

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – NOVEMBER 17 EDITION

Hunters keep Vienna UMC's pantry stocked with venison

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

Deer are a big deal in Dooly County.

They're a big deal at Vienna United Methodist Church, too. The church's three freezers are packed full of ground venison, and its food pantry's two freezers are also fully stocked with the meat.

Venison is a vital part of the church's food ministry, which serves between 40 and 75 families each month.

Every third Tuesday, cars line up to receive groceries, toiletries, and a few pounds of venison.

Locals appreciate having the lean, nutritious protein, said Vienna UMC pastor Rev. Jerry Akin.

"I've never had anyone tell me to keep the venison," he said.

Area hunters keep the church's freezers stocked pretty much year-round with the deer they harvest and donate during hunting season. So far, just one month into firearm season, 19 deer have been donated. Last year, 28 deer were donated, and Rev. Akin expects that number to be surpassed this season.

The bulk of the food pantry's meat supply comes from the donated venison, says director Sharon Wilkin, a member of Vienna UMC.

"We live in an area where we have lots of deer, and we have men and women from all over the southeast who come here and hunt," she said.

Often, the hunters aren't interested in keeping the meat, so the food pantry arranged for a local processor, Huey Deer Processing in Cordele, to receive it, process it into ground venison, and freeze it. The church only pays a nominal fee for the processing.

"Usually the deer meat we're given is enough to last the entire year," she said. "It's an absolute blessing. As we all know, meat is very expensive, so any meat the clients don't have to pay for is great. They love the venison; they ask for it!"

An avid hunter, Raymond King donated his first deer of the season to the food bank.

"They need it, and they like it," he said of the venison. "I don't eat it like I used to, and I like to donate it to the food bank."

King, also a Vienna UMC member, said he doesn't hunt as often as he used to, but what he harvests he donates. His nephew and several of his friends and fellow hunters also often donate their deer.

Each deer can yield 50 pounds or more of venison, and the 1,500 pounds or so of venison is hugely helpful to the community, Rev. Akin said.

“The mission of the church is to be here for the community, not just the people within our church walls, but to actually get beyond the church building and serve the community,” he said. “There are families in need, and we want to do what we can to help.”

Brooklet UMC’s music ministry gets creative to encourage community

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

If you drive through downtown Brooklet, you may catch an impromptu porch concert put on by Marjorie and John Frazier.

In mid-October, John, playing guitar, and Marjorie, both members of Brooklet United Methodist Church, surprised neighbors and passers-by with a stirring and heartfelt rendition of “Precious Lord, Take My Hand.”

The Fraziers, Brooklet UMC choir members, also filmed themselves and sent the video to music director Mandy Mitchell. Mitchell used the Frazier’s video in the church’s live and online worship services and posted it to the church’s [Facebook page](#).

It’s one way the church’s music ministry has reimagined itself in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

Like most – if not all – South Georgia congregations, Brooklet UMC ceased in-person worship services in March. The choir wasn’t able to gather and still isn’t meeting in person, and it’s been a challenge to rethink the music ministry, Mitchell said.

But music is important, and with a lot of prayer, creativity, and flexibility, the congregation has embraced this new reality.

Mitchell reached out to choir members and asked them to use their phones to film themselves playing the piano, singing, or playing instruments. Videos began to fill her inbox, and with help from her husband and Josh Burnham, Brooklet UMC’s worship leader, she used them in the church’s two worship services.

“It’s about sharing your gifts, and that’s what we asked them to do, to share,” Mitchell said. “And who knows how God will use it.”

And while the congregation began meeting in-person again on June 21, many still aren’t ready or feel comfortable to be in a crowd and choose to worship online, said pastor Rev. Chip Strickland. Incorporating the submitted videos into the worship services connects those who are worshipping in person and those who are worshipping virtually.

“It’s a special time that we can stay in touch with folks who aren’t there in person with us,” he said. “It’s not quite the same, but it’s got us back together, and that’s the main thing.”

While there have certainly been challenges, Mitchell said there have been positives to the pandemic, too. Several church and choir members who hadn't previously volunteered have offered to serve because they want to see ministries they care about flourish and continue.

"It's been a tough road, but it's been a journey worth fighting for," she said. "I just can't imagine a church without music, without a way of lifting praises."

Virtual Thanksgiving Agape Meal planned for Nov. 22

Bishop Lawson and Mrs. Sherrill Bryan invite the South Georgia Conference to join them in a virtual Thanksgiving Agape Meal at 6 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 22.

Intended to be a time of Christian fellowship and an opportunity to gather together virtually, the Thanksgiving Agape Meal will include music, guided prayer, time for contemplation, and personal witness.

"We held a conference-wide Agape Meal last spring and I was thrilled at the overwhelming response of our annual conference," Bishop Bryan said. "Many participants told me this experience gave them the sense of connection to others that they had been missing. So now I am eagerly anticipating how this Agape Meal will unite us to celebrate Thanksgiving in a way that is deeply meaningful."

In his latest [Advocate column](#), Bishop Bryan writes that, "Thanksgiving is about survival ... With all that is weighing so heavily on us these days, may this be our resolve: in South Georgia, we will help each other and our communities survive by being Alive Together at the Table."

The Thanksgiving Agape Meal is, planners say, an opportunity for South Georgia United Methodists to gather around their respective tables and the communal South Georgia "table" as one family, united in Christ.

"Thanksgiving is one of my favorite seasons of the year," Mrs. Bryan said. "I am especially excited to invite each of you into our home for this special celebration. There is a place for you at the table. We're planning some surprises for you, too."

