



ENDURING THE STORM

A few weeks ago the Huntsville area went through a time where it seemed there was a major thunderstorm every few days. I can remember looking out of my window upstairs and seeing the trees bend and stretch in response to the wind as the rain poured down the lightening flashed and the thunder rolled. Even in these kinds of thunderstorms I always feel safe in my home, however I cannot say the same thing about our little pop up tent camper.

The Saturday before Palm Sunday we decided to head out to Monte Sano state park for a brief vacation. I knew that I would have to head home early Sunday morning to get ready for church so we packed everything up and got to bed early. Everything was fine until about two o'clock in the morning when the winds picked up, the rain turned into hail, and it sounded like we were on a set of train tracks with the train coming towards us. Needless to say I did not get a lot of sleep that night and the rest of the week was wonderful, but that night was the first time, in a long time, when a storm scared me.

All too often our world seems like a great storm blowing us to and fro. We never know what to expect or how to plan and prepare for what is to come. It seems as if the world is always changing and that we are behind the times. I have long since given up on having the latest cell phone or computer, as long as the one I have works, but I have heard many people state that they no longer recognize the country that they grew up in. We seem so divided and it is easy to feel like we are blown to and fro with no sense of stability.

In an unpredictable world how can we rise above our fear and desperation into a sense of peace that we can share with others? How can we retain our focus, our willingness to share our gifts, and our drive to make the world better? I think it is remembering that we are more like trees. We may sway and bend when the wind picks up but this is because we are flexible and ready to adapt. We have solid roots, a foundation of faith that keeps us firmly planted in what truly matters in life.

We are called to love one another, pray always, learn about our faith, share our blessings, and continue to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. When we focus on our foundation the changing winds of the world no longer frighten us because we know that through the power of God we are given roots to grow and wings to soar. Thanks be to God, Amen.

IN PERSON & ONLINE WORSHIP SERVICES

We have resumed in-person worship services but you may still stream them live at 9:30 am on Sundays (or watch previous services anytime) on YouTube at: www.youtube.com/channel/UCzQCRY8Vfa-IDhuqUnUhCKw

You may also stream services live on Sundays at 9:30 am, watch previous services, videos for children, and special activities on our Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/fchsv/videos

Finally, stream services at 9:30 am on Sunday at: www.twitch.tv/fchsv

Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, April 22**, at Noon. Email to: publisher@fcc-hsv.org

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

CONGRATULATIONS

Mission Family 2 extends congratulations and well wishes to McKenzie Williams who graduates from The University of Alabama, April 30, with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication. Her concentration is in Sports Media, with a minor in Communication Studies. Rob Williams is the proud father and Mary Ann Williams the proud grandmother. Mary Beth Johns and Lee Ann Huang share in the joy of this occasion as proud aunts.



WEEKLY PRAYER CONCERNS



Not Published Online



GRATEFUL LIFE COMMUNITY CHURCH SUPPORT

Christian Women's Ministries is asking for financial support for Grateful Life Community Church during May. This church, our sister Disciples congregation in Huntsville, serves the disadvantaged and homeless members of our community. If you would like to contribute, please write your check to FCC with Grateful Life in the memo line and mail it to FCC. Thank you.

SEVERAL OPEN DATES FOR FOOD BASKETS



Sign up dates for **FOOD BASKETS** are 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, with checks made out to First Christian Church and Food Basket on the notation line, and go to our Community Outreach committee for local needs.

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
Grateful Life Christian Church
Huntsville, AL
Harrison Street Christian Church
Greenville, AL

WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

- April 11 - 66
- April 18 - 64
- April 25 - 65

THIS WEEK'S FOOD BASKET is in of Karen Ball's birthday by Matt and Stan Ball.

SEEKING DONATIONS FOR HOME # 27

We completed Home # 26 last year during the pandemic. We did not work many hours on the house but did contribute \$4,000 to its construction cost. Eight partner families moved into their new homes during the pandemic. Their experiences and how they live their lives have changed dramatically since moving. Their children can run and play outdoors after a long day inside because they now live in a safe neighborhood with adequate space for learning and working from their home. The knowledge that their home was built to code and standards promotes an environment of health and safety. We are making a difference. This new Habitat neighborhood will have 31 homes when completed.

