



BEARING FRUIT

On the first Saturday of May I traveled to the CASA gardens with our youth group for their annual “Plant Day”. We gathered with other volunteers get the soil ready, plant seeds, weed, mix in fertilizer, and generally get things ready for the growing season. I have been to the CASA gardens before, usually later in the season when there is produce to pick, so the garden looked very different. It was almost lifeless. Where I was used to seeing plants of many different varieties producing vegetables and fruit, now there was nothing but dirt, a few planting boxes, and dried up plants from the last year.

We began the day by planning corn. We then moved to cucumber hills and finished off with okra. As we planted these seeds, in my mind, I began to see what things would look like in a few months. Large stalks of corn ready to be picked and shucked, cucumber vines growing on the trellis curled in and out, heavy with produce, and okra plants bristling with leaves and pods. I knew that the time and energy we spent that day would lead to a wonderful harvest. Of course, there would be work in between. The plants would need to be cared for, watered and pruned. The weeds would need to be pulled and the young shoots protected, but eventually the garden would produce.

So often, when we think of starting a project or trying something new, we worry that the time we invest will be wasted. We are people who want to see results quickly, and if we do not, then we consider our endeavor a failure. However, Jesus knew that it would take time for faith to take root. In John 15: 16 Jesus states, “You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.” The fruit that Jesus talks about in this passage is love, faith and hope, those virtues that are so important to our lives and our ideology.

We bear the fruit of the Spirit if we abide in the love of Jesus. This means that his love should become a part of us, it should infuse us, so that we become Christ’s body. When this happens God’s love flows through us, to the point where there should be no question as to who we belong to and no questions as to who this love and grace is for, it is for all people.

Yes, it takes time for change to occur, it takes effort to seek the vision of Christ for the church, and it takes energy to make this vision a reality, but when we do, we will see our spiritual garden produce and there will be enough, not only for us, but for the community and the world. Now is the time for us to cultivate our soil, plant our seeds, and care for our sprouts. Now is the time to become the love of God in the world and now is the time to bear fruit, so the transformation we bring will last. Thanks be to God, Amen.

IN PERSON & ONLINE WORSHIP SERVICES

We have resumed in-person worship services at 9:30 but you may still stream them live at 9:30 a.m., or watch previous services anytime, on facebook.com/fcchsv, twitch.tv/fcchsv, or search First Christian Church Huntsville on Youtube.


Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, May 20**, at Noon. Email to: publisher@fcc-hsv.org

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

Please join us on May 23rd at 9:30am for **Senior Sunday**. We will be celebrating the accomplishments of our high school graduates from this year. The graduates include Abby Allen and Ashlynn Johnson. If you are unable to attend but would still like to congratulate them for this wonderful accomplishment, cards can be dropped off at the church office or mailed directly to the graduates!


Abby Allen,
Address not published online

Ashlynn Johnson,
Address not published online



2021 PENTECOST OFFERING BE THE NEW CHURCH

For the past thirteen months, many Disciples living across the United States and Canada have been struggling with social isolation. They've stayed away from their places of worship to protect the health and safety of themselves and others. It has been hard.



How have new church leaders responded? By spreading the word about Disciples through Door-Dash, meeting with folks struggling with anxiety on Zoom, and addressing returning citizens' needs.

Chaplains, pastors, and others have answered the call to **be the new church**. To support them, contribute to the Pentecost Offering on May 16 and 23. Half of the gifts stay within the Alabama-Northwest Florida Region to support new church development. The other half goes to New Church Ministry (newchurchministry.org), which trains, equips, assists, and multiplies new church leaders.

You can note "Pentecost Offering" for any amount, whatever your preferred method of donating to Huntsville First Christian Church.

Please give generously. Let's all **be the new church**, together.



SHORT 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
Macedonia Christian Church
Tallasse, AL



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

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.



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.

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 pervious services anytime) on YouTube at: www.youtube.com/channel/UCzQCRY8Vfa-IDhugUnUhCKw

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/fcchsv/videos

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

MAY CHURCH CALENDAR

The following are the known church related activities.

- 18 8:30 am Barbara Shippey ECM Retirement
- 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

* 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.