Introduced to John Wesley by the Moravians, Agape Meals became a significant part of early Methodism. And at a time when the church is still somewhat scattered because of the coronavirus pandemic, the virtual Thanksgiving Agape Meal will hopefully help South Georgia United Methodists feel more connected to Christ and one another.

Lasting about 30 minutes, the Agape Meal unites Christians in table fellowship using bread, cup, scripture, and prayer for encouragement and support. Participants are encouraged to prepare their favorite meal or snack to eat during the service.

“This is the perfect opportunity to reach out to friends, relatives, and neighbors wherever they may live,” Bishop Bryan said. “Share the link and invite them to a unique experience of Thanksgiving. On Sunday, November 22, at 6 p.m., we will be Alive Together at the Table.”

Visit www.sgaumc.org/agapemeal for more information and to join the meal.

Giving thanks

There's no question 2020 has been a challenging year. But we still have much for which to give thanks. We asked you, our South Georgia UM family and friends, what you're thankful for during this season of giving thanks. We are thankful for our wonderful [#sgaumc](https://www.sgaumc.org) family! Here's what you shared with us:

I am thankful for the new friends I have made by participating in online events and studies.
Karen Forrester, Bainbridge First UMC

I am thankful for all the volunteers and ERTs that have worked tirelessly this season to be a caring Christian presence in the aftermath of disasters. Even a worldwide pandemic can't stop us from being the hands and feet of Christ! *Kelly Crane, Trinity UMC, Savannah*

Thankful that my faith overcomes fear in uncertain times. *JoAnne Lewis, Lone Hill UMC*

I am thankful for my family and friends and God's blessings. *Joyce Suttles, Douglas First UMC*

We are thankful for our wonderful family!! That includes our beautiful Powersville/Wesley Chapel UMC family! We are so blessed to count them as ours!! We thank God every day for allowing us to be their pastoral family!! *Kathryn Beck, Powersville/Wesley Chapel UMC*

I am thankful for so much this year! Thankful that we got extra time with our 2020 graduating senior as he is doing his first year of college online; thankful that our daughter was able to have a marching band season; thankful that all of my friends and family have remained healthy through this season; thankful that through technology we still get to hear wisdom from our spiritual leaders in a time when we need their wisdom most! *Connie Howard Walker, Richmond Hill UMC*

I'm thankful for the South GA Conference!!! *Rev. Larry Stricklin, pastor of Morgans Chapel UMC*

My family, my health, and the Lord Jesus Christ in my midst continually! *Barbara Neal Mullinax*

The Moore Methodist Museum celebrates the season with nativity collection

By Anne Packard

The [Moore Methodist Museum](#), known for its extensive, international nativity collection usually on display Thanksgiving weekend through January, will this year celebrate the season with an even larger collection, thanks to the generous donation of more than 100 nativities by The Upper Room Museum in Nashville, Tenn., which closed in January, 2020.

Anne Packard, curator, and Cindy Angelich, assistant curator, have been busy cataloging and photographing the new additions and are excited to share them with museum visitors. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, however, the Moore Methodist Museum is closed to the public, but Packard and Angelich have planned a virtual display so that people can enjoy the nativities from the comfort of their own homes.

Each day, from November 29 through Christmas Eve, the Museum will post a photograph of a nativity and an accompanying scripture on its [Facebook page](#) so all may continue to participate in this joyous celebration of the Advent season. Each nativity reflects a unique perspective of the Holy Family based on its cultural traditions and native materials. Enjoy nativities created from recycled paper in Vietnam, Indonesian nativities made of balsa wood, and Kenyan angels comprised of banana stems, to name a few.

Packard and Angelich invite readers to like the Museum's Facebook page, [Moore Methodist Museum](#), to enjoy these daily reminders of God's love and grace. They look forward to welcoming visitors in person in 2021 to experience the newly created Nativities Room.

Join me this week for a virtual play and a virtual Agape Meal

**FROM THE BISHOP
R. LAWSON BRYAN**

I hope you will take advantage of two virtual opportunities this week. First, you can attend an excellent virtual play based on C. S. Lewis' book, "The Great Divorce." Second, I hope you will join me for a South Georgia Thanksgiving Agape Meal.

The Great Divorce

The virtual play is presented by the Fellowship for Performing Arts, a non-profit New York-based company producing theater from a Christian worldview. They are offering free presentations of "The Great Divorce" through November 18. Sherrill and I saw the 4 p.m. production this past Sunday. It is excellent. There is no cost, but you do have to register in order to receive the link to the play. For full details, visit fpatheatre.com.

Thanksgiving Agape Meal

Please join Sherrill and me, along with others from South Georgia, for a Thanksgiving Agape Meal on Sunday, November 22, at 6 p.m. This conference-wide event will unite the traditional observance of Thanksgiving and the Moravian Agape Meal (aka “Lovefeast”). It will include music, scripture, witness, and prayer led by voices from around South Georgia. The service will last about 40 minutes and will conclude with the blessing of the meal. After the service, we will eat our meal with glad and generous hearts knowing that we truly are Alive Together at the Table.

We held an Agape Meal last spring, and I was thrilled at the overwhelming response of our annual conference. Many participants told me this experience gave them the sense of connection to others that they had been missing. So now I am eagerly anticipating how this Agape Meal will unite us to celebrate Thanksgiving in a way that is deeply meaningful.

Visit www.sgaumc.org/agapemeal for more information and to join the meal.

Please share this with your friends, relatives, co-workers, and neighbors. Each of these events is an opportunity to spread the Gospel of Christ at a time when the world needs Good News.