We are changing lives one home at a time. Please help us with time, talent or treasure on Home # 27. Write your check to FCC with Habitat on the memo line if you would like to contribute. Bob Senn, Mr. Habitat for FCC

CHURCH OFFICE

Correction from last week. Thursdays are Paul and Matt.

The current Church Office hours continue as normal. Open Monday through Friday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm except closed from 12:30 - 1:30 pm for lunch. While the office had been minimally staffed with one person per day due to COVID precautions, staffing is now being increased to two persons assigned per day. The reduced staffing schedule is as follows. Mondays – Lynn and Rick. Tuesdays – Lynn, Paul, and Rick. Wednesdays – Laura and Matt. Thursdays - Paul and Matt. Fridays - Laura and Rick. The staff continues to work from home (Zoom meetings, email, phone calls, etc.) when they are not in the office and come in the office when their work cannot be done from home. As always, it is a good idea to call before coming to the office to see a particular person and make sure they are available (meetings, projects, errands, vacation, etc.).

Church members/office visitors should continue not using the North entrance of the church.

Office continued next column...

Office continued...

This entrance is temporarily for ECM staff and children only during the current healthcare crisis. Members/visitors are directed to use the separate Church Office entrance, signs are pointing the way, about 40 feet East of the North entrance. There is a doorbell to request entry/assistance.

THE RESURRECTION IS RADICAL by Lillian Daniel

The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." - Luke 24:5 (NRSV)

After twelve months of this pandemic, if our greatest desire is to get back to where we were a year ago, we have missed the memo from the Holy Spirit.

The women get the news when they are looking for Jesus' body in the empty tomb. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Why do you look backwards for God's future?

If all you want is a sentimental sign of spring, I'm sure you can find a crocus growing in a graveyard somewhere, but the promise of new life is more than that.

What is dead is gone because it has been transformed into something entirely new. So much so that after the resurrection, when Jesus ran into his closest friends, they did not recognize him. They were looking for the living among the dead. They were massaging their memories, clutching to sacred scrapbooks from a pretend past, the kind that grows more perfect the further we are from it. When Jesus actually showed up on the street where they lived, they almost missed him.

New life does not mean more of the same. So why settle for some pre-pandemic nostalgic normalcy for your church, your children, your institutions, your society, your schools, or your street? Why do you look for the living among the dead?

Resurrection is the radical change that renders our run-of-the-mill desires unrecognizable. Christ is risen and there's no going back.

Prayer

Open my heart to your future, God. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING for the Election of Officers on **Sunday, May 2**, following 9:30 a.m. worship service.

FCC Nominees for 7/1/21-6/30/23

Position Agreed to serve

Moderator	Andy Herron
Moderator Elect	Pam Clasgens
Treasurer	Jon Ahlbin
Asst Treasurer	Roger Sameck (1year)
Financial Secretary	Dick Christiansen
Asst Financial Secretary	Don Coburn
Asst Financial Secretary	Terry Sullivan
Elder	Monty Love
Elder	Cameron Douglas
Elder	Lisa Fitzgerald
Elder	Margaret J. Vann
Elder	Roberta Shivers
Elder	Nancy Woodall
Elder	Sabrina Beckman
Elder	Lee Boles
Deacon	Frank Fitzgerald
Deacon	Carrie/Kyle Love
Deacon	Marilee Keim
Deacon	Diane Douglas
Deacon	Sharifa Love-Rutledge
Deacon	Beverly Cannon
Deacon	Chris Haury
Deacon	Susan Griffin
Convener	Mary Ann Anderson
Convener	Anita Wood
Convener	Nancy Waites
Convener	Phyllis Leonard
Trustee	Lee Boles
Trustee	Dick Christiansen
Trustee	Dale Thomas

Sanctuary Service Protocols

(Revised April 8)

