



THERE'S MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

By Jake Owensby

I was eleven years old when Neil Armstrong stepped out of the Apollo 11 lunar module onto the moon's surface on July 20, 1969. My mother and I watched Armstrong's "giant leap for mankind" on a black and white TV in a cheap motel room. Mom had spent most of her remaining cash to give us at least one night sleeping in a bed and a chