves could have been oblivious to the fact that different camps had formed around them within the congregation. The leaders were bystanders in relation to the obsessive preoccupations of the factions. Paul's letter will raise up many issues over which the congregation is divided. The situation is not just about each group's allegiance to different leaders.

The more Paul gets into the letter, the more it seems that the congregation is mostly divided into a "Paul camp" and an "Apollos camp." Shortly after naming the factions in Corinth, Paul goes into a discussion about knowledge and wisdom, and how some individuals wanted to boast about their knowledge and wisdom over that of other individuals in the church. They were quite possibly the Apollos camp, because Apollos, the Alexandrian, was known for his eloquence.

Paul, on the other hand, admits that when he came to them, he did not come proclaiming the gospel in "superior speech and wisdom." He said, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." Paul says that he came to them "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." His speech and proclamation were made "not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power." In other words, he did not try to win them over with his eloquence, but tried to present the message of the crucified Christ in its most simple and raw form, so that their faith would "rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God." (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

It should be quickly noted that Paul did not have a problem with Apollos. The problem that Paul had was with a group in the church that claimed to have superior knowledge and wisdom over their brothers and sisters, who identified themselves as the Apollos camp. Paul was trying to put a stop to their boasting about themselves and their judging of others.

He said that God has not chosen that superior wisdom and knowledge should be what saves us. According to Paul, "God chose what is low and despised in the world" to be the basis of our salvation. The basis of our

salvation is Jesus Christ and him crucified. Paul said that God chose this “so that no one might boast in the presence of God.” Paul said “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:27-31)

It was the boasting that was the problem for Paul, not Apollos. The Apollos camp was probably not the only group boasting. There were at least two main groups that were divided against each other. One was claiming Apollos as their patron saint or mascot, and the other group was claiming Paul. So, Paul did a very wise thing. He started talking about the complementary nature of his own ministry and the ministry of his friend and colleague, Apollos. His intention was to lift up himself and Apollos as examples of cooperation for the congregation to follow.

**Have you ever noticed a tendency of some Christians to “worship” the pastor? Have you ever noticed when one’s allegiance to a former pastor kept them from connecting to the newly appointed pastor? What consequences do you see in this? If the main problem was boasting, over what do Christians tend to boast in your experience?**

### **Paul and Apollos as Examples to Imitate**

This is how Paul described the complementary nature of Paul’s ministry and the ministry of Apollos. Paul wrote:

*What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and each will receive wages according to their own labor. For we are God’s coworkers, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building. (1 Corinthians 3:5-9)*

Paul saw that his ministry and the ministry of Apollos each had a place in the work of God. Paul planted the church in Corinth, and Apollos came along afterward to water what Paul planted. Paul’s message of the cross was just the message the congregation needed at its planting. The ministry of Apollos was just what the congregation needed in the watering phase.

The most important thing for Paul however is that God is the one who gave the growth. Compared to the divine work of God, the servants carrying out that work are insignificant. Paul and Apollos should not be compared to one another. Nor should they be pitted against one another by members of the congregation because the ministries of Paul and Apollos are knit together into a single purpose. Paul and Apollos were coworkers, and Paul told the congregation, “You are God’s field, God’s building.”

Paul wanted the congregation to observe Paul and Apollos and follow their example. They should work together in the same way that Paul and Apollos were working together. They should see themselves on the same level with each other as Paul saw himself on the same level as Apollos, especially when compared to God whose work is so much above them.

**What do you think of the analogy Paul used? How was Paul a planter? How did Apollos water the congregation? What was God doing? How did the ministries of Paul, Apollos, and God complement one another? What is the most healthy way for a congregation to respond to the ministries of various people with various giftings?**



## Whose Judgment Really Counts?

The background we have been exploring has been important for us to grasp. Now that we have explored the culture of the Corinthian church, and the message that Paul had begun to give them, we are ready to get into the scripture passage we are studying.

**<sup>1</sup>Think of us in this way: as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. <sup>2</sup>Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.**

Paul wanted the members of the church to think of Paul and Apollos as no more and no less than servants of Christ. The congregation should not put either Paul or Apollos on a pedestal. They were both humble stewards of God's mysteries, which is no small thing. But it is clearly the divine mysteries themselves, contained in and around the gospel of our salvation, that should be lifted up on a pedestal, not the stewards who, by the grace of God, have been given the privilege of sharing those mysteries.

Paul also understood that both he and Apollos must be deemed trustworthy in order to be duly recognized as God's stewards. They were leaders who were required to live and serve under authority. The question is, *under whose authority?*

**<sup>3</sup>But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup>I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.**

Paul believed that he was solely under the Lord's authority in the living of his life and ministry. He gave little to no place for the members of the church or any human court to judge him. It was a presumptuous thing for the members of the church to sit in judgment over him. Paul had gotten to the point where he no longer allowed judgmental people to have an outsized influence over him. Paul put them on notice that he considered it to be a very small thing that he should be judged by them or by any human court. God was the only Judge who mattered.

He did not even consider himself to be his own judge. He could say on the one hand that he was not aware of anything at that moment that would be a mark against him, but he said it did not matter what he thought. He was not acquitted or declared innocent on the basis of what he thought about himself. God was the only judge who counted.

Worrying about what others think of you, or how they are judging you, can be paralyzing. This does not mean that we are not under authority. We are under God's authority. We are accountable to God. A part of living under the reign of God is living a life of accountability to God. Anyone who would presume to be our judge is not qualified to be our judge, nor should such a one be able to speak judgment into our lives.

Paul wanted to free the Corinthians from the business of pronouncing petty judgments against one another and their leaders, because such behavior is a form of rebellion against God. They are claiming a privilege and responsibility that God alone possesses. Paul was trying to hold up the complementary nature of the ministries of Paul and Apollos as an example when two people let go of competition against one another and instead choose cooperation because they trust one another.