- In person worship is at 9:30 a.m.
- Sunday school classes, the nursery, children/youth gatherings, coffee, and other hospitality services are currently suspended.
- While FCC and the State recommendations are good benchmarks, we invite all people to worship with us based on their comfort level. Virtual services are offered (facebook.com/fcchsv, twitch.tv/fcchsv, or First Christian Church Huntsville on Youtube) every Sunday.
- **Attendees, including children, will wear face coverings/masks inside the church and practice social distancing (6 feet apart for non-household members) for everyone's safety.**
- Attendance is limited (approximately 75) to the ability to social distance.
- Enter the church through the Bell Tower Garden/Narthex doors. The doors by the church office will be locked.
- Greeters will provide hand sanitizer to all who enter and provide masks for those who have not brought their own.
- No choir/congregational singing.
- Offerings may be placed in the brass plate when exiting the sanctuary or sent by mail.
- **Anyone with any symptoms will remain home and celebrate virtually for at least 14 days.**
- **Notify the church office immediately if you develop symptoms after attending a service**



CHURCH CALENDAR

The following are the known* church related activities.

April

- 26 10:30 am Quilters
- 28 9 am Breakfast Bunch
6:00 pm Men's Bible Study

May

- 2 10:30 am Congregational Meeting
- 3 10:30 am Quilters
- 5 6:00 pm Men's Bible Study
- 9 Mother's Day
- 10 9:15 am Esther Circle
10:30 am Conveners
10:30 am Quilters
- 12 6:00 pm Men's Bible Study
- 13 6:00 pm Zoom Board Meeting
- 17 10:30 am Quilters
- 19 6:00 pm Men's Bible Study
- 23 Graduation Sunday
- 24 10:30 am Quilters
- 28 9 am Breakfast Bunch
6:00 pm Men's Bible Study
- 31 Memorial Day - Church Office Closed
10:30 am Quilters

* Previously, activities were listed on the calendar based on Facility Requests submissions. Some meetings are now being conducted virtually, or in other ways, so the church office has no way of knowing that those meetings are occurring. Please contact the church office (256-881-0150 or publisher@fcc-hsv.org) if you would like your group or committee, including the point of contact, included on the calendar.

SERMON TEXT SUNDAY, APRIL 25, 2021

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV Sermon **I Am**

Scripture - John 10: 11-18

In our world we spend a lot of time trying to find out who we are. We expend money, time, and resources to study our personal feelings, develop our sense of self, and look for the purpose of our lives. The problem

is that all too often we only catch a glimpse of the surface and never move deeper. True and meaningful self-examination is a lost art, because we want the easy answer, or the quick fix. We want to feel good about who we are without understanding our faults and failures and never looking at what we might become.

Throughout the Gospel of John Jesus tells us who he is through his "I am." Statements. There are no questions, or uncertainty. Jesus tells us, I am the bread of heaven, I am the light of the world, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the way, the truth, and the life, I am the true vine, and this week, I am the Good Shepherd.

This is the most pervading image we have of Jesus. It brings forth the idea of a kind and gentle savior, a messiah who protects, guides, and nurtures his flock. Yet, this peaceful image is of our own creation. The idea of Jesus as shepherd was shocking in his time. In fact, at the end of the passage today, the Pharisees meet and discuss Jesus' words and actions. They wonder if he is out of his mind or perhaps even possessed by a demon. Why? Why would Jesus' detractors and followers find it so hard to visualize him as the good shepherd?

In Jesus' time Shepherds were cut off from human society, spending all their time out on the hills with the sheep. At night, they herded them into pens and, if they were seriously committed to their task, they slept out on the hills, usually across the gate of the pen. Their job was to find water and grazing for the sheep, not an easy task in the arid semi-desert.

Most importantly, the sheep had to be kept safe from the predators that lurked in the rocks and caves where complacent sheep walked into accidentally, not to mention the predators that walked on two legs who would steal another's sheep. Leading, feeding and protecting, shepherding was not a job for the weak.