UPDATE ON SALVATION ARMY

MOBILE KITCHEN

Every third Tuesday of the month, FCC volunteers drive and serve for two locations of the Salvation Army Mobile Kitchen. From 25 -50 people receive a meal prepared by the Salvation Army on Seminole Drive. This service requires two to three people for 1 1/2 hours, 5:15 - 6:45 PM. No special driver's license is required, however the driver must complete an application and have a good driving record for SA insurance purposes. Currently the Chandlers, Coburns, and Swards are volunteering. There is always room for more help. Contact Jeff Seward 256-___or wjsseward@___ for more information. We can schedule a practice run..



HEALS

(Health Establishments at Local Schools)

HEALS, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization that provides school-based primary health-care in collaboration with Huntsville City and Madison County school systems and local medical, dental, and optometry communities. Providing early intervention and health education to economically disadvantaged children has been shown to lower lifetime medical costs and delinquency rates and to foster better success in school and life. Services are offered free or at reduced rates, based on a sliding fee scale.



During the month of May, Community Outreach requests monetary donations to support the HEALS Dental Clinics, which provide on-site preventive and restorative services to students at Title 1 schools in Huntsville and Madison County. Please give generously! Thanks, Mary Ann Anderson

WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

- May 2 - 76
- May 9 - 70
- May 16 - 63

INTO THE CLOUD

by Vicki Kemper

The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day God called to Moses out of the cloud. - Exodus 24:16 (NRSV)

People have been making pilgrimages to the summit of Ireland's Croagh Patrick for 5,000 years, since pagans first gathered there to celebrate the harvest. According to tradition, Saint Patrick prayed and fasted there for 40 days in the year 441.

Now more than a million people each year make the climb – for the adventure or as a form of penance. Some walk the rocky path barefoot or crawl over the sharp stones on their knees.

My friend and I wanted a mystical mountain-top experience. Besides that, the guidebooks promised magnificent views of Clew Bay. And so we began the steep ascent.

By the time we reached the top, my shirt was soaked with perspiration ... and the sparkling blue waters of the bay were nowhere to be seen. The summit was socked in by fog so completely enveloped that it felt like we were in a cloud. What a disappointment!

Or not.

We are, many of us, goal-setting people. We set our sights on what we hope to achieve. When difficulties arise or obstacles appear, we think all is lost.

But experience tells us that transformation happens in the obstacles and how we handle them. Tradition tells us that God is in the cloud itself.

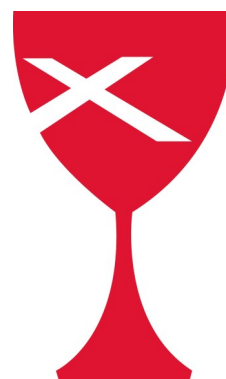
As my friend and I stared into the thick gray cloud at the summit of Croagh Patrick, an opening appeared. Through the veiled window we could see the brightness cast by the sun and captured by the cloud. The glory of God was all around us.

Prayer

When I think I've hit a dead end, remind me that is where you do your best work.

Sanctuary Service Protocols (Revised April 8) (The following will be updated later this week based on recommendations by the Worship Committee and approval by the Board.)

- 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**



Reborn in Love

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV Sermon - May 9, 2021
Scripture - John 3: 1-17

Have you ever had a discussion with another person and you just could not understand their point of view? Perhaps it is because of where you grew up or your basic values, but whatever the case you could just not get in sync with the person talking with you. Not matter what they said or how they tried to make you understand their side of the story you just could not get it.

For me it was when Patti attempted to teach me how to drive a stick shift. My first vehicle was a little red Toyota Long bed pickup, made before they called them Tacoma's. I bought it my first year in Seminary, but there was a problem, I had never learned how to drive stick.

So Patti took me to the Seminary parking lot and attempted to teach me that subtle art. Needless to say, I was terrible. The truck kept stalling or jerking into gear and I was afraid that I would drop the clutch.

The first attempt was a failure, the second attempt was even worse, and by the third try I almost gave up and decided to look for another vehicle. No matter what Patti tried to do she could not get me to understand how to drive my truck. Then she had a breakthrough. She asked my friend Jeff to teach me to drive and sure enough I got the idea on the first lesson.

When I asked her why she thought of asking Jeff to teach me she said, "I figured that we just do things differently. Maybe Jeff could teach you in a way you could understand. Anyway, I figured it couldn't hurt." And she was right.

In our lesson for today Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, came to Jesus under the cover of night to discuss a matter of theological importance. It seems that the Pharisees were confused about Jesus' teaching. Nicodemus is sometimes believed to be a secret disciple who did not follow Jesus openly out of fear. Many think that he came to Jesus in the night to discuss these religious matters because he did not want the other Pharisees to know of the meeting. Yet, this is not sup-

ported in the gospel of John.