Churches will succeed to the degree that members trust one another and their leaders. The reason many churches cannot move forward with God is because there is a lack of trust.

**Why do you think people may be quick to judge one another in the church? What keeps people, including yourself, from recognizing that they are judging? How would a lack of trust keep the church from moving forward?**

### **Anticipating the Future Judgment**

We are about to examine our key verse. It anticipates the time when the Lord will come again at the of time in preparation for eternity. Whenever we talk about the Lord's future return, we are not to act as if it has nothing to do with us now. We are to anticipate this future reality in our present life. We are to live as if the Lord could come tomorrow. We are to live now in preparation for what is coming.

**<sup>5</sup> Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God.**

When Paul tells them not to pronounce judgment before the time, he means that they are to suspend judgment until the time when the Lord will be the one to judge when the Lord returns, and not before that time. It is then that the Lord will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness. God will disclose the purposes of the heart. Every heart will be laid bare before God.

Then each one will receive commendation from God. Just as we should not let others speak judgment into our lives, we should also be cautious of receiving praise from others.

**<sup>6</sup> I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters, so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, "Nothing beyond what is written," so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another.**

"Nothing beyond what is written" was Paul's way of saying that he and Apollos were sticking to the basics, and they should also get back to basics. Paul and Apollos were seeking to stay "on mission" and the members of the Corinthian church should get back on mission. They should cease this business of pitting Paul and Apollos against one another and using this kind of partisanship to be puffed up among themselves.

**How are you looking forward to the return of Christ? What is your level of anticipation? What is your level of preparation? How should we prepare? What should we stop doing, and what should we start doing?**

### **The Congregation Reveals Itself in Paul's Absence**

Our scripture passage skips over to verse 17 to help us continue the theme we have been exploring. Remember that Paul was writing this letter because he was currently in ministry to the church in Ephesus. He had planned a visit to Corinth to strengthen the church, but it was not time yet.

It seems that the church was revealing itself to Paul in his absence. We all know of the tendency to present ourselves one way to a person when we are face-to-face with them and another way when they are absent. They were clearly showing Paul that they needed a representative of Paul to be with them.

**<sup>17</sup> For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and trustworthy child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church.**

Paul sent Timothy, his child in the faith, and reminded them that Timothy was trustworthy in the same way that Paul was trustworthy. They could therefore trust Timothy to remind them of Paul's understandings of Christ's ways. These were the same teachings that Paul shared with every church. This was a way of caring for the congregation in his absence.

**18 But some of you, thinking that I am not coming to you, have become arrogant. 19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power.**

So, another point of contention with the Corinthian congregation was the criticism of one group against Paul that he was not being truthful when Paul said he was coming to them. This group had become very arrogant about the whole thing. They were setting themselves up as judges over Paul once again. No wonder that Paul was exasperated with them. When will the judging end? Can't they see the inappropriateness of this behavior?

Paul told them that he did intend to come to them if the Lord wills. When he was finally able to be present with them, he would be able to observe them with his own eyes. Would this group still be talking? Were they "all talk" and no action? Or was their "talk" indeed an "action" that was hurting the church? Did their words against Paul amount to a power play? When Paul visited the congregation in the future, he would find out the destructive power and influence this arrogant group held over the congregation.

They should not be afraid of Paul though. It is God to whom they must be accountable.

**20 For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power.**

It is our actions that will come under judgment. One of the phrases Paul uses in other letters in relation to the kingdom has to do with those who, because of their actions, will not inherit the kingdom. Paul is saying that behind all their "talk" were actions that were harmful to the body of Christ. Their behavior was antithetical to the kingdom of God. Their actions were therefore "anti-kingdom" in terms of the power and influence that they were attempting to wield in the congregation.

**21 What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick or with love in a spirit of gentleness?**

It was Paul's preference that these members of the Corinthian church examine their actions and change their behavior before he comes. He would rather come to them in a spirit of gentleness. He would rather not come and be forced to chastise them with the truth of their anti-kingdom actions. It was up to them.

Paul was no doubt praying that they would come under conviction and repent. Whether or not they came under conviction would have to do with the awareness of their accountability before God. They could not focus on their own accountability before God while they were preoccupied with their rivalries and factions and judging.

**What temptations present themselves in the life of the church to act in ways that are antithetical to the kingdom? How do we deal with these in ways that contribute to a solution instead of contributing to the problem?**

## **How We Bring Accountability into Our Lives**

Paul in his letter has gone to great pains to show how he and Apollos were required, as stewards of God's mysteries, to demonstrate their trustworthiness. The members of the church should imitate them and also act and behave as those who are under divine authority.

Paul had endured enough of their arrogant and presumptuous attempts to appoint themselves as Paul judges, whether they judged Paul to be their hero or their hero's rival. Their preoccupation with judging Paul and Apollos was taking them away from what they should be doing, which was learning for themselves how to live under God's authority, God's judgment, and God's righteous reign.

**Have you ever gotten tied up in knots trying to meet other's expectations? Has this pattern ever resulted in the voice of God being lost amidst all the chatter?**

There is a place for involving others in your endeavor to live a life of accountability before God. It is a wise and healthy practice to appoint people in our lives whom we trust to provide a source of accountability. A good practice is to belong to an accountability group.

This is a group that covenants to practice mutual accountability. This is usually a small group where each member agrees to be accountable to one another. They hold one another accountable to spiritual practices that bring them in tune with God and keep them in tune. They may choose to confess their shortcomings to one another, and be there to speak forgiveness into each other. Notice that the goal is not for them to become judges of one another, but to keep them in touch with the God who is their judge and their redeemer.

The goal is not fix each other or set each other straight, but to be a sounding board as each member grows in his or her own relationship with God. Notice how different this is from the backbiting that can occur in congregations. The difference is night and day.

Let's return to a portion of our key verse and use it to come to a vision moment. Imagine we are in the presence of God and inviting God "to bring to light the things now hidden in darkness." Imagine that you have learned how to do this in your moments where you have sought solitude and you have stilled all the competing voices that bombard you. Imagine God disclosing to you "the purposes of the heart"—your own heart.

Imagine receiving "commendation," but not from your peers. How many of you can hear ten people give you a word of commendation, but it's the uninvited, off-hand, word of criticism that torments your spirit? Imagine receiving "commendation from God." Sometimes this divine commendation shows you where you were close to God and in the center of God's will.

Sometimes this divine commendation may say, "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) In other words, the commendation is that, although you messed up, you are in Christ, and you are therefore able to learn from your mistakes and start again in God's unconditional love and unmerited favor—as one who is *highly* favored! Imagine the joy and peace you will be experiencing.

**Have you ever been a part of an accountability group? Have you ever experienced this kind of accountability even if it was not in a formal group? How did you welcome it? How would you want to replicate the experience?**

### **Prayer**

Gracious God and Father of our returning King, in anticipation of his glorious return, deliver us now from the evil of pronouncing judgment before the time, bring to light things now hidden in darkness, and disclose the purposes of our heart, that we may receive our commendation from You, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen.

*Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Superintendent of Clergy and District Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at [jharris@sgaumc.com](mailto:jharris@sgaumc.com). Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the "Layered Bible Journey," at [www.layeredbiblejourney.com](http://www.layeredbiblejourney.com).*

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## **August 27 Lesson: God's Kingdom Will Be All in All**

**Summer Quarter 2023: The Righteous Reign of God**  
**Unit 3: God's Eternal Reign**

**Sunday School Lesson for the week of August 27, 2023**  
**By Jay Harris**

**Lesson Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28**

**Key Verse:**

*When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:28)*

**Lesson Aims**

- To begin connecting today's lesson with the overall summer focus on God's reign
- To begin understanding the reign of God in the context of the Church's resurrection tradition
- To explore Christ's resurrection as the first fruit in a series of resurrections and implications
- To delve deeper into our belief in the promise of resurrection for believers
- To connect the resurrection to the return of Christ and the reign of God in Christ
- To examine the image of the enemies of God's reign being brought into subjection
- To understand more about the co-reign of God and Christ
- To reflect on the time when Christ subjects himself to God and hands over the kingdom
- To contemplate the meaning of Creation's completion, the end of time, and beginning of eternity

### **When God's Kingdom Encompasses All in All**

This last lesson of the summer quarter serves as a most fitting conclusion to the theme of "God's Righteous Reign." At the beginning of this series, we recognized that the reign of God, or kingdom of God, is a recurring theme running through the Bible. Not only does the theme keep coming up again and again, we see the theme being developed in beautiful and meaningful ways across the centuries as the biblical story unfolds.

There is something all-encompassing about the nature and scope of God's kingdom. We understand that God's desire is to bring all that God created under God's rule. There is the matter of free will, however. Forces exist that are opposed to God's kingdom. The story of bringing all into the blessing of God's kingdom is therefore a story of creation's ongoing and ultimate redemption. At the heart of this story is God's relentless love, and the belief that God wins in the end. There is something powerful and winsome about this story of God's reign.

The scripture passage we are studying takes us to the core of this story. In a way, we go back in time to the Resurrection of Jesus, then back further still to Adam, then forward to the future return of Christ. We get a look behind the curtain, so to speak, to learn what God has been up to, and what God's plans are between

now and the future return of Christ when God's reign will be complete. We learn what "complete" even means. The more we are able to take in, the more breathtaking it is.

## **The Reign of God in the Context of the Resurrection**

First Corinthians 15 is often called "The Resurrection Chapter," and for good reason. The 19 verses that lead up to our scripture passage are about the resurrection, and the 30 verses that come after the passage we are studying continue to talk about the implications of the resurrection (58 verses in all).

In the first 19 verses, Paul makes the case that our faith in Christ is very much an Easter faith. Faith in Jesus without a belief in his resurrection is not just faith in a story without its last chapter, it is no faith at all. Paul was concerned that not every believer in Corinth had accepted the resurrection as an article of their Christian faith. Paul was referring both to their belief in Jesus' own resurrection and their belief in the prospect of their own resurrection and the resurrection of their fellow believers.

Paul reminded the church in Corinth of the resurrection tradition that had been handed down to them through Paul. Paul characterized this tradition as being of "first importance." What Paul recalled for them sounds like it could have been a litany with which they would have been familiar. Paul reminded them that what he had handed to them was what he had first received from the larger community of faith:

"that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,  
and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,  
and that he appeared to Cephas and the twelve." (1 Corinthians 15:3-5)

Notice that the resurrection tradition was understood to be grounded "in accordance with the scriptures." The mention of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to Cephas and the twelve seeks to establish the truth of Jesus' resurrection through the eyewitnesses, which was also a part of the resurrection tradition. The list of eyewitnesses continued:

"Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time,  
most of whom are still alive, though some have died.  
Then, he appeared to James, then to all the apostles." (1 Corinthians 15:6-7)

When Paul mentioned the five hundred eyewitnesses to a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus, we are hearing of an event not recorded in the gospels or the book of Acts or any other epistle in the New Testament. Yet, we understand that this event was being recalled in this litany that was handed down through the Church. In other words, Paul included it because the Corinthians would not have been hearing about this appearance by Jesus for the first time. It was a well-established point of information in the resurrection tradition.

Notice that these appearances are recalled in their specific order, as if the church understood that the order was important. Jesus seems to have planned his own revealing. Have you wondered why Jesus did not appear to Pontius Pilate or Herod Antipas or Caesar?

It appears as if Jesus limited his appearances, between his resurrection and his ascension, to those who already belonged to the community of faith. Jesus appeared to those who already *wanted* to believe on some level. Jesus wanted faith to play the dominant role in how people relate to him. He did not overwhelm the world with physical evidence so that faith was not required. Jesus did not want people to merely give mental assent to him and the fact of his resurrection. Jesus wanted people to believe in him and wanted that belief to be based on a relationship with him.

