



WHAT IS A SABBATICAL?

Writing this article is a rather strange experience as it is one of the last Newsletter articles I will write before I go on my sabbatical. I have taken a sabbatical before, and while I know that ministers at First Christian Church have taken sabbaticals in the past, many church members have asked the question, “What is a sabbatical?” A sabbatical is defined as a period of rest or an extended period of leave from a person’s customary work. However, I do not think that this definition is appropriate for a minister’s sabbatical. For ministers, it is a planned time of spiritual reflection and reconnection with God, which leads to deeper ministry and mission. It is very different from a “vacation” or “days off” as it is an opportunity to disengage from normal tasks so that ministry can be viewed from a new perspective.

I am fortunate that the church cares for me so much that you have allowed me to take this time to reconnect with God. I am looking forward to spending time with my family, reading, meditating, praying, and getting away from my ordinary routine so that God can speak to me about my future and the future of our congregation. I know that you will be well cared for in my absence. The Rev. Laura West will assume some of my duties as well as worship services on Sunday. Our Elders and other leaders in the church have already made plans to augment Rev. Laura’s ministry as needed. As always we are grateful for the work of the staff in the office, and our music and worship teams have spent a great deal of time making sure that the service will run smoothly. Rev. Laura and Alyssa are hard at work planning Vacation Bible School, Camp, and other activities for our youth and children.

I look forward to coming back in three months rested, refreshed, and with a new vision of my role as your minister. This sabbatical experience is not just for me, it is also for you. This can be a time for congregations to rediscover their resources for lay leadership, to know and realize that we are called to be ministers and that we all have a role to play in the mission of the church. I hope that you will also be renewed during this time and that when I come back we will be ready to move forward, asking God for guidance, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and commissioned to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

FOOD PANTRY REMINDER

Please remember to bring a non-perishable item, or several, for the food cart in the Narthex (Sanctuary Lobby) on a Sunday. Pick your own Sunday and make it a habit. Let’s help keep the pantry full at the Huntsville Assistance Program.

Thank you, Community Outreach Committee

The Church Office will be closed on Monday, May 30, in observance of Memorial Day.

Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, May 19**, at Noon. Email to: publisher@fcc-hsv.org

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



**SHORT TERM
PRAYER CONCERNS**



You are cordially invited to celebrate the happiness of McKenzie Williams at her bridal shower hosted by Mission Family 2 on Sunday afternoon, May 22, 2 - 4 pm, in the FCC Parlor. McKenzie and her fiancé Justin Foscue are registered at Lawren's, Pottery Barn, and other sites on www.theknot.com/foreverfoscue/registry. You can read their romantic story on that site as well.

Not Published Online



Grateful Life Community Church

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.

CHURCH CALENDAR

- May 16 10:30 am Quilters
- 5:30 pm ECM Board Meeting
- May 17 7 pm Worship Committee Meeting
- May 18 6 pm Men's Group
- May 22 2 pm Williams/Foscue Shower
- May 23 Paul on Sabbatical through August 22
- 10:30 am Quilters
- May 29 Pentecost Offering
- May 30 **Memorial Day - Church Office Closed**
- 10:30 am Quilters
- June 1 6 pm Men's Group
- June 5 **Pentecost Sunday**
- Pentecost Offering
- June 6 10:30 am Quilters
- June 8 6 pm Men's Group
- June 10 6 pm Board Meeting

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
Macedonia Christian Church
Tallassee, AL

THIS WEEK'S FOOD BASKET is given in memory of Bob Abernathy by Lynn Abernathy.



THE ONES WHO SHEPHERD US

Talitha Arnold

God makes me lie down in green pastures; God leads me beside still waters; God restores my soul.

Psalm 23:2-3 (NRSV adapted)

Chances are good that you've already heard the 23rd Psalm. You may be familiar with excerpts of it or can recite it from memory. You may have learned it as a child or heard it at more than one funeral.

Such popularity has a price. Perhaps for you, as for me, the psalm can become rote and lose its meaning. Still waters and green pastures become something to rush through, rather than an invitation to slow down and relish God's care and abundance.

Today, I invite you to take time to remember your experience of the psalm's promises. Over the course of your life...