Alive Together at the Table,
R. Lawson Bryan

Sacred Rhythms, Part 2: Being Sent

OUR CONNECTION MATTERS

ALLISON LINDSEY

“The call of Jesus is a call to a two-beat rhythm of life: being with him and being sent from him.” – Sheridan Voysey

[Last month we began thinking about rhythms and how foundational they are within our everyday lives](#) – as well as how easily they can be disrupted. Using the Voysey quote as a springboard, we explored the first part of the two-beat rhythm: “being with him,” discovering that developing intentional sacred rhythms (using spiritual practices) allows us to encounter and experience God each and every day. These “practices” give us a framework through which to carve out and create space to be attuned to Him, developing spiritual muscles and fostering God’s work of transformation.

Our faith is personal, but it is not meant to be private. Yes, there is more to our faith journey! We are also called to love our neighbors and share our faith. So now, we lean in to unpack the second part of the two-beat rhythm: “being sent from Him.”

In a few short weeks, we will begin the season of Advent in which we marvel at God’s big **reach** to **reveal** himself to us through sending his son, Jesus Christ, and offering the world salvation along with the opportunity to **respond** to this gift. The scriptures are filled with many examples of God sending others to accomplish His work, but stop for a moment and think about these questions:

- Do you ever think of yourself as being sent from God each day into the world for His purposes?
- Do you see yourself as being sent daily, or do you think of the word “sending” for experiences like going on a mission trip?
- What difference might it make in your life if you truly believed that you are being sent by God to the places and relationships in your life?

There is a significant mind shift from “sending” to “being sent.” The focus shifts from God onto each of us. I read a devotional years ago lifting up the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) in which Jesus’ instructions are clearly to GO. The author added that with this commissioning we need permission to stay. Let that sink in for a moment. This insight has certainly stayed with me. Sometimes going may be to far away places, but I think of these instructions as “wherever you go”: across the street, to work, into our communities and/or beyond. Wherever we go, we should be striving to fulfill our commissioning to make disciples.

I hope you will remember the three words from above: Reach, Reveal and Respond. These three words are, for me, the pendulum in approaching being with Him and being sent from Him.

Reach: God calls us to love our neighbors. How can we reach out to those who God puts in our path and lays on our heart today?

Reveal: God calls us to be salt and light to flavor and brighten our world. How are our words and actions giving others a glimpse and revealing Jesus today?

Respond: God calls us to invite others to respond to His gift of salvation. Do we give others opportunities to respond by sharing our hope, inviting others to church or a Bible study, or giving others an opportunity to serve?

If we connect this back to the first part of our quote, through the spiritual disciplines we reach out to God and in turn God reveals himself to us, always giving us an opportunity to respond to Him.

The familiar instructions when flying on a commercial plane come to mind: “Should the cabin lose pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the overhead area. Please place the mask over your own mouth and nose before assisting others.” As we prioritize being **with** God, we are then equipped and empowered to be sent **from** Him out into the world for His purpose! Now that is a glorious rhythm.

Mind shifts are not always easy, but when that “ah-ha” moment occurs, it is powerful. Never doubt that we are in fact being sent from Him. In John 20:21, Jesus tells the disciples, “As the Father has sent me, so I also send you.” We remember that all authority under heaven has been given to him and he says, “Therefore, GO.” (Matthew 28:18-19)

Where or to whom are you being sent today?

Allison Lindsey is the director of Connectional Ministries. She has a passion for the local church and its people. Contact her at allison@sgaumc.com.

Responsive Love

Fall Quarter: Love for One Another

Unit 3: Godly Love Among Believers

Sunday school lesson for the week of Nov. 22, 2020

By Dr. D. Craig Rikard

Background Scripture: Acts 4:32-5:11

Key Verse: All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own but, they shared everything they had. (Acts 4:32)

Lesson Aims:

- To help us understand the expectations, beliefs, experiences of the early church.
- To ask us to question the issue of selfishness, and the theological issues of sin and punishment.
- To consider the question of how the church treats obvious sin and creates a very poor witness for Christ. Do we have a course of action? Should we?

Context

The second coming of Jesus must always be viewed as a major expectation of the early believers and church. Many, if not a majority, took Jesus literally about “seeing his return.” Thus, they expected Jesus at any moment. They expected him daily. I doubt there was any belief in the early church that Jesus would return in a year, much less thousands of years later. We read Scripture in 2020, 2,000 years later. Thus, it is difficult for us to imagine being a member of the church, which had no formal bible and depended almost solely on the epistles of the apostles, especially Paul. Consequently, it sounds drastic to us to “sell everything, throw it in a pot, and distribute according to need.” There was no need to worry about money and possessions. Upon Jesus’ return they were useless. However, it is important to remember care for the poor and suffering was a major concern of Jesus’. Therefore, the sharing of possessions had always been a moral concern of Judaism, and especially Jesus. However now, the entire church was united in participating in community sharing and helping another.

Also, Paul is often criticized as chauvinistic man and a supporter of slavery. If judged by us in 2020, he was both. However, we must remember that the role of women was part of an oppressive system, as was slavery. Paul saw no need to rid the culture or attack these institutions. Why? Jesus was coming at any time and would establish a kingdom of justice and mercy. Also,

why invite conflict with the government and the power structures? There was already enough conflict just over their existence. As time passed without Jesus' coming, the entire idea of "shared money and property" became difficult, and issues regarding marriage, women and slavery began to challenge Christianity. However, Paul listened to the Holy Spirit and actually elevated the status of women. The scripture: "In Christ, there is no male or female" is attributed to Paul. This is a very radical change in the importance of women and culture's treatment of women. It still sounds as if women were never treated as equals. Looking backward from today, they weren't. Yet, from the role and status of women in the first century to Paul's later letters, women receive growing respect. Slavery remained for a long span of time, especially through the indentured servant system.