To the list of appearances, Paul added his own autobiographical note: “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.” (1 Corinthians 15:8) Paul added Jesus’ appearance to him on the road to Damascus approximately three years after Jesus’ ascension. Paul reminded them of his own story where he had been persecuting the church until he met the risen Christ. In other words, Paul was offering to them the dramatic transformation of his own life as proof of the risen Christ.

Believing in Jesus’ own resurrection constitutes just part of our resurrection faith. Apparently, there were some who believed that *Jesus* was raised from the dead, but they denied “the resurrection of the dead”—in other words, the resurrection of believers. For Paul, this amounted to a denial of Jesus’ own resurrection: “*For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*” (1 Corinthians 15:16-19)

**What do you think of the idea that the Christian faith is an Easter faith? What do you think the resurrection tradition tells you that you had not thought of before? What do you make of the order of Jesus’ appearances? What is to be pitied about one’s hope in Christ being limited to this life only?**

### **The Original Intention that Jesus’ Resurrection Was to Be the First in a Series**

This is the point in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter where we begin to examine our selected scripture passage.

**<sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.**

“First fruits” is an agricultural metaphor referring to the first of a crop to be harvested. “First fruits” means that there is more to be harvested. In other words, “first fruits” means the first in a series. “First fruits” implies that Jesus’ resurrection guaranteed the promise of more resurrection. Just two simple words, “first fruits,” speak volumes about the beauty of the Christian Story.

It was Jesus’ original intention to share the victory of the sacrificial offering of himself over the specter of sin and death. Self-giving love wins. Jesus willingness to die a horrible death on a cross for our atonement is of one piece with Jesus’ desire to share the fruits of his resurrection with us. All of it speaks of grace—God’s unmerited favor toward us.

Moreover, this all occurred “in accordance with the scriptures.” As we know, Jesus could have let the cup of death pass from him in the garden of Gethsemane, but Jesus’ understood that he was committing himself to an action that had eternal consequences.

**<sup>21</sup> For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being, <sup>22</sup> for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.**

Paul’s reference to Adam ties Jesus’ sacrificial death and the sharing of his resurrection to the beginning of redemption history. Death and mortality became a part of the human condition through the disobedience of Adam and Eve. In the Incarnation, Jesus took on the form of a human servant so that through his ministry, death, and resurrection, he could make right what had gone wrong in the human story. This was Jesus’ destiny. His death and resurrection were *intended* to become the lynchpins in God’s redemptive work throughout human history. Jesus died and rose again for our salvation and his heavenly Father’s glorification. “*For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.*”

Jesus' sacrificial death sowed the seeds, and the power of the resurrection is what grew from those seeds. Jesus' own resurrection constitutes the first fruits of the resurrection, and the resurrection of believers constitutes a continuation of that harvest. But there's more.

**How does Easter make right what had gone wrong in the human story? Practically speaking, how do you imagine all being made alive in Christ?**

### **The Continuation of the Harvest of Jesus' Resurrection**

In verses 3 through 7, a definite order seemed to emerge in the resurrection appearances of Jesus. In the next verse, we see this focus on the order of events as the continuation of the harvest unfolds.

**23 But each in its own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.**

With these words, "each in its own order," we know that there is more to unfold. There are more repercussions to flow from Jesus' resurrection. Jesus' resurrection comprises the first fruits. We are given the wonderful news that these repercussions will bless those who belong to Christ.

The next words that jump out for us in verse 23 are, "then at his coming." Paul shifts the focus in time to the future. When Paul refers to the coming of Christ, we know that the first coming of Jesus, his birth in Bethlehem, had already occurred. The coming of Christ to which Paul is referring is Jesus' second coming. Another way of referring to the second coming of Christ is to speak of the return of Christ.

We live between Jesus' first coming and his eventual return. At his first coming two thousand years ago, Jesus accomplished a work that continues to have implications for us all the way through to our present day. We know that forty days after the resurrection of Jesus, he ascended into heaven. It is from heaven that Jesus continues to reign beside the Father through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit works in us and around us to bear witness to Christ and to advance Christ's reign. One of the points we are making is that Christ's work did not end when he went to heaven. This work is ongoing and is even building, despite appearances at times. We know that when Jesus returns, he will complete what he began at his first coming.

Paul also tells us that it is when Jesus returns that both the living and the dead who belong to Christ will be resurrected. There are two points of view concerning the resurrection of believers. One viewpoint is that there will be what is referred to as a "general resurrection" when all believers will be raised at once when Jesus returns. The other viewpoint is that believers are raised as soon as they die. The support for this latter viewpoint comes from Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:8 where he speaks of being absent from the body and present with the Lord as soon as we die.

The Early Church was comfortable with the idea of a general resurrection because they felt that Jesus was going to return soon, during their lifetimes. When their loved ones, who belonged to the Lord, started dying before Jesus' return that caused some to be anxious. Paul told the Christians in Thessalonica that when Jesus returns, the dead in Christ will rise first. The early Christians imagined death to be like going to sleep, and then waking up before they knew it in the presence of the Lord.

Many believe that we go to be with the Lord immediately after we die, and that when the Lord returns, there will be something about the resurrection that we experience together. In any case, we should not fear that we or our loved ones languish in any way after death. We are talking about entering eternity where time is not experienced in the same way that we experience it now. Although there is mystery surrounding the



resurrection of believers, we know that at the center of the experience is a loving Savior who “for the joy set before him endured the cross” so that we might be raised with him. But there’s more.

**What are your thoughts on the resurrection of believers? What do you think happens at the return of Christ related to the resurrection of the dead?**

### **The Return of Christ in the Context of the Reign of God**

Let’s remember that Paul is in the middle of unpacking for us a series of events—*each in its own order*. First, Christ’s resurrection, then, at his coming, the resurrection of those who belong to the Lord, who have not already been raised. The time of his coming, his return to earth, is when something else follows.