It is important to know that some of Jesus' followers were Pharisees. Jesus' message of reform closely resembled the Pharisees' own desires, but as is often the case, those with similar ideas seem to be able to disagree all the more strongly.

The Pharisees focused on the Law of Moses, and the traditional laws, following this code of ethics to the letter. Yet, often times they became so focused on the letter of the law that they forgot the Spirit that drove these laws.

Nicodemus came to Jesus to discuss his teaching. To understand how the new message of faith brought by Christ could be understood by a culture steeped in tradition and law.

So this section of scripture is actually a theological debate. Jesus tells Nicodemus that no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above. Nicodemus takes Jesus' words literally, "How can anyone be born after they have grown old."

They continue to debate in this fashion, yet no understanding is reached. Nicodemus cannot understand the example that Jesus used and so communication broke down. The two begin to talk past each other without comprehension. Nicodemus just could not get Jesus' point.

Finally, in exhaustion, Jesus grumbles, how can I teach you about heavenly things if you do not understand earthly things?

This debate could have gone on forever. Something needed to happen to break the tension, to bring a new understanding into the argument that could reestablish communication. So Jesus decided to change the discussion, to try a different tactic that would bring the focus back to the original topic of salvation.

He states that no one on Earth has seen heaven, except the Son of Man who descended from heaven. But just as Moses lifted up the serpent staff in the desert to provide hope and direction for the wandering Israelites, so too must the Messiah be lifted by to provide hope and direction for the weary and wandering in the world.

Reborn continued page 6...

...**Reborn** continued.

This hope of new life, of salvation, is not in vain. The very act of sending Jesus to the world was an act of love and an outpouring of grace. The presence of Christ is proof positive that new life can be obtained and that we can be born of water and the Spirit. The positive, literal, and substantial proof the Nicodemus was searching for stood right in front of him.

John 3:16 is perhaps the best known passage of scripture in the Bible. It is used on tracts and pamphlets; people place this verse on signs and carry them to sporting events and other large gatherings. Yet, I often wonder why they do not quote John 3: 16 and 17 because I think verse 17 helps to make the point.

Jesus was indeed sent to the world to provide salvation, but God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. The gift of salvation, this new life that we are given through Christ, is offered to all people everywhere. But this gift of new life is not the end; it is just the beginning.

Inherent in the idea of salvation is that once we receive the gift of Jesus, we must not only tell others about the love of Christ, we must show them as well.

Our lifestyles, our attitudes, even our basic beliefs must change and make room for the Spirit of God, for we are called to emulate Christ, to become servants of God, and to live for others rather than for ourselves.

Only by sharing this gift can we know its true power, for the new life offered in Christ is not meant to divide but to unify. We are to live as one true family of God caring for each other in times of need, and helping to strengthen our lives of faith so that we might work of the Kingdom of God.

This idea brings to mind a Jewish legend about two brothers who owned a flourmill. One of the brothers was single; the other had a wife and two children. Because they were partners, each day the surplus flour was divided equally. Each broth-

er took his share and stored it in his barn.

After several years the single brother thought to himself, "This arrangement is not fair. My brother has a wife and children to feed, while I have no one to support. It is not right that I should receive half of the flour." And so, not wanting to embarrass his brother he began that night to take flour from his own barn and place it in his brother's barn.

About that same time the other brother began to think as well. "This arrangement is not fair. I have the blessings of a wife and children to care for me, but my brother has no one." So he began to take flour out of his barn and place it in his brothers.

Each night the brothers did this, but when they awoke the next morning they were surprised to find that the level of flour never when down in their barns. They began to think of this as a miracle so they began to give more and more to the other brother.

Finally, one night the two brothers met in the darkness, each carrying a sack full of flour. They realized what had been taking place, and overwhelmed by the true miracle of their love for each other, they embraced.

The legend claims that when God looked down and saw these two brothers embracing God blessed the spot saying, "Truly this is a holy place, for I have witnessed extraordinary love here." The rabbis claim that this is the very spot where Solomon built the first temple.

These two brothers knew what it meant to be children of God. They each had so much love it had to be shared and God blessed them on that day because they thought more about another than themselves. Their lives were changed because they knew that the miracle they found was the love they shared for each other.

As we go forward in our lives let us pray that we might share with others, that we might love and serve God, and that we may listen to the callings of the Spirit deep within our soul, for we are a changed people that have been given new life and new hope in Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.