



HOLY WEEK RENEWAL

It is strange to think that only a month ago we were wearing our winter coats and the sun was going down as we came home from work. Now flowers are blooming, the birds have returned, and the trees are starting to bud. Spring is not around the corner, it is already here, and in my family, this means spring cleaning. Outside we are mowing our lawn, pruning back the bushes for growth, and clearing out the leaves that have collected over the winter. Inside, we are cleaning our home, opening the windows to let in the fresh air, putting away winter wear, and getting out our spring and summer clothing. It can be a lot of work, but when we are done we know we are ready for a new season and all the excitement it can bring.

In the church when we think of spring we think of Easter and the renewal that it brings, however, we are still in the season of Lent, reflecting on our lives and bringing before God our sin and brokenness. This time of contemplation is leading us to the ideals of transformation and rebirth found in Easter. In our Sunday morning worship services, even though the alter is draped in black there is still a joyful spirit because we know that soon our time of mourning will be over and our faith will be renewed.

April 10 was Palm/Passion Sunday, an opportunity to celebrate the crowds cheering for Jesus as he entered Jerusalem, but also a time when we look ahead to his last week on earth and the cross looming in the distance. It is easy to allow the joy of the resurrection to overshadow the sacrifice of the cross but you cannot have one without the other, there can be no faith without sacrifice. I have always loved the symbolism of the dried-out palm branches being turned into crosses or burned to make ashes for the next Ash Wednesday. From the celebration comes despair, which then turns into healing and hope.

Our Maundy Thursday Holy Week service is an opportunity to contemplate Jesus' journey to the cross and to worship together as a community. It will be held on Thursday, April 14 at 7:00 pm. It features an adapted form of service called the Office of Tenebrae (Shadows) that dates back to the fourth century A.D. In worship, the extinguishing of each candle after the Scripture reading is symbolic of the flight of the disciples, the approach of the guards, and the suffering of Jesus. The darkness recalls the days Jesus was in the tomb while relighting the Christ candle symbolizes the Messiah's resurrection and hope for the world.

All of these services either help us to prepare or realize the significance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and his resurrection for the sake of the world. Such a gift is not to be taken lightly, but treasured and allowed to nourish our souls so that through our words and our lives others may see the love of God revealed. This year let us all experience the joy and renewal that Easter brings. Amen.



Join us Easter Sunday at 9:30 am as the FCC Chancel Choir presents the Easter cantata *Beautiful Christ* by Heather Sorenson. The choir will be joined by guest musicians David and Rebecca Caine, Katerina Fedoseyev (piano), Kevin Lay (cello) and Olivia Palazollo (violin). We look forward to seeing you on Easter Sunday as we celebrate the Risen Christ!

Peace, Lauren Wilson Carter, Director of Music

Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, April 14**, at Noon. Email to: publisher@fcc-hsv.org

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

In April **Community Outreach** is encouraging support of **HEALS Dental Clinic**. Many eligible economically disadvantaged school children visiting the clinic have never visited a dentist before school. The teeth may have many decays requiring multiple visits.



The volunteer dental staff provide a reward to the child for every visit. If many visits are needed, the anticipation of a reward helps to reduce anxiety.

The reward box contains many choices for selection by the child and are not expensive. Fast food prizes (new) such as those in a Happy Meal are a great prize as are the following: book, bubbles, small stuffed toy, colored socks, hair decorations, or special pencil. The dollar stores are a great place to shop, especially if you have your child helping. Please remember the reward will return with the child to the classroom. Teachers try to get rewards in backpacks quickly.

Reward items can be placed in the basket around the food pantry cart located at the entrance to the church. If you do not wish to shop, we will do it for you. Please make check to FCC with HEALS rewards on the item line.

CHURCH CALENDAR

- April 11 9:30 am Esther Circle
- 10:30 am Quilters
- 5 pm Conveners' Meeting
- 6 pm *Disciples History Class*
- April 12 6 pm Elders' Meeting
- April 13 7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- April 14 7 pm **Maunder Thursday Service**
- April 17 9:30 am **Easter Cantata & Service**
- April 18 10:30 am Quilters
- April 20 7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- April 21 6 pm Board Meeting
- April 24 2 pm Clagsens/Rutherford Shower
- April 25 10:30 am Quilters
- 6 pm *Disciples History Class*
- April 27 7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- May 2 10:30 am Quilters
- May 4 6 pm Phoebe Circle
- May 8 11:45 am Community Outreach
- May 9 9:30 am Esther Circle
- 10:30 am Quilters



SHORT TERM PRAYER CONCERNS



Not Published Online

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 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
 New Vision Christian Church
 Birmingham, AL

THIS WEEK'S FOOD BASKET is in memory of James Hayes, relative of Sue & Jeff Seward.