**<sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.**

When Christ returns, we are told that time as we know it is coming to an end. The “end” is when Christ completes what he started at his first coming 2,000 years ago. The end comes when Christ has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power aligned against the reign of God. Once the powers that are opposed to the reign of God are defeated and subdued, then the Son will hand over the kingdom to God the Father.

**<sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.**

The 25<sup>th</sup> verse is an allusion to one of the most famous psalms written by King David. What makes the 110<sup>th</sup> Psalm so famous? It is famous for the amount of times it is quoted. The psalm begins, “The LORD says to my lord, | “Sit at my right hand | until I make your enemies your footstool.” Or, “Sit at my right hand until I put all your enemies under your feet.” It was a practice of ancient rulers for artisans to make footstools for the ruler of the land. The artisans would carve into the footstool images of the enemies they had conquered. It symbolized that the ruler had defeated, subdued, and put his enemies under his feet.

The belief that David enshrined in a psalm of praise to God was that God is subduing the enemies of the king that God has chosen to rule his people. In this image, God is the ultimate ruler for sure, but God has invited the king of his people to sit beside him as a co-ruler. In the case of a king like David, the king is not a co-equal ruler, but a co-ruler just the same by God’s design, choice, and invitation.

For God’s people, Psalm 110:1, had messianic overtones. They believed that the Messiah, the promised Son of David, the soon and returning king, was to be the fulfillment of Psalm 110:1. Jesus, himself, made a reference to this according to the gospels.

According to Paul in the 25<sup>th</sup> verse, Christ, who reigns at the right hand of the Father, must reign until all his enemies have been put under his feet. The enemies are rulers, authorities, and powers aligned against God.

**<sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death.**

Death is a power aligned against God’s reign and rule. You could say that death represents the greatest power aligned against the reign of God. Death is understood to be the ultimate consequence of the Fall of humankind. Death is the consequence of sin. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Revelation 20:14 makes a triumphant declaration when it announces that “Death and Hades” will one day “be thrown into the lake of fire.” Christ, through the power of the resurrection, is working to defeat death and all that is death-dealing.

I was recently handed a pulpit Bible to take to the Moore Museum on St Simons Island where the archives are kept for the South Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. This particular pulpit Bible was given to the local church where it was used in memory of one of its local saints. In the dedication, it praises the work of this believer as a part of the Church Militant until he became a part of the Church Triumphant.

One of the enduring images of the Church is that of the Church Militant. The Church Militant is understood to be working with Christ as a part of his reign through the power and leading of the Holy Spirit. The “militant” image is appropriate because we are talking about subduing the evil powers of this world. As Paul clarifies in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, the warfare that the church wages is not being waged with actual military hardware. He writes, “for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

The Church Militant becomes the Church Triumphant when Christ has destroyed every ruler, authority, and power of the enemy. Paul tells us that when this happens, then the end has come, and the Son hands the kingdom over to the Father. Paul digs into this amazing image further in the next verses.

**What spiritual enemies do you think God is subduing? What are the death-dealing forces that you think will die along with death?**

### **The Co-Reigns of God and Christ**

We have already mentioned the co-reigns of God and Christ. In the next verses, Paul delves more deeply into this.

**<sup>27</sup> For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him.**

God the Father has put all things in subjection under the feet of his Son, except himself. Here is the image of God and Christ co-ruling as One.

**<sup>28</sup> When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.**

When every enemy has been subdued, and when all things have been therefore subjected to Christ, then Christ, the Son, God’s Co-Ruler, will subject himself to the Father. At this time the Son will willingly and lovingly hand the kingdom over to the Father.

In this image, the curtain has been parted to allow us to see through a divine mystery and peer into the trinitarian life of God. When time gives way to eternity, we see that the Son who proceeds eternally from the Father, also lives to serve the Father throughout eternity, along with the Holy Spirit. It is within this eternal proceeding, serving, and loving action within the trinitarian life of God that we see the Oneness in God.

When every enemy has been subdued, when the Son has handed the kingdom over to the Father, and when the Son has subjected himself to the Father, then God will be all in all. God’s reign will encompass all with all of God’s own self.

Notice that when the scripture says, “then comes the end,” it is referring to the end of time as we know it. So, then the “end” is also the beginning. The end of time is the beginning of eternity. The return of Christ brings

about what we call the completion of Creation. We say that the purpose of Christ's return is to complete what Christ began with his first coming. What does "complete" mean? "Complete" means that the kingdom of God has taken in everything. God has become all in all.

Again, "complete" is the beginning of an eternity of completeness, complete fulfillment, complete contentment, complete peace, and complete joy for us. For God, "complete" means the complete glorification of God from God's subjects, which includes the whole of God's creation, including us, bringing glory to God. As the Westminster Confession says, "The chief end of humankind is to glorify God and enjoy God forever."

As we said at the beginning of today's study, this scripture lesson we have been given is the perfect way to conclude our focus on the "Righteous Reign of God." We have also learned that this focus on the reign of God is a part of our Easter faith. It flows from, and expands, our belief in the resurrection.

**What do you think of the image of the Son serving the Father throughout eternity? How does this expand your thinking on the Trinity? In what ways do you feel that this lesson helps you put together what you have learned in this series about the reign of God? What will be your biggest takeaway from this series?**

**Prayer**

Gracious God, You sent Your Son to reign with you through the Holy Spirit in the world and through the Church. Make us ever more sensitive to the leading of Christ, that we may be able to participate in His reign to the glory of Your name, through Christ our Lord, Amen.

*Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Superintendent of Clergy and District Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at [jharris@sgaumc.com](mailto:jharris@sgaumc.com). Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the "Layered Bible Journey," at [www.layeredbiblejourney.com](http://www.layeredbiblejourney.com).*



**Brick-and-mortar grant helps churches**

By Rev. Garth Duke-Barton

Has your church dreamed of repairing its sanctuary or remodeling the bathrooms? Have you wondered if you could fix the leaking roof but just did not know where to get the money? In the past two years, South Georgia had churches that received Renfro Grants to help with projects like these.

The first was Pinkney Chapel in Folkston. They needed assistance to finish a bathroom renovation. The Renfro Grant gave them the help they needed to complete the work. The other church was Scott's Chapel in Blackshear. Their work is ongoing to renovate their sanctuary, making it accessible for all who wish to attend.

The Renfro Grant is a fund offered to rural churches, defined as towns of 10,000 people or less, in the Southeastern Jurisdiction. This is a brick-and-mortar grant, meaning it goes for building projects, and is to be spent on the main church property (not parsonages). Each conference is offered an award of up to \$5000 towards a deserving church.

The church that is awarded the grant in South Georgia will have submitted the application, found by clicking on the page here if you are viewing the online version of this: [www.sejumc.org/renfrotrust](http://www.sejumc.org/renfrotrust), or emailing a

request to [revgarth0810@gmail.com](mailto:revgarth0810@gmail.com). To be eligible, all applications must be received by August 21, 2023. Completed applications may be emailed to the above address or mailed to:

Rev. Garth Duke-Barton  
205 E. Cherry St  
Jesup, GA 31546

*Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, co-pastor of Jesup First United Methodist Church, also serves as Conference Secretary for Global Ministries.*



## **Thankful for teachers**

by Hal Brady

Since many teachers have officially returned to the classroom, I want to offer a word of thanks to teachers, leaders, administrators, and school staff. These folks carry such enormous opportunities and responsibilities - and sometimes burdens - and the overwhelming majority do so faithfully and effectively. Remembering them in our prayers and expressing appreciation for them is and will be most appropriate.

Honestly, what would we do without our teachers? Like you, I can immediately think of several teachers from my days in school, going all the way back to elementary school. It was a teacher there that taught me to be creative. It was a high school teacher that taught me my love for American History. And it was a high school librarian who taught me my love of books. So many of you have similar stories.

Repeating, what would we do without our teachers? David Kerns, former chairperson of Xerox, put it this way, "Education is the transmission of civilization. Civilization is not inherited; it has to be learned again by each new generation." So, our teachers are those who transmit civilization to our children and young people. With the exception of the spreading of the Gospel, I can't think of a more important task.

For a few moments, I'd like to point out the objectives of education in three points.

The first objective of education is to open and enlarge human minds! Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "The purpose of education is not to fill the minds of students with facts. It is to teach them to think. The purpose of education is to replace an empty mind with an open one."

The second objective of education is training in human relations! Humankind is made for fellowship. One of the aims of education is to adjust to our peers or associates. It is to learn how to live in community with self-confidence and with communication skills and respect for others.

The third objective of education is civic responsibility! America was not founded by people looking for peace of mind and a comfortable life. This nation was built by men and women who risk and even gave their lives in order to fulfill their civic responsibilities. Simply stated, we cannot preserve a healthy nation "for the people" unless it is also "by the people." And our teachers in our school have a gigantic role to play in educating our children and young people.

Once more, our teachers are the transmitters of civilization. They deserve our thanks, prayers and support. May God bless them all!

*Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries ([halbradyministries.com](http://halbradyministries.com)).*

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## Conference Updates

### **Renfro Grant Applications now being accepted; deadline is August 21**

Connectional Ministries is accepting applications for the Southeastern Jurisdiction Renfro Trust Grant. This grant is a brick-and-mortar grant specifically for small, rural churches. Guidelines, [requirements, and applications can be found here](#). Completed applications must be submitted to Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, Conference Secretary for Global Ministries ([revgarth0810@gmail.com](mailto:revgarth0810@gmail.com)) by our conference deadline: Monday, August 21, 2023. (Note: application will say August 1)

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## Conference Happenings

### **2023 Lay Servant Ministries & Certified Lay Ministry**

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

### **Reset Cohorts - 2023-2024**

Do you remember how church used to be? Do you talk about going back to the way things were before the pandemic? Or do your “good old days” go even further back than that? Maybe you’d rather go back to what church was like 40 years ago when you regularly added new members and your Wednesday night dinners were the talk of the town. It’s good to remember what was, but only if that reflection leads you toward resetting your energy and resources toward your mission. The Office of Connectional Ministries is gearing up for year 2 of its "Reset Cohort." In this 7-month cohort, clergy and laity will spend time refocusing on the mission to which we’ve been called, “Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” If you’re longing for more than a return to the “good old days” and are ready to reset your church for missional engagement, Gospel energy, and a passion for people, this cohort is for you! [Learn more and register](#)

### **Lay Planter’s Training - Fall 2023**

Here in South Georgia, we are seizing the opportunity to start new things for new people in new places. We are seeing a resurgence of grassroots efforts among our laity to dive deeply into disciple-making using new models for church planting like home churches, fresh expressions and more. Can you imagine what it will be like in a few years when laity across the conference will be engaged in leading discipleship efforts across the conference? These discipleship groups and home churches will be able to meet in all kinds of places, made up of all kinds of people. Coming up on July 22, we will have an informational zoom session to find out more about an online Lay Planter’s Course we will be offering this Fall to interested laity. Coming to the meeting doesn’t commit you to the course; it’s an opportunity to hear more about it. [Learn more](#)

### **Annual Eagles Retreat - Oct. 16-18**

The Eagles, the retired ministers and spouses of South Georgia, have set their annual retreat for October 16-18, 2023, at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons. This year’s program and presentations will focus on World War II. Participants will hear interesting and informative presentations about the beginning and the end of the war in the Pacific from a guest speaker traveling from Orlando, FL. Registration and room check-in begins on Monday, October 16 at 4:00 pm. Dinner will be served between 5:30-7:00 pm. The retreat will conclude on Wednesday, October 18 with lunch. Register by calling Epworth at (912) 638-8688 (ask to

speak to Trice Roberts). Invite a friend or family member to come with you for this retreat for good food, fellowship, and fun. If you have questions, please contact David Tart at 229-300-8805 or [revdtart@bellsouth.net](mailto:revdtart@bellsouth.net).