Our lesson is related to this expectation of the second coming of Jesus.

Luke is one of few Gentiles who has writings accepted as inspired scripture. His gospel is often called the gospel of compassion, or the gospel of the Holy Spirit. He is a physician with a loving heart. He was a close companion of Paul and witnessed much of the history of the early church and especially the ministry of Paul and the disciples. Therefore, he offers us what is considered the only historical book in the N.T. That is, it has the intent of telling the story as it unfolded. Over the years, his book of Acts has helped the early church understand who they are in Christ, those who paid highly for the church's life, and is especially important to us in 2020 in remembering who we are and from where we've come.

The story our lesson focuses upon today is unsettling, and honestly, can be hard to embrace. The deaths of two who held back on their sharing seems a rather severe reaction to the sin of selfishness. Read verses 32-35.

How does the second coming of Jesus effect the beliefs and actions of the church we attend? Or does it? Do you believe the church today has a clear understanding of our history and our calling? If so, why, and if not, why? Does your church have a united heart and mind to tend to the needs of the poor and suffering?

In Acts 5:1, the narrative of Ananias and Sapphira begins. True, it is a story of selfishness, yet, it is also a story of deception. Though we should not rank sin – sin is sin – it is also important to acknowledge that one sin may lead to a multitude of sins that follow. As an example, I may speak harshly and hatefully to an individual, and certainly my words cut and wound them. However, if I speak that way in front of others, I have hurt and embarrassed that person, I have spoken mean-spirited words that help no one near, and I have hurt my witness that I am a follower of Jesus. My action effects many who look to me and other Christians in their own search of faith. So, one word was a sin, the same word spoken publicly is a sin with far greater effect.

On the surface it appears that Peter and the leadership of the early church are angry and confront Ananias over his selfishness. His holding back of money from the sale of property will impact

many that are in need. Yet, it seems that Peter and the leadership are just as angry over Ananias' attempt to deceive as he attempts to keep a portion for himself. Keeping the money was selfish for Ananias, but as a Christian he had lied to the Holy Spirit, for he lied to the church. If his actions go without confrontation, the body of Christ, who depend upon the witness and teaching of the disciples and the leadership of the early church, will over time make such behavior acceptable.

Ananias' behavior reveals a flaw in his understanding of God. He actually believed he had the power to hide his selfishness from God. Perhaps he believed God didn't really mind or care. He is committing a grave sin. He is making God in his image, violating the Ten Commandments that read, "Thou shalt have no graven images or likenesses." Ananias is creating an image of God that is not all powerful or all knowing.

When Peter accused him of attempting to lie to God in the presence of the early church, Ananias immediately dies. In 5b Luke states that "fear" seized the church. Luke, the physician, does not write that God made Ananias die. There is a great probability that Ananias had a heart condition and the exposure of his sin to the Christian community created a fatal heart attack. However, this doesn't explain his wife's immediate death. We must leave the cause of their deaths to the wisdom of God.

We must ask, "How would the early church respond if God did nothing?" "How seriously would they take sin and accountability?" If there is no consequence, a door is opened to commit almost any sin without worry. Remember, the early church has no bible. They depend upon the apostles' teaching, the collective faith of the church, and their own personal relationship with Christ. The immediate death of Ananias creates a "fear of God" throughout the community. The fear of God does not mean God is unloving and harsh in judgement. It means to respect and acknowledge the holiness of God.

Can you describe the ways a Christian today might still participate in dishonesty and deception? What do you think caused Ananias' death? What would occur today in the mindset and heart of the church if sins that hurt the community are not acknowledged?

In verse 7, Sapphira did not receive the news for several hours. She entered the community about three hours later. She was unaware of his death and that he had already been buried. Peter immediately gives her an opportunity to be honest and godly. Instead she lied, revealing that she and Ananias conspired to be selfish. The accusation here is slightly different. She is accused of "testing" the Spirit. The easiest manner in which to understand testing God is to imagine knowing an act is a sin, and knowing God will be displeased, yet do it anyway. I know that sounds like a shallow explanation, but essentially that is what Ananias and Sapphira did. They dared to put God's holiness to the test in order to benefit in some way. They are asking, "if we deceive the church, will God overlook it, or count our generous gift more than enough to earn God's acceptance?"

Sadly, Sapphira dies immediately following Peter’s confrontation, as did Ananias. Let us seriously consider the fact that within a very limited time she learns her husband is dead and buried after being exposed for holding back on his giving and lying to the church and the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, can we even imagine how forceful Peter could be when angry? Remember, he is compulsive and has just emerged from the shame of denying Jesus and abandoning him. The resurrected Christ had given him forgiveness, restoration, and a new beginning. Still, he wasn’t the most patient man. His compulsiveness and impatience were parts of his personality. I don’t think I would want to stand before him after attempting to test the Holy Spirit.

Again, her death, like the death of Ananias, is difficult to understand. It sounds like a harsh judgement for her action. It sounds like she and Ananias “reported” the amount of their gift after making a major sacrifice in selling their property for the church. Without doubt, their deception was rooted in the desire to achieve great respect, status, and influence within the faith community. There also were most likely other dynamics at work in this experience which Luke did not record. We must take the narrative as it is and place the experience within the context of the first Christians, still steeped in Judaism, living under the government of the powerful Roman empire and again, the expectation of Jesus’ immanent return.

In conclusion, we leave this narrative learning that sin is always serious and always creates destructive consequences. Though the deaths unsettle us, the important truth that God is loving and “holy” is ageless and applies to us today as it did the early church. God is indeed changeless.

Prayer

Almighty God, we are deeply thankful for your steadfast love and for the power of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to find and be our better self. Thank you for eyes to see the value and need of another, the ears to hear their cries, and all gifts that help us to encourage others. May we become witnesses of Jesus’ love in an often cold world. Empower us to see all that is before us as holy ground, upon which all your children live. Help us to acknowledge the incredible connection we share with your children in every time and place. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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Impartial Love

Fall Quarter: Love for One Another
Unit 3: Godly Love Among Believers

Sunday school lesson for the week of Nov. 29, 2020
By Dr. D. Craig Rikard

Background Scripture: James 2

Key Verse: Listen, my dear brothers and sisters; Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? (James 2:5)

Lesson Aims

1. To help the listener to understand the destructive power of partiality.
2. To help the listener realize that favoritism cannot coexist with godly love.
3. To allow us to ask ourselves, “Do I practice favoritism?” Does my church practice favoritism?”

The disciple John is often referred to as “The Eagle.” Using that analogy, I would refer to James, the half-brother of Jesus, as a man gifted with eagle eyes. It is obvious that James is a man with two feet planted on the ground, gazing at life through the eyes of faith. He is able to see what many overlook. His writing reveals a man sharply focused on living for Christ in day-to-day life. It is obvious that he sincerely desires to make the ground upon which he stands holy ground, whether he is in a community of believers or walking the streets of a village.

James has a fascinating testimony. As a child and young man, he lived very much like Jesus. Jesus was his brother, as Nazareth would believe, and he was second oldest boy. He was a very devout Jew. He was called by some “James the camel kneed,” for he prayed so often and long on his knees. In the beginning he did not believe Jesus, his brother, was Messiah. He committed his life to Jesus as Messiah *after the resurrection*. James’ life is one of great proofs of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. It would be a major step to move a few steps away from Judaism toward believing your brother was God in the flesh and Messiah. James was not a man easily swayed to lay aside that which he strongly believed. Only seeing his crucified and buried brother conquer death and appear later as the resurrected Lord could move James to believe. Also, as a devout Jew he would have held the Sabbath as very sacred. Many devout Jews would rather lay down their weapons and die in battle than violate the Sabbath. The only reason James could ever change his Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday would be some of kind of major divine action had occurred. The divine action was the resurrected Jesus. Only God could conquer death.

James became an early apostle and leader in the Jerusalem Counsel, the first leadership in the new faith. Therefore, when he spoke, early Christians listened. James never totally abandoned Judaism. He had lived a legalistic life in order to please God. He would have tried passionately to obey the Law of Moses. Though obeying the Law was no longer the means to become a child of God and entering the Kingdom of God, living a disciplined, obedient life was as important as ever. James believed, as did all the apostles, that one was saved by grace. However, grace did not mean that one was to abandon living an obedient, holy life. James addresses the reality that we can embrace both. Grace moves us toward Christ, and obedience moves us toward holiness of life.

James would later die for his faith. Tradition maintains he was taken to a high point in the temple and thrown to the ground. Miraculously he survived. The angry anti-Christian mob then attempted to stone him, but he still clung to life. They then collected clubs, the kind that were often used to beat dust out of carpets, and beat him to death. Once he gave his life to Jesus no disciple was any more faithful and obedient than James.

Christian Love Confronts Favoritism and Partiality

I am saddened by the fact that a large number of clergy have experienced partiality in a congregation. I invited an African American pastor to sing at our Christmas banquet. He sang spirituals and hymns from a deep place in his soul. He often moved me to tears at conference events. It was my responsibility to secure someone to be the program at the banquet. When I announced my friend was coming to sing, a group of members told me to cancel him. As a matter of fact, they blocked me allowing him in our buildings simply because he was black. The argument got too heated and I did not want my brother to walk into such resentment. Therefore, several of us rented a banquet hall in a local hotel near the church and sponsored the banquet. To my great surprise almost everyone, even those who passionately opposed his coming, attended. When the powerful program was over, I passed a cup for a love offering. The cup became so filled I had to use a second. A majority of those who were so angry at his coming gave generously. I have learned to never doubt the Holy Spirit's ability to move the heart with godly love. All of our hearts were changed that night. The congregation became an open, welcoming community to all over the following days and years. Had we resisted the call of the Spirit and the power of God's love, something would have died within us as the body of Jesus. Instead, we had experienced the glory of internal resurrection as the heart began to open through a single program of hymns and spirituals. Too many of us have witnessed the destructive power of partiality from some determined not to change.

As a Christian, have you witnessed favoritism within your church? Was the partiality accepted and glossed over, or did someone call attention to it? As an exercise, look within your heart and ask yourself if you have practiced favoritism, treated the wealthy better than the poor, or treated people from a different ethnic background as "less than." You do not need to share with the group unless you feel it productive. Meditate upon how we participated in favoritism and pray. Pray for God to empower us to recognize partiality within our own heart and contemplate on steps to overcome this sin.

Notice the ways favoritism is destructive. Before we practice favoritism, we have to first be judgmental in heart. When we judge, we lessen the value and dignity of another simply because of fleeting wealth. When the fullness of God's Kingdom bursts into our life, our love of wealth will grant us nothing. We will confront the question why we devalued one of his children because they lacked wealth.

