



# The Journey

Volume XXX No. 12  
March 21, 2022  
[www.fcc-hsv.org](http://www.fcc-hsv.org)

## WHAT BRINGS US JOY?

I enjoy talking to people about what excites them, those things that bring them joy. It is different for everyone; Abby is excited by things that are new to her, starting a new class, going camping with friends, or getting her first apartment. Joe likes the challenge of a new video game or a different skill when it comes to his hobbies. Patti gets excited when she can see her family or when she starts a new project.

At church, it is easy to see the things that excite people. When our young children enter the door and run to go see Pastor Laura you know they are excited about our Small Group program. When Lauren and Chris talk about a new piece of music or the work the choir is doing for Easter their faces light up. Others are excited about our upcoming 75th anniversary, seeing old and new faces that will celebrate the history and future of our church. Others are looking forward to the Easter Egg Hunt and seeing the church's and the ECM children learn more about Jesus and then watching them race around picking up Easter Eggs.

The thing about joy is that it is contagious. When you are around someone who is excited you cannot help but share their enthusiasm. What is more, when many people are excited about a project, or the direction of the church, this delight leads to new ideas, new ways of worship, and new faces in the congregation. Joy is something that others long for and that the world is searching for. Amid the bad news that we hear every day we want to hear the good news that sustains our spirits and leads us to experience God in the world around us.

We have many things to be excited about at First Christian Church. More and more people are joining us for worship on Sunday. We are seeing members we have not seen in a while who feel comfortable coming back again. We are also seeing new faces and welcoming them into our congregation. New programs are being planned to involve our members and the community. Mission opportunities abound to share our gifts and the Spirit of Christ we all know. But more importantly, we can celebrate the fact that God has blessed First Christian Church with the passion to make a difference in people's lives. That is something to be excited about. Thanks be to God, Amen.

### CONGREGATION MEETING

Sunday, March 27, following the 9:30 am Worship Service. 2022 Budget update, election of Moderator & Moderator Elect, Rev. Allen's 2022 sabbatical, and Rev. West's 2023 sabbatical.

### IN PERSON & ONLINE WORSHIP SERVICES

We offer in-person worship services Sunday mornings at 9:30 or you may also stream them live at 9:30, or watch previous services anytime, on [facebook.com/fcchsv](https://facebook.com/fcchsv), [twitch.tv/fcchsv](https://twitch.tv/fcchsv), or [Youtube.com](https://Youtube.com).

Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, March 24**, at Noon. Email to: [publisher@fcc-hsv.org](mailto:publisher@fcc-hsv.org)

3209 Whitesburg Drive, Huntsville, Alabama 35802  
Telephone: 256-881-0150 **Leave a message.**



## April Birthdays



## SHORT TERM PRAYER CONCERNS



Not Published Online

Not Published Online

### HELP WANTED



Early Childhood Ministries is seeking a Kitchen Manager/Cook to start on May 31. Hours are 8:00 am - 2:00 pm Monday - Friday. Experience in a commercial kitchen is needed. Please contact [susan@fcc-hsv.org](mailto:susan@fcc-hsv.org) for additional information.

### CHURCH CALENDAR

- Mar. 21 10:30 am Quilters
- 5:30 pm ECM Board Meeting
- 6 pm *Disciples History Class*
- Mar. 23 6 pm Men's Group
- 7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- Mar. 24 10 am *John, Gospel of Light & Life*
- Mar. 27 10:30 am **Congregational Meeting** -
- Mar. 28 10:30 am Quilters
- 6 pm *Disciples History Class*
- Mar. 30 6 pm Men's Group
- 7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- Mar. 31 10 am *John, Gospel of Light & Life*

We are temporarily publishing, as space allows, the prayer concerns that are normally listed in the Sunday bulletins. **Concerns are listed for one month unless we receive an update.** Long term prayer concerns are published monthly in the *Journey*. Send requests to [publisher@fcc-hsv.org](mailto:publisher@fcc-hsv.org) or call the church office at 256-881-0150 to leave a message.