ATTENDANCE
 April 10 Worship Service: 91
 Small Groups (During week & Sunday): 55



WEDDINGSHOWER

TIME TO CELEBRATE A NEW CHAPTER

WHO: Janie Clasgens & Brandon Rutherford

WHAT: Wedding Shower

WHEN: April 24, 2022, 2:00 PM

WHERE: Church Parlor

Their beautiful story and registry for the couple is available at www.theknot.com/us/***** . All are welcome to enjoy the festivities

DESPERATELY POOR CHILDREN NEED OUR HELP

Christian Women's Ministries (CWM) hopes you will join us as we financially support House of Hope Haiti and the Pringle House of Jamaica during April.



House of Hope Haiti

Through Global Ministries, House of Hope provides a safe place and educational programs for

at-risk children in the Port-au-Prince area with a completion rate of 95%. Haiti has been in political turmoil for years and has also been devastated by several hurricanes. Life expectancy average is 63 years and adult illiteracy is over 51%. We will also be donating to the Pringle Home of Jamaica, which provides the same services for the impoverished children there. We can make a difference in the lives of children in two very poor third world countries by donating to support these causes. Checks can be made to FCC with "CWM April project" in the memo line. The need is great; please join CWM in changing lives.



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 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/



God's Love Endures Forever
Psalm 118

Give thanks to God for God is good,
God's steadfast love endures forever.

- Psalm 118:1

Enduring Love...

- Bible studies that challenge and inspire
- Opportunities for clergy to gather in prayer
- Spiritual care for those in prison
- Resources for mental health and trauma care
- Visionary leadership that calls the church to imagine new ways to witness to God's love

Enduring impact...

- Global ministry partners who work for justice, reconciliation, and peace
- Colleges, universities, and theological institutions that nurture Christian leaders who are transforming church, society, and the world
- Collaborative response in the wake of disaster
- New congregations that worship in a variety of languages and worship styles
- Ministry grants for congregational service ministries that serve hungry neighbors

On April 17, we join Disciples churches across the US and Canada to collect an *Easter Offering* to provide support for general ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). You can note "Easter Offering" for any amount, whatever your preferred method of donating to Huntsville First Christian Church.

Learn more at: disciplesmissionfund.org/special-offerings/easter/ .

Please give generously.



GENEROUS GRACE by Marilyn Pagán-Banks

But God raised Jesus from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Acts 2:24 (NIV)

Peter is my favorite disciple (aside from Mary Magdalene, of course!), because his behavior throughout the Gospels reminds me that God can and will use anybody for the building of God's kingdom.

Peter wasn't afraid to ask questions, to take chances, or to risk sounding dumb. He spoke up - sometimes out of turn and way too soon. He was ambitious, curious, and sometimes unclear. At times he was brave and protective (remember that guard's ear?), and other times he was afraid and chose his own safety. All the while, Peter never gave up trying, working, and seeking to be true to his calling.

Peter loved Jesus deeply. It is on this love, faithfulness, and determination that the Church was founded.

And so, it is no surprise to me that on that Pentecost holiday, Peter was not about to let the naysayers gaslight those who had decided to follow Jesus. The Holy Spirit filled the hearts of the people, allowing them to connect and to understand and to hear one another.

Peter did not allow his journey to diminish his conviction. His past trauma did not take away from his testimony. Peter did not shrink in the presence of the "devout" (Acts 2:5, NRSV). He stood on what he knew, controlling the narrative.

And when asked, "What shall we do?" Peter invited them into the community of faith. Because just as death could not keep its hold on Jesus, Peter had learned that it is impossible to hold onto and withhold God's grace.

Prayer - Thank you, God, for your generous grace. It is our prayer that we, too, boldly and lovingly bear witness in a world that seems determined to squash your story of love and new life. Amen.

THE EMPTY TOMB

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV

Sermon: April 10, 2022

Scripture Verses:

Luke 24: 1-12

We have all heard this story time and time again. Christians thrive on it because it is the center, the good news, of our faith. The resurrection is the ultimate answer to the promises of God and hope for our future as we look forward to the day when Christ will come again.

Each gospel tells of this event in its own way. The best known story of resurrection is found in the gospel of John when we hear of the belief of the disciple whom Jesus loved, the disbelief of Peter, and the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene.

The gospel of Matthew shows us the power of God as an angel rolls the stone away from the tomb, paralyzes the Roman guards with fear, and tells the women that Jesus has been raised from the dead. In contrast, the gospel of Mark focuses on the fear that the women felt when they heard the news of the angel. They did not report this event right away because they were so afraid.

There are also many similarities between the gospel accounts, not the least of which, is the importance of women. In each gospel women are the first to hear the good news of the resurrection and become the vehicles in which the apostles and followers of Jesus first hear of this miraculous event. In this manner the women at the tomb become icons of faith, who prove their strength and courage when they share a story that the world was unprepared for and did not believe.

Unprepared for Easter. Pinewood derby. Are we ready? Are the scouts ready?

We are told in the gospel of Luke that early in the morning before dawn on the first day of the week, the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee traveled to the tomb to prepare his body as was Jewish burial custom.