## Resource Roundup – August 2023

### 5 Tips for Writing Letters that Inspire Generosity

It is hard to find one of our churches that doesn't have any anxiety about the future, both in terms of membership and financial support for local mission and ministry. [Read about how a simple handwritten letter can inspire generosity within your congregation.](#)

### Save time and multiply your marketing creativity with ChatGPT

(UMCom) ChatGPT is all the rage at the moment, with many people giving it funny prompts, such as requesting responses in Shakespearean dialect, while marketers use it to craft content that would often take half a day to write. Jeremy Steele, UMCom's resident tech guru, guides us on how to use ChatGPT to check off tasks and give us time that can be better used elsewhere. [Read more](#) | [Watch a screencast](#)

### Using tech safely in kids' ministry

Technology is everywhere, and tomorrow's generation won't know a world without it. Here are three ways to use technology in your kids' ministry safely and effectively. This article covers topics such as obtaining parental permission, teaching students about online safety and using digital tools to make children's ministry easier. Discover how digital tools can make Bible study and Scripture memorization fun for kids, and how social media can build a stronger sense of community among families in your ministry. [Read more](#)

### Bring real people into real church with social media

Have you ever considered how churches can leverage the power of social media recommendations to reach a wider audience? Here are seven practical ways to encourage congregants to share their positive experiences with their social networks, from asking them to check in and post during services to creating tweetable quotes and Instagrammable slides. [Read more](#)

### Make your next fundraiser a hit!

Raising money can be challenging at times. However you set up your fundraising activity, it is important that you develop a solid strategy and put plenty of effort into marketing to maximize impact. [Read more](#)

### Grants available for ethnic churches

The deadline is Sept. 10 for local ethnic United Methodist churches to apply for grants of up to \$10,000. Racial Ethnic Local Church Concerns grants may be used for leadership training, small groups, worship, stewardship and spiritual formation. New programs will be given priority in the selection process. [Read press release](#)

### United Methodist Publishing House Resources for the South Georgia Conference!

Whether there are faithful people in the South Georgia Conference who are beginning again, continuing their journey after a season of disorientation, grief, and loss, or just want to strengthen their commitment to our tradition, Amplify Media (a streaming resource from Cokesbury) is offering free resources for you and all continuing United Methodists at <https://amplifymedia.com/amplify-your-commitment-to-beumc/>.



## Retired Clergy Birthdays – August 2023

8/05 – Gordon Dukes: 126 Nelson Ave.; Garden City, GA 31408  
8/05 – Joe Romigh: 3055 Cabernet Court; Cumming, GA 30041  
8/06 – Rick Holt: 286 Knoll Rd.; Thomasville, GA 31757  
8/07 – Wayne Anthony: 5830 Wiltshire Dr.; Columbus, GA 31909  
8/07 – Ricky Varnell: 11025 Sunbury Rd.; Claxton, GA 30417  
8/08 – Jim Nelson: 3584 Hidden Acres Dr.; Atlanta, GA 30340  
8/09 – Creede Hinshaw: 2924 Hillandale Circle S; Macon, GA 31204  
8/15 – Nathan Godley: 322 E. Oglethorpe Ave.; Savannah, GA 31401  
8/15 – Charles Houston, Jr.: 505 Fort King George Dr.; Darien, GA 31305  
8/16 – Dick Reese: 6593 Patriot Dr.; Columbus, GA 31909  
8/17 – D. Eugene Pollett: 30 Branson Mill Dr. NW; Cartersville, GA 30120  
8/19 – Jim Giddens: 4 Cottenham Circle; Savannah, GA 31411  
8/19 – Jeffery Seeley: 3301 Stinsonville Rd.; Macon, GA 31204  
8/19 – John H. Stephens: 881 Nesbitt Rd.; Pavo, GA 31778  
8/20 – Cleo Gilchrist: 108 Easy St.; Dublin, GA 31021  
8/20 – Dave Hanson: 106 George T. Morris Cir.; St. Simons Island, GA 31522  
8/20 – Bev King: 140 Long Pines Circle; East Dublin, GA 31027  
8/21 – John Eckert: 237 Bartholomew Blvd.; Jeffersonville, IN 47130  
8/22 – Jesse France: 514 I.G. Lanier Rd.; Pembroke, GA 31321  
8/22 – John Powell: 3016 Gin House Rd.; Sylvania, GA 30467  
8/22 – Steve Vinson: 3212 Norcrest Dr.; Oklahoma City, OK 73121-1842  
8/23 – Derek Hobbs: 1708 Sisters Ferry Rd.; Clyn, GA 31303  
8/23 – Joe Johnston: 2109 W. Gramercy Dr.; Green Valley, AZ 85622  
8/24 – Jim Burgess, III: 661 East Plum St.; Jesup, GA 31546  
8/24 – Sam Lamback, Jr.: 821 Wesleyan Dr.; Macon, GA 31210  
8/25 – Charles Puryear: 106 Sandra St.; Thomasville, GA 31792  
8/25 – Elliott Sams: 6400 Poplar Ave.; Memphis, TN 38197  
8/26 – Ashley Randall: 801 Silver Leaf Dr.; Winston-Salem, NC 27103  
8/28 – David Carter: 102 Rivoli Oaks Circle; Macon, GA 31210  
8/28 – Robert Clark: 2022 E Pinetree Blvd.; Thomasville, GA 31792  
8/30 – Jenny Jackson-Adams: 17 Lands End Dr.; Greensboro, NC 27408  
8/30 – Hall Grimmett: 6625 Seminole Road; Richland, GA 31825  
8/31 – Willie Beasley: 4451 Mahan Dr.; Valdosta, GA 31632

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### Obituary: Rose Bullard Willis

Rose Bullard Willis of Thomasville passed away peacefully on Sunday afternoon, July 30, 2023. She was born on July 4, 1930, in Lumberton, North Carolina to Elton and Letha (Bedsole) Bullard. Growing up in Fayetteville, Rose graduated high school after 11th grade and attended Mars Hill College where she obtained an associates degree. She went on to Wake Forest University earning her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and receiving her teaching certification.