**Please notify the Pastors or the church office if you are going to the hospital and would like to be contacted**

### REGIONAL PRAYER REQUESTS

Snow Hill Christian Church  
Ft. Deposit, AL



**THIS WEEK'S FOOD BASKET** is in memory of Joan Cannon, sister of James Cannon.

### ATTENDANCE

March 20 Worship Service: 69  
Small Groups (During the week & Sunday): 33



### NATIONAL CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER (NCAC)

One of the Christian Women's Ministries' service projects for March is the Healthy Families program at the NCAC. Healthy Families is a parent support program for first-time parents living in Madison County. It offers family support and education services that begin in the last trimester of the pregnancy or before the baby is 1 month old and may continue until the child begins kindergarten.

Please consider a monetary donation to this program, marking your check "NCAC Healthy Families" in the memo line .

Thank you! Christian Women's Ministries

### RUMMAGE SALE UPDATE

Hello all!

I have received many questions about this year's rummage sale. As many of you know, the rummage sale is a huge ordeal that requires the volunteer efforts of many of our church members and staff. It is also important to note that I am pregnant and due on the week/weekend of the rummage sale's typically stated date. COVID is still taking a toll on the community as well. With these factors prayerfully considered, the Christian Education Committee and the staff had discussions about this event for the 2022 year and decided it is best to not hold the event. However, we still do encourage donation of items to charitable causes and wanted to share some resources to help make this easier for you! :)

[www.rocketcitymom.com/huntsville-thrift-stores-donation-centers/](http://www.rocketcitymom.com/huntsville-thrift-stores-donation-centers/) this link has a great list but here are a few hand picked locations!

#### A New Leash On Life Marketplace

707 Andrew Jackson Way NE, Huntsville, AL 35801

#### Downtown Rescue Mission Thrift Stores

(will also pick up items from your home; call 1-855-376-7283) 1407 A N. Memorial Parkway, Huntsville, AL 35801 Or 8006 Old Madison Pike, Ste 10, Madison, AL 35758

**Goodwill of Huntsville** 8501 Whitesburg Drive, Huntsville, AL 35802

Alyssa Burton,  
Youth Director

### LANDSCAPE TEAM AT WORK AND VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The beautiful weather let the landscape team get in some great work.

Duffy Boles manicured the Thomas and Martin Islands. They have never looked so good under my care. John Hall cleaned up the Courtyard and cleaned the fountain of a great Springtime look. Thanks Guys. Earlier, Dick Christiansen cleaned out the flat roof gutters so those leaves stopped falling into the Courtyard. He also maintains the Bell Tower front garden.

I put out a call for some helpers to reduce the amount of work I was putting into the landscaping and several members have responded. **I still have a few gardens to offload on some willing volunteers. Call me at \*\*\*\*\* or email at \*\*\*\*\*.com if you can help.**



Bob Senn, Landscaping Committee Head

### HELP THE CHURCH WHEN YOU SHOP AT AMAZON

Click the link below, click on Start Shopping, and sign in to your Amazon account as usual. FCC will automatically be credited with 0.5% of your purchases at no additional cost to you and no deductions from the donated amount to FCC.



The 2022 sign up chart for **FOOD BASKETS** is available. You may call the office at 256-881-0150 or email [publisher@fcc-hsv.org](mailto:publisher@fcc-hsv.org) to select a Sunday to remember or honor a friend, loved one, anniversary, birthday, or other special occasion. Donations are \$25.00 and go to Community Outreach. Make checks payable to First Christian Church and Food Basket on the notation line. You may also make your payment through PayPal and designate Food Basket through our website [fcc-hsv.org/who-we-are/how-to-give/](http://fcc-hsv.org/who-we-are/how-to-give/)



## POWERFUL QUESTIONS

Marilyn Pagán-Banks

*Will the Lord reject forever? Will God never show favor again? Has God's unfailing love vanished forever? Has God's promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has God in anger withheld compassion? - Psalm 77:7-9 (NIV)*

I am currently training as a certified professional coach, and one of the main competencies taught is the asking of powerful questions. As a coach, we are not to provide the answers that our client is seeking to find, but to ask the types of questions that will allow them to uncover and discover the answers they are seeking for themselves and to gain clarity on next steps. Coaches accompany clients as they do their own work.