Possessing a judgmental spirit implies that we trust in our own judgment over God's. A judgmental spirit fails to acknowledge the depth of love revealed in Christ; Jesus loved us all equally. We actually are ignoring the major commandment Jesus embraced and taught: to love your neighbors as yourself. One of the reasons Jesus was the recipient of the rage of the Pharisees and Sadducees and the upper ruling class in Jerusalem was that he embraced those the powerful shunned. He dared preach that God loved the entire world.

We must be careful not to judge the wealthy as sinful. Some accumulate more wealth during their lives than others. Solomon would say, "That's life." However, wealth should never become an instrument that separates us from one another or causes us to look down on others. Many use their wealth to care for the poor and struggling. James is especially addressing the wealthy who gain their wealth by taking advantage of the most vulnerable, and often do so in the name of God. I have witnessed some who struggled financially who judged the wealthy as ungodly and arrogant. Yet, they did not know those they condemned. They were as guilty of judgment as those who judged the poor to be a bother.

Most of us are familiar with the story in Acts of Peter's vision while resting on the roof in Joppa. Even after his experience at Pentecost, Peter retained an obvious resentment of Gentiles. He did not want "those people" in the church. While resting, God gave Peter a vision of a sheet being lowered from heaven. Upon the sheet were all things that were considered "unclean" according to Judaism. God then informs Peter that what he calls clean is clean. The lesson from this vision was to teach Peter that God had always equally loved the Gentiles, they were not unclean as Peter believed. Furthermore, Peter needed to learn the Gentiles were as dear as the most devout Jewish Christians. Peter left Joppa and journeyed to Cornelius, a respected Gentile. There Peter offered him Christ. I encourage you to read the background Scripture, and especially verse four.

Is your church a welcoming community? Is your church determined to let it be known that all will be genuinely loved and be a part of the family? If not, what can be done to accomplish these acts of godly compassion?

Wealth of the Poor

In this section of the text James appears to "favor" the poor just as he condemns favoritism. However, James isn't defining wealth here as monetary wealth; he defines wealth as "spiritual depth." Why would he claim the poor are richer in faith than the rich? We must not assume he is claiming that the rich do not have good standing with God. God loves all equally, rich and poor. The poor recognize struggle and the frailty of life, for it is a part of their experience. They recognize their dependence on Christ for joy, meaning and for belonging to a loving and supportive faith community.

I worked on mission projects for four consecutive years in a very poor area of Merida. We were helping them build a sanctuary. For years missions were understood as helping people in other countries to live like we do in America. Actually, they taught me more about life, faith and love

than any community. They were truly rich in faith while struggling monetarily. They took care of each other and squeezed more joy out of a day than I have ever witnessed. Wealth and riches are of no consideration when it comes to faith. It is better to be rich in heart. There are wealthy and poor who are very rich in heart.

Does wealth play a role in the way we look at one another? What can we learn about authentic faith from those who struggle financially? What can we learn from the wealthy about faith and compassion?

Blasphemy

Blasphemy has proved to be a confusing biblical term for many, and some have been severely hurt due to misinterpretation. I worked for the Salvation Army during college. One afternoon, a man knocked on our lodge door. He was dressed in the most ragged clothes and had nothing in his possession. He refused to enter. I asked what I might do for him and he answered, "I don't get any help because I blasphemed and I am lost forever." I attempted to engage him in talking but he quietly walked away and I never saw him again. Some believe blaspheme is taking God's name in vain or cursing God. They also believe once they have blasphemed God they can never be saved. This belief emerges from a misreading of the book of Hebrews. First, blaspheme occurs when the light and truth are obvious and we willingly ignore them and pursue an egocentric path. Hebrews 10:26 reads, "If we keep on sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left." In the original language, Hebrews is saying that "as long as we remain in willful sin we cannot be forgiven. Blaspheme is not a single act, it is a *spiritual state*. As long as we remain in *willful sin*, we cannot be forgiven for we refuse to accept God's truth and grace. We blaspheme when we choose to willfully reject what should be obvious. However, once we give our heart to Jesus, abandoning our rejection, all can be forgiven. The continuation of rejecting obvious light and grace leads to what Paul referred to as a hard heart. Therefore, our inability to receive God's forgiveness is not due to God's will but our own. We turn to God and everything becomes new. In reality, all of us have been guilty of blaspheme. I remember clearly wanting little or no part of Christianity. When I did attend church, which until age 17 was rare, I would hear truth and see light. I understood what the preacher was saying. Yet, I had a different life in mind, therefore, I chose to resist God. However, a year later I turned, opened my heart to Christ, and found a new life and purpose. Again, all of us initially probably rejected obvious truth. However, we turned! The arms of God were open as they had been all the time. We just needed to abandon and accept.

It is obvious that people are suffering. People are hungry and alone. We are obviously aware of hurting people! We cannot help the whole world. We are not called to such an impossible task due to our weak humanity. But we are called to help those in our path and give to missions around the world of which we are aware. In some sense we all reject obvious truth. However, we must remember blaspheme is a STATE and not an act. An act may be blasphemous and we not be guilty of blaspheme. This does not mean we can shrug our shoulders over our willful sins,

believing God will overlook it. Remember the lesson concerning Ananias and Saphira. He especially was guilty of believing God would not call him to account for his choice to be more concerned about his own wealth than those who were in need. God doesn't shut us out over a willful sin we commit out of our ignorance. Still, as ignorance gives way to an open heart, we must willfully turn toward God's obvious truth. There is within the biblical reality called blaspheme a sense of mystery. Understanding is a path, a journey. God judges sin out of his love and mercy in his own way. God's will is not always grasped by us. We will understand it as we walk with Christ through the years.