Who is one person who helped restore your soul?

Who has led you to green pastures and still waters?

Who has walked with you through the valleys of the shadows of death?

Who has anointed you and filled your cup to overflowing?

In a word, who have been your good shepherds? Who has fed you, protected and healed you, walked with you, even sacrificed some of their life for you?

And who have you helped to shepherd? A paradox of our faith is that we are sheep in need of God's love and care, and also called to be God's good shepherds who offer our lives for others. How has God enabled you to live into that call?

Either as a beloved sheep or a good shepherd, let your life breathe new life into this old psalm.

Prayer - Thank you, Lord, for being our shepherd - for green pastures, still waters, cups that overflow, and all who have shepherded us.

ATTENDANCE

May 15 Worship Service: 74

Small Groups (During week & Sunday): 16

CONGRATULATIONS TO CLAIRE UPTAGRAFFT

Claire won First Place in the Upper Elementary Poetry category of the 2022 Huntsville Literary Association's Young Writers Contest. The First-Place winners will read their entries on WLRH's Sundial this summer. The Young Writers Contest is made possible by a grant from Arts Huntsville.

Shimmering Stars

by Claire Uptagrafft

Shimmering, shining

Little balls of light

Glimmering, glistening

Tiny suns in the night.

Flickering, flying

Constellations bright

There's Orion and the Big Dipper

That you only see at night.

Wonderful, wishful

Lovely little flames

Like sand on a black tablecloth

Little sky stains.

Shimmering, shining

I love the stars God made

Glimmering, glistening

He made them perfect in His way.

The 2022 sign up chart for **FOOD BASKETS** is available. You may contact the office at publisher@fcc-hsv.org or 256-881-0150 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/



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, twitch.tv/fcchsv, or Youtube.com.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV Sermon: May 15, 2022
Scripture Verses: John 13: 31-35

Today's sermon topic is one that we think we know a lot about; love, pure and simple love. Often we don't talk about love because we figure that everything and anything that can be said has already been stated over and over and over.

But I want to talk about love today, the love that God has for us, and the love we should show to one another. I don't know about you but sometimes it is hard for me to tell other people I love them. It is easy to tell my wife and children, but difficult to tell friends, extended family, and others who are close to me.

Why is it hard to tell or show someone you love them? Are we embarrassed by these words and the connotations they bring up? That our love might seem inappropriate? Or are we afraid because loving someone means giving them a piece of ourselves? Of opening our hearts to them in ways that are enlightening and disturbing. If we have trouble saying, "I love you" how can we show others that we love them?

Love is one of the most overused words in the English language. It has so many levels of meaning that often the word itself can be difficult to comprehend. I love Ice Cream and I also love God, but can the two be compared?

We talk about love all the time, the love of a parent, of a spouse, of a child, or the love of God, but very rarely attempt to understand it. We call love a feeling, an emotion, a spontaneous response, but we do not know how to cultivate love. I dare say that most Christians do not know what it means to love our neighbor or to love one another.

The scripture lesson for today is a good place to begin to comprehend the mysterious nature of love. This passage occurs during the Last Supper right after Judas is exposed as the betrayer of Jesus. I find it fascinating that even though Jesus knew what Judas would do to him he still washed Judas' feet; Jesus continued to love Judas.

During this supper the theme of death was prevalent. Jesus knew what the future would bring. He understood that he faced pain, humiliation, torture, and death but that evening his focus was on his friends and disciples gathered together to celebrate.

Jesus told them that he would be with them just a little longer. Soon they would be separated and the disciples would be tested. At that time it would be easy to give in to fear and hatred, therefore, Jesus gave the disciples a new commandment that is in reality based on the spirit of the laws of the Old Testament. He told them to love one another and care for each other, just as he loves and cares for each of them.

Jesus continued to care for Judas amid betrayal, and so too were the disciples called to love those who would look upon them with scorn and persecute them.

Yet, Jesus is not done with the idea of love. His explanation of the love of God went beyond all boundaries and erased what separates humankind. Jesus told his disciples that others would know that they are his followers if they love one another. In this manner love of neighbor, or of others, becomes the primary focus of Christianity.