They had returned after the Sabbath day of rest to complete the funeral ritual and mourn their teacher and friend. The women had been through so much in the last few days. They were a part of the crowd that saw Jesus drag the cross to Golgotha, or the place called the skull. They saw his torment and death on the cross as they watched from

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a distance unable to stop his pain or turn their eyes away.

Only these women were brave enough to follow Joseph of Arimathea as he took the body of Jesus and placed it in a tomb. They knew that no one else would care for Jesus, therefore, throughout the Sabbath day they rested, prayed, and steeled themselves for what had to happen.

Can you imagine the crushing sorrow and fear that these women must have felt? In a time when women were seen as second class citizens they had been welcomed into the inner circle of Jesus' disciples. Throughout the gospel of Luke we hear of women who were accepted by Jesus, followed him, and learned at his feet. Now their teacher was gone, their hope for a new world was gone, and they knew that they would have to return to Galilee alone.

The women came to the tomb expecting to find death. This was the only thing that they were prepared for; so when they found that the stone had been rolled away, looked inside the tomb, and saw that Jesus' body was gone, they were confused.

What had happened here? Had the body been taken? Did the Romans and leaders of the Jews add a final insult to the death of their teacher? But while they were standing there perplexed two men in dazzling clothes appeared beside them. The women were terrified, but these two men, later identified as angels in verse 23, simply asked them a question, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

The women who journeyed to the tomb assumed the worst in this situation and why shouldn't they? Of course they remembered afterward that Jesus had told them of his coming death and resurrection, but nothing prepared them for this event.

Humans always expect the worst to happen; in fact we seem to thrive on threats, violence and fear. Proof of this fact was the reaction of the crowd to Jesus. Earlier in the week they had proclaimed him to be a King, but then called for his death after Pilate could find no legal reason to execute him.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem the crowd believed that great changes would be made, a political revolution was at hand, and they longed for this upheaval. Yet, instead of a conqueror, they received a humble man riding a donkey, who proclaimed a message of sacrifice, forgiveness, and love.

The crowd's response, the crucifixion, even the unbelief of the women and later the disciples was a resounding, "No," to Jesus' message of love and obedience. They could not accept his call for peace, the hope for change, and the very nature of his ministry. Humanity said, "No" to God on that day. But three days later God said, "Yes" to humanity.

God said, "Yes" to the very things that we had denied, through the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, love, forgiveness, reconciliation, trust, hope; they all rose with him to eternal life and eternal validity.

Because it was the Women who followed Jesus who first heard of his resurrection, we are shown that all people can experience the glory of the resurrection of Christ and that the only things that died on Easter morning were the perceptions of the world. The resurrection of Jesus meant the death of all the ways in which the world had traditionally worked, the values that the world had lived, everything that bound humanity to sin. Easter became the first day of a new creation.

Of course when these women returned from the tomb and told the apostles what they had seen and heard, the men believed that this was nothing more than an idle tale. They had not yet experienced resurrection; in fact, it would take a vision of the risen Christ to convince them of the truth of these words.

It is hard to believe in resurrection, difficult to realize that the world is no longer the same, that we are called to become a transformed people. This idea frightens us to our very core, because we are so deeply tied to old convictions and brokenness.

Yet, we must remember that resurrection cannot occur without loss and pain. Jesus had to suffer and die on the cross so he could be raised from the dead. So too are we called to suffer, to give, and to transform ourselves so that we might become true followers and servants of God.

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Even then, resurrection is only the beginning. We are taught, through the appearances of Christ to his followers after he was raised from the dead, that there is still teaching to be done, instructions to understand, and actions to perform. Our own experience with new life calls us to continue our growth as Christians for the grace of God does not release us from this work; instead it calls us to continue so we can share the good news of Jesus Christ in new and exciting ways.

It is interesting that the women at the tomb believed in the resurrection without seeing. They did not have a direct experience with the risen Christ; they only knew that the tomb was empty. Only the apostle Peter journeyed to the tomb, and while he was amazed at the sight, he still did not understand what had happened. There was no recognition of the magnitude of this event, no joy and celebration, instead, he went home to reflect and wait.

Throughout Holy Week we too have witnessed the final days of Jesus and our hearts have grown heavy because deep within us we still expect to find death at the tomb. Like the disciples, we are not ready for resurrection as nothing in our experience prepares us for this event.

But today, even though we are unprepared for the coming of Christ, even though we cannot foresee our own transformation, even though we have said, “No” to God time and time again; our Lord and Savior says, “Yes” to us.

When we turn away, tell ourselves and others that we do not know him, and deny his very existence; Christ is there, waiting to forgive, accept, encourage, and empower his brothers and sisters in faith.

Our call, on this day, is to become like the women at the empty tomb, who believed without seeing, recognized the importance of this event, and rushed to tell others that Jesus Christ had defeated death, and that he is risen, he is risen indeed. 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, 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.**