James is addressing a Christian community that is very aware of hurting people yet chooses to ignore them while favoring the wealthy. Our lesson book says blaspheme is a willful insult or slander against God. There is no greater insult than to tell a loving Christ, who has given his all for us, "Not right now," or ignore him altogether. Remember, Jesus taught, "As you have done it to the least of these you have done it unto me."

Again, the Shema

It isn't accidental that we keep running into the Shema. From Deut. 6 we read the "Law of laws." Jesus said there is no law greater. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart soul and strength; and, thy neighbor as thyself." This eternal law is a thread that runs through the books of holy Scripture. Read James 2:8-11. How can we dare ask for forgiveness and not offer it to someone who hurt us? How dare we abuse grace and withhold from our neighbor the love of God!

Take an inventory of yourself. Ask, "Have I ignored or rejected God's call upon my life?" "Have I intentionally avoided or ignored people in need?" "Do I hold a grudge?" How does holding a grudge relate to the Shema?

Conclusion

Again, James is among the initial leaders in the early church, and a devout Jew and keeper of the Mosaic Law. He did not abandon his determination to be faithful to the Law. However, Jesus opened his heart to grace, and grace began to season his faith. Yes, he had two feet planted on the ground, but he had a heart for Jesus and the eternal. Eventually his great faith allowed him to accept tremendous suffering and even death for Christ. Furthermore, in his journey of faith he always heard the cries of the suffering and needy and asked himself, "What would Jesus have me do?" Doing and believing went hand in hand with James, as they should in our Christian life.

Prayer

Almighty God, we give thanks for your great mercy. Your tender, just love has opened our eyes and hearts. We praise you for the gift of "eyes that can see" and "ears that can hear." Grant us the courage to willingly act upon what we believe. Continue to teach us that we are a vital part of

your will to redeem the world, rich and poor, those in high places and those in low places. May we embody Jesus' prayer, "Make us one." In Jesus' name. Amen.

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

That Different Spirit

By Dr. Hal Brady

Not long ago a man audited a doctoral seminar on leadership. One day the professor asked each of the 16 participants in his class to tell the one thing at which they excelled. The man said he dreaded questions like that because he still was not sure of what he did best. And besides, it sounded to him like bragging. But when his turn came all he could think to say was this, "I am best at not quitting."

Now, at first, that answer sounds a little strange, but when you consider all the obstacles we face in life, the power to persist is amazing.

Without question, one of my favorite Old Testament characters is Caleb. The reason is that Caleb had a different spirit. He excelled at not quitting. God said that Caleb had a different spirit. But I'm getting ahead of our story.

Under the direction of God, Moses sent 12 leaders of Israel to spy out the Promised Land. At the end of 40 days, these spies returned to give their report. Ten of the 12 reported that capturing the Promised Land was a total impossibility. The enemy was just too strong and numerous.

But Caleb, one of the two remaining spies, quieted the people and urged, "Let us go up at once and occupy it; for we are well able to overcome it" (Numbers 14:24). That different spirit is truly a blessed thing to behold.

As the late Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick observed, "It is not so much what life brings to us in her hand, as what we bring to life in our spirits that makes the difference between people."

For a moment, let's look at some of the attitudes or spirits that we bring to life, with the hope that all of us will have the Caleb spirit – that different spirit.

First, there is the "can't do" spirit! So where does this "can't do" spirit come from? In one word, the answer is fear.

Now, I'm not talking about healthy fear and there are some of those. But I am talking about those paralyzing fears that stifle us and keep us from moving forward. Instead of fearing God, we fear humankind. Instead of being motivated by the possibility, we are intimidated by the impossibility. Instead of attempting great things for God, we are afraid of the attempt. And instead of living life with creative risk, we often choose to be safe.

Because of fear, a person says, "Come on, let's be realistic. God can do wonderful things, but this is impossible.

Second, there is the “critical of” spirit! Where does this kind of detrimental spirit come from? For sure, one place is a lack of love in the heart.

A mother and her adult daughter were out shopping one day, trying to make the most of a gigantic sale weekend just prior to Christmas. As they went from store to store in the mall, the older woman complained about everything, the crowds, the poor quality of the merchandise, the prices, and her sore feet. After the mother experienced a particularly difficult interaction with a clerk in one department store, she turned to the daughter and said, “I’m never going back to that store again. Did you see that dirty look she gave me?”

The daughter answered, “She didn’t give it to you, mom. You had it when you went in.” A lack of love in the heart.

Third, there is the “possibility willing spirit! This, of course, is the Caleb spirit – that different spirit. The kind of spirit I pray we all have as we continue to move through these uncertain times in which we live.

Just one example of this Caleb spirit will suffice!

I love the story of the 10-year-old boy who was selling pencils door to door in his neighborhood. When an interested adult at one of his houses asked him the reason for selling pencils, he replied, “I want to raise six million dollars to build a new hospital for the city.”

Amazed, the inquiring adult exclaimed, “That’s a mighty big job for just one little boy isn’t it?”

“No,” responded the 10-year-old with a big smile. “I have a friend who’s helping me.”

Perhaps the late Robert H. Schuller expressed it best when he said, “Great people are average people with a different attitude toward impossible situations.”

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).

Prepare

WHAT’S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

ANNE PACKARD

The word “Advent” is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming,” which is a translation of the Greek word *parousia*. Historians believe that from 300-500 AD, advent was a time to prepare new Christians with fasting, prayer, and penance for baptism which would take place during the feast of Epiphany in January. Later, Roman Christians used advent as a time to prepare for Christ’s arrival, but not his original arrival in a manger in Bethlehem. Romans thought of the advent season as a way to prepare for his second coming as judge of the world. It wasn’t until the Middle Ages that Christians specifically linked the advent season to Christmas.