Her family, her church family, and service to others were of paramount importance to Rose. She married M. Burns Willis on June 10, 1952, and they moved to New York City where she worked at Columbia University

while he attended Union Theological Seminary. Her children and grandchildren remember her wonderful cooking skills and how her special meals were a highlight of every family gathering. The family could count on “THE CAKE” every Christmas!

As a United Methodist for seventy years and a minister’s wife, Rose shared her faith and served numerous churches throughout the South Georgia Conference in many meaningful ways including singing in the choir, teaching Sunday School, serving in the United Methodist Women’s various ministries, and organizing and providing meals with the Bereavement Ministry. In 2007, she received the Quiet Disciple Award from her beloved United Methodist Women’s organization.

In the community Rose enjoyed being a volunteer for over ten years with the Archbold Hospital Auxiliary Volunteers. She was often seen assisting patient families at the front desk of the hospital.

Rose’s passion was life-long learning and teaching. She loved literature and reading. Her family and friends could always anticipate receiving an enriching and inspiring book as gifts. She received a Master’s degree from Georgia College in 1979 in English Education. She taught high school English and Literature in Washington, Laurens, and Peach Counties.

Rose and Burns returned to Thomasville where Burns completed his ministry of forty years as a United Methodist pastor. They have lived in Thomasville and made it their retirement home for thirty-five years.

Rose is survived by her husband, Rev. M. Burns Willis; her brother, Herbert Bullard (Judy) of Durham, NC; daughters, Lisa Willis Salveter (Dan) of Thomasville, Jennifer Willis Payne (Weldon) of Dublin, GA, and Marsha Willis Phipps (Richard) of Manor, PA; seven grandchildren, Natalie Salveter, Chris Salveter, Caroline Payne, Joseph Payne, McKenna Phipps Bonato (Jared), Abby Phipps and Matthew Phipps.



**Obituary: Rev. Albert E. Clarke**

Rev. Albert E. Clarke of Atlanta, minister in both the north and south Georgia conferences of the United Methodist Church, passed away on July 28, 2023. He was born February 15, 1936.

Dr. Clarke received his BA degree from Emory University in 1957, Master of Divinity from Candler School of Theology in 1960 and Doctor of Ministry from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. During his senior year at Emory, he was elected vice-president of the student senate. He was married to the former Elizabeth Anne Stuckey (who preceded him in death in 2016) in 1960 and they had one son, Alan, who is an attorney. Dr. Clarke is survived by his son and son-in-law, Jeffery Brown, of North Topsail Beach, NC, one brother, Tol Clarke (Patricia) of Macon, nieces and nephews.

Dr. Clarke served on the board of counselors of Oxford College of Emory University for more than 20 years and received the distinguished alumni award from Oxford. In 1999, he was distinguished as a permanent counselor at Oxford College. In 2008 he received an award for 40 years of continuous giving to Emory University. At his fiftieth Emory College reunion he was named a member of the Corpus Cordis Aureum of Emory University.

In 1985 Dr. Clarke received the Freedoms Foundation Award from Valley Forge, PA. Boards and agencies on which he served included chairman of the North Atlanta Counseling Board, chairman of the Marietta District Council on Ministries of the United Methodist Church and the Atlanta Board of Urban Ministries. Dr. Clarke served as fund raiser for years for the World Methodist Evangelism Board. He also served as a



member of the “friends of evangelism” for the world Methodist Evangelism Institute of Emory University and its development committee, and was a member of the District Board of Ordained Ministry in the Atlanta Board of Ministry.

Dr. Clarke was best known for his work in pastoral care. Many called him a visionary in this field. He worked untiringly as a volunteer for the Boy Scouts of America during the 12 years he served as a minister at Peachtree Road United Methodist Church. According to Scout leaders, he held the record in the Atlanta area in training Boy Scouts in the “God and Church” award. He continued his work with the Scouts in his retirement years.

Dr. Clarke served six United Methodist Churches in the Atlanta area: St. Mark, Peachtree Road, Glenn Memorial, Sandy Springs, Northside and St. James.

Funeral services will be held at Peachtree Road United Methodist Church on Saturday, August 5 at 2:00 pm. Dr. Bill Britt, Dr. James Cantrell and Rev. Julie Wright will officiate. Visitation will be 6-8pm at H.M. Patterson & Son, Arlington Chapel in Sandy Springs. Memorial gifts may be made to Peachtree Road United Methodist Church, 3180 Peachtree Road, Atlanta, GA 30305; Oxford College of Emory University, 801 Emory street, oxford, GA 30054; or World Methodist evangelism, Candler School of theology, 1531 Dickey drive, Atlanta, GA 30322.

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## Scripture Readings – August 15 edition

### August 20

#### *Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A*

- [Genesis 45:1-15](#)
- [Psalm 133](#)
- [Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32](#)
- [Matthew 15:\(10-20\) 21-28](#)

### August 27

#### *Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A*

- [Exodus 1:8-2:10](#)
- [Psalm 124](#)
- [Romans 12:1-8](#)
- [Matthew 16:13-20](#)

### September 3

#### *Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A*

- [Exodus 3:1-15](#)
- [Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b](#)
- [Romans 12:9-21](#)
- [Matthew 16:21-28](#)