It took a real investment of time and resources for the good of the flock knowing them face by face, by voice and by name. There were no "generic sheep" in any shepherd's fold and in the same manner there are no "generic disciples" in the fold of Christ.

He calls each one of us by name. He lays his life on the line for us -- not just his death, but his life, because that is what a good shepherd does. A story is told about a little girl who was reciting the 23rd Psalm and began, "The Lord is my shepherd; that's all I want."

Maybe she missed the wording, but she got the theology right.

I Am continued page 6...

...I Am continued.

As he moves towards the cross, Jesus holds up the model of the good shepherd, reminding his listeners that he would lay down his life for the sheep. He would give his life to protect the flock from thieves, wild animals, or whatever danger might confront them.

He tells the crowd, his disciples and the Pharisees what it means to be the good shepherd by telling them a story about the difference between a shepherd and a hired hand. The shepherd takes risks for the sheep and is willing put himself in danger for them. The hired hand will run away because the sheep are not his, he has no investment in them.

He also reminds the listeners that the sheep know the shepherd's voice. They identify it with comfort, safety and the meeting of their needs. The sheep get used to the voice of the shepherd calling them; therefore, when someone else tried to lead them they would not follow. The sheep know the difference.

Jesus tells his followers that he is the gate for through him lies salvation and new life. Those who use religion for their own purposes do so to steal and destroy. Jesus came to save.

We believe that we are the sheep in this image, but we are not just sheep. We are not just a herd of animals that are going to be sheared or even sold to market. We are beloved individuals. Even though we are messy, even though we can and will get into trouble of any kind, we are cared for. We know the voice of the shepherd and through the shepherd we know God and God knows and cares for us. In essence we move from sheep to family.

Then we move into a section of scripture that can be enlightening and troubling. Jesus states in verse 16 that he has other sheep that do not belong to the fold and that he must bring them also, that they will listen to his voice, and there will be one flock, just as there is one shepherd.

Who are these other sheep? Who represents this other flock? Some historians claim that Jesus was speaking of Jews who did not believe in the Messiah, while others claim this statement represents Gentiles who were just being allowed into the Church as the gospel of John was written.

Whatever the case may be, this is a reminder that the work of the good shepherd continues. His sacrifice and resurrection was not just for a small group of people long ago, it has meaning today. We are still in need of a shepherd, in need of guidance, care and love.

Again Jesus tells us that he will lay down his life, but this time he adds that he will take it up again because of his love for the world and that we are called to do the same.

If you have ever seen the famous drawing called The Praying Hands by German artist Albrecht Durer then you might know there is a legend behind the painting that tells of two struggling artists, one a musician whose goal in life was to play and compose music to the glory of God. Durer, the second, was a painter and engraver. The two men lived and worked together as friends.

It was a struggle for these men to survive focusing on their art, so the musician began to work in the fields to support the work of Durer. By the time Durer gained enough fame to be self-supportive, the friend's hands had become so hardened and callused that he could not return to his career in music.

The legend is that those hands have become the model for the famous praying hands. Laying down one's life is not always a matter of life or death, but perhaps postponing or canceling dreams so that another might fulfill their own.

We are like sheep, constantly getting into trouble, laying waste to the land through our consumption, finding difficulty in the least likely of places, and even when our needs are met we still need constant care and attention. We need a shepherd!

But Jesus is more than a shepherd in this passage. He is a teacher, friend, savior, and giver of life. This passage is more than just a metaphor that fills us with warm feelings; this scripture holds the reality of life, the promise of death, and the glory of resurrection.

It contains the distinct promise that God cares for us all, that Christ will be with us until the end of time, and that we are one people, messy and in need of care, but loved so powerfully that the good shepherd laid down his life for us only to rise again bearing the gift of new life for us all.

This is the message of Easter that we continue to proclaim, the faith that we celebrate every day, and the truth that we long for. Jesus tells us who he is and in doing so shows us who we are called to be. Now it is our turn to be good shepherd, to care for the sheep, to help others fulfill their dreams, and bring them into the fold so that our flock might increase and the glory of God will be seen everywhere. Amen.