While it doesn't appear that the psalmist had a coach, it is clear they remembered how God has always accompanied them. In their despair and pain, they remembered all that God had done over the years. The cries became questions, and the questions led to deeper clarity and a renewed conviction: that if God did it before, God can do it again.

Perhaps this is why the seasons of the church are so important. We don't all have coaches, but we do have the story of a love so profound that God wrapped it in flesh and dwelled among us. A love so magic that death could not destroy it. A love that is present and possible for all creation to experience.

The season of Lent is an opportunity for us to turn back to God, again. To recall the story of God's liberative love as modeled in the life and ministry of Jesus. To have the courage and humility to ask powerful questions of ourselves as followers of Jesus and as the church, with the intention of living truly transformed lives and to be the church.

### Prayer

Gracious God, when we don't have all the answers, please help us to ask the right questions. Amen.

## A CHANCE TO BEAR FRUIT

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV

Sermon: Mar. 20, 2022

Scripture Verses:

Luke 13: 1-9

The scripture passage for today is only found in the gospel of Luke and it deals with the author's favorite subject, repentance. It is a combination of two distinct but related stories, the first recalls two tragic events and their impact on faith and the second is a parable about mercy.

The passage begins when the crowd questions Jesus about a group of Galileans who were worshipping in Jerusalem. Pilate had sent Roman soldiers to attack them, and after they were killed, the soldiers mixed their blood with the blood of the sacrifice on the altar, desecrating the temple. This was sacrilege, not just because Jews were killed, but because the altar had been defiled. The place where God resided on earth had been desecrated by humans.

This horrible event sets the context for an important discussion. The crowd didn't want to know what Jesus thought about this event itself, they wanted to know what the Galileans did to incur the wrath of God, what sin were they guilty of to be punished in such a horrible way?

Many people believe there is a correlation between suffering and sin. The good are prosperous, healthy, and successful while those who are evil are diseased and poor. Because of their sin, they are marked by God.

In the Old Testament this idea is supported in Psalm 1 and refuted in the book of Job. In Jesus' time, it was a common belief, in fact, it even went so far that many pious Jews did not believe that they should help the poor and downtrodden because they were interfering with God's judgment.

Jesus takes a strong stance against this kind of thinking. He asked the people if they thought that these Galileans were worse sinners than other Galileans, or if their sins were worse than those of the crowd? No. We are all sinners; we are all in need of the power and love of God, we all need forgiveness. Jesus then tells them about a natural disaster in which eighteen people were crushed

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when a section of the tower near the pool of Siloam fell. Were they better or worse than any of the others living in Jerusalem? Of course not!

We all have our own sense of how things should be in the world. We want to make sense of senseless tragedies and search for reasons even when there are none. Look at the blame placed for natural disasters, wars, or diseases. Many used these disasters as a way to support their own view of morality or lack thereof.

Jesus makes it clear that there are no rational explanations for these tragedies. He doesn't say, "It was God's will." The Galileans killed by Pilate were victims of the Romans' fear and desire for control, anyone who was offering sacrifices that day could have been killed. And the people crushed by the tower? This could have happened to anyone who happened to be there.

Jesus is telling us, don't look for cause and effect explanations. Did those who died deserve their fate? No, but unless you repent, you will perish spiritually. Jesus is reminding us to turn our attention to our own lives and to stop speculating about others.

We spend so much time trying to explain things, so much time worrying about other people's actions that we forget to pay attention to ourselves and our relationship with God. Let these senseless deaths remind you that life is precious, says Jesus, but it is also fleeting.

However, Jesus is not finished with the crowd, next he tells a parable that challenges us to use the gift of life and bear spiritual fruit. It is a warning to those who think that belief in Christ is all that is necessary. Instead of doing something with our faith, we just sit. Instead of marching forward, we remain at parade rest.

In the book of James we are reminded that faith without works is dead. True faith in Christ calls us to sacrifice for others, open ourselves to the will of God, and use our spiritual gifts for God's work. Garrison Keillor once said, "You can become a Christian by going to church just as easily as you can become a car by sleeping in a gar-

age." Our parable is a clear warning against a fruitless existence in the light of God's grace.