Today, advent is celebrated on the four Sundays prior to Christmas and can be seen as a time of looking back and looking forward. The modern church looks back to the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem just as Israel looked back at the end of the Old Testament on God's deliverance from Egypt. In the same way, the modern church looks forward to Christ's second coming and deliverance from evil as Israel looked forward to God's deliverance into the Promised Land.

During this tumultuous year, advent becomes even more important as a season for Christians to still their hearts and minds for the birth of Christ and his eventual return as judge. With this in mind, the Moore Methodist Museum will honor the preparations with a daily post on its [Facebook page](#) which will include one of the many nativities from the South Georgia Conference collection with a reading from Luke 2:1-21. We pray that this will help you prepare your hearts and minds for the birth of the Savior and his return as King while also remembering how this simple story has changed the world. Please notice that the nativities come from many different places, use many different materials, and look very different from each other and, yet, are seen as being part of our family – no matter what our family may look like. Please check in every day from November 29 through December 24 to honor the season with the Ministry of Memory.

So, it's time to prepare for the birth of light in the season of darkness and the coming of unimaginable faith, hope, and love.

Anne Packard serves as Conference Historian and director of the Arthur J. Moore Methodist Museum on St. Simons Island. Contact her at director@mooremuseum.org.

Retired Clergy Birthdays – November 2020

11/01 – Sam Collins: PO Box 191; Dexter, GA 31019
11/01 – Thomas Maddox: 137 Norfolk Pine Lane; Naples, FL 34114
11/03 – Loretta Dunbar: 7552 Edgewater Dr.; Columbus, GA 31904
11/03 – Edwin Smith: 305 Grindstone Creek Dr.; Clarkesville, GA 30523
11/04 – Russell Edwards, Jr.: 385 Ashton Dr.; Athens, GA 30606
11/07 – Eve Tomberlin: 137 Aston Hall; Macon, GA 31078
11/08 – Gary Carter: 400 Hill Manning Rd.; Cochran, GA 31014
11/08 – Mary Ann Traver: PO Box 1934; Richmond Hill, GA 31324
11/09 – Douglas Force: PO Box 1938; Hinesville, GA 31313
11/09 – Joe Flowers, Jr.: 390 Brook Hollow Dr.; McDonough, GA 30252
11/10 – Kirk Loyless: 5677 Hwy. 91 S; Donalsonville, GA 39845
11/11 – David Johnson: 916 Watermelon Run; Charleston, SC 29412
11/12 – James E. Davis: 170 Caney Branch Dr.; Homerville, GA 31634
11/12 – John Mitchell: 123 Lundy Court; Macon, GA 31210
11/14 – Woody Roberts: 1259 Hwy. 36 E.; Barnesville, GA 30204
11/14 – David Tart, III: 312 Knob Hill Rd.; Valdosta, GA 31602
11/14 – Donald Youmans: 287 Pacolet Ridge Lane; Tryon, NC 28782

11/16 – Sue DeJournett: 4648 Savage Hills Dr.; Macon, GA 31210
11/21 – Robert Hall: 4221 Stone Mill Ct.; Martinez, GA 30907
11/21 – Kitty Newton: 187 Newbridge Rd.; Sylvania, GA 30467
11/22 – John McGowan: #1 Ramblewood Circle; Valdosta, GA 31602
11/23 – Jack Atkinson: 2317 Bear Creek Rd.; Adel, GA 31620
11/25 – Carter Berkeley: 77 Bethany Way; Statesboro, GA 30458
11/25 – Rex Odom: 4062 Vineville Ave.; Macon, GA 31210
11/27 – Buddy Coss: 356 Manry St.; Edison, GA 39846
11/27 – Gordon Goodwill: 2911 Charlie Lane; Statesboro, GA 30461
11/28 – Richard Turnipseed: 12420 Clubhouse Court; Tavares, FL 32778
11/30 – Enoch Hendry: 306 E. 54th St.; Savannah, GA 31405

Scripture Readings – Nov. 17

November 22

Christ the King / Reign of Christ Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
Psalm 100 (UMH 821)
Ephesians 1:15-23
Matthew 25:31-46

November 29

First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 64:1-9
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 (UMH 801)
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:24-37

December 6

Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 40:1-11
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 (UMH 806)
2 Peter 3:8-15a
Mark 1:1-8

Events in the South Georgia Conference – 11/17/2020 edition

Virtual Thanksgiving Agape Meal – Nov. 22

Bishop Lawson and Mrs. Sherrill Bryan invite the South Georgia Conference to join them in a virtual Thanksgiving Agape Meal at 6 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 22. Intended to be a time of Christian fellowship and an opportunity to gather together virtually, the Thanksgiving Agape Meal will include music, guided prayer, time for contemplation, and personal witness. Visit www.sgaumc.org/agapemeal for more information and to join the meal.

United Methodist Student Day – Nov. 29

The United Methodist Student Day Special Sunday Offering helps provide funds for scholarships and loans for United Methodist students. Student Day gifts make a real difference for those who hope to attend college. Ninety percent (90%) of the offering goes toward funding the many scholarships and loans administered by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (www.gbhem.org) and ten percent (10%) stays within our state and goes to Georgia UM-related schools for merit scholarships. Contact the Georgia Commission on Higher Education and Collegiate Ministry (770-854-7283 or www.umcommission.org) for more information.