The apostle Paul writes that Faith, Hope, and Love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is Love. This is because love focuses and directs all aspects of our life. If we love God we must love others, if we love Christ we must love ourselves. Faith and hope spring from the basic concept of love.

The call to love one another sounds simple at its onset. Of course, we should love others, it makes sense, and it sounds positive and easy to do. But in reality, this is the hardest commandment we have to follow because all others flow from it. If we do not have love we cannot forgive, if we do not have love we cannot be hospitable, if we do not have love we cannot worship, if we do not have love we cannot trust God.

It is easy to say we love everyone but how do

Love continued on page 5...

...**Love** continued from page 4.

we love those who constantly hurt us, that abuse our trust, who reject us, or wish to hurt us, and how do we love those people who we just don't like? When we ask these questions we find that this innocent command, which sounds so easy in our ears, is very difficult to keep. How can we love one another as Christ loved us?

An example is found when Jesus called his friends and disciples little children. We often overlook the names Jesus used for his disciples, but they have great meaning. To a child everything is new. Children see the world through fresh eyes. I can tell you from watching my daughter Amberlea and my son Joe. Everything is an adventure and even small things are exciting.

It is not until we get older that the sense of the ordinary sets in that we lose this sense of wonder. To a child, a flower, a rock, a blade of grass, or a funny face is amazingly absorbing. For an instant, that one thing grabs their attention and fills their life so that nothing else can distract them.

When Jesus called the disciples children he is telling them to see the world as a child and to look at love with a new sense of wonder. To allow it to fill their senses and their lives so that they can begin to understand it. He calls them to see people as new creations in Christ who can partake in and share the love we have received, rather than competing for it.

My brother and I are very different people. For those of you that do not know my brother is from Honduras. We do not look the same, our personalities are dissimilar, and our beliefs and values are different. We grew up in different places only sharing the last portion of our adolescent life. Yet, this does not matter because he is my brother and I love him. But of course, as a teenager, I asked the inevitable question every parent hears, "Mom, which one of us do you love more?" My mother answered, "I love you in different ways but I love you both the same."

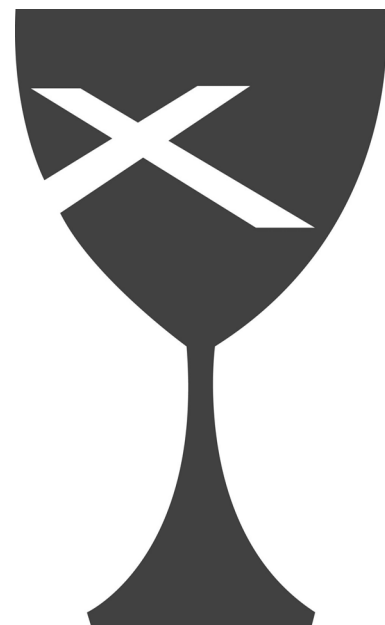
How do we love one another? How do we care for those who are not like us? We take a les-

son from our mothers and remember we can love others in different ways, but still love them the same. We also know that Christ loves us, and through his grace all things are possible. Jesus would not have given us this commandment if he did not think we could live it out.

I am not saying that love is easy. Christ knew the disciples would fail, he knew that Judas would betray him and Peter would deny Him, but through the disciples, Jesus also saw the goodness and holiness found in humankind. He saw people who can learn, change, and try harder, who thought they knew everything about love until they experienced the sacrifice of one man for the world until they saw God die for God's children.

We need a new understanding of love, the example provided by Christ and shown by God. We know that with this love comes sacrifice and joy but we also know that God loves every one of us. Let us mirror this love as we go out into the world today, throughout this Easter Season, and throughout our lives.

Amen.



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

- **An in-person worship service is available at 9:30.** 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 the air flow of our heating and cooling system.**
- 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.**

HOW TO GIVE ON LINE?

Miss church, but would still like to give your tithe or offering? You may give online through PayPal by going to the church website <http://fcc-hsv.org/who-we-are/how-to-give/> and scrolling down to the donate button. You may designate your tithe or offering for the General Fund or specify a particular church ministry/fund. You may also designate if you would like this to be a recurring or single donation.