One of the interesting things about this story is that Fig trees can grow almost anywhere. They are easy to plant and care for. They usually do not need fertilizer or a great deal of attention to produce, but in this case, the tree was barren.

This is a simple problem for a gardener; if a plant does not produce it will be removed to make room for a new plant. But the difference in this story is that the Fig tree is given a second chance.

The gardener asks the owner of the vineyard for time to care for the tree. The gardener will fertilize, prune, and allow this plant to bear fruit. If the work fails then the tree will be cut down, but if it produces then the owner will have gained a healthy and productive tree.

Human beings like to cut other people down. We do not give second chances because it is hard to forgive. It is difficult to deny our impulses to tear others down so that we can build ourselves up. Yet, in this story, we are the ones who are given a second chance. Jesus, the patient gardener, carefully prunes us, loosens the soil around our roots, nourishes us, and gives us what we need to continue.

The three years in which the Fig tree does not bear fruit can be seen as the three years of Jesus' ministry. His time on earth was coming to a close, but this did not mean that Jesus would turn his back on the world he came to save. Instead, he allows us to be productive and continue his work as the body of Christ.

To do this we have to look at our lives and dare to ask the hard questions: Do we love others? Are we offering forgiveness for old wrongs? Do we believe that we can be forgiven, or are we carrying a growing burden of guilt? Are we so busy making a living that we've forgotten to make a life?

Jesus digs at us with questions like these. He digs at our hearts in the outstretched hand of every beggar on the streets, of every child not fed, of every outcast searching for welcome.

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"What have you done?" Jesus asks, and more importantly "What have you left undone?" Such questions, like the parable of the fig tree, move us toward repentance, a word that means to turn around, to believe things can be different; to trust that the one who calls us to bear fruit will be there even when we fail.

In this passage Jesus does not discount the fact that bad things happen to good people. There is evil in the world that we cannot escape. But that does not mean we should not risk for the sake of God. If we do not take a leap of faith, ask for repentance, bear spiritual fruit, and move forward we may believe that we are risking nothing, but we are risking everything!

The life of a Christian is not without suffering and danger. Christ was tempted, Abraham suffered from doubt, and Paul wondered if his word would be accepted. But through their faith each found the strength to resist.

It is this same strength that God provides to every one of us if we turn our hearts and lives over to our Creator! We will encounter evil in our lives and sometimes the strain and sorrow of life will take us to our limits. But that is where God steps in, that is where Jesus' love encourages us, and that is when the Holy Spirit empowers us to do what is right.

"One more chance to bear fruit," says Jesus, "One more opportunity to grow and to change, one more call to repentance and action." We are being tended by the patient gardener, now we have to ask ourselves if we give a fig.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

## **COVID-19 CHURCH PROTOCOLS** (Approved by the Board on March 10, 2022)

- **One in-person 9:30 a.m. service** is currently offered. Virtual services ([facebook.com/fcchsv](https://www.facebook.com/fcchsv), [twitch.tv/fcchsv](https://www.twitch.tv/fcchsv), or First Christian Church Huntsville on YouTube) are also offered every Sunday. While FCC and State recommendations are good benchmarks, we invite all people to worship with us based on their comfort level.
- **Enter the church through the Bell Tower Garden/Narthex doors.** The doors by the church office are locked.
- **Wearing face coverings/masks is optional**
- Hand sanitizer and masks are available at the Lobby Welcome Table along with prepackaged communion elements.
- The **nursery** is open for the 9:30 a.m. service and the 10:30 a.m. small group time.
- **The front section of the Sanctuary, on the pulpit side, is the least impacted area with our heating and cooling system and every other row of pews is roped off to allow individuals to practice social distancing so that they may worship at their level of comfort.**
- Offerings may be placed in the brass plate when exiting the sanctuary or sent by mail.
- **Small groups** (including Sunday school classes) will meet at **8:30 a.m. or 10:30 a.m.**
- Anyone with any symptoms will remain home and celebrate virtually for at least 14 days
- **Please notify the church office immediately if you develop symptoms after attending a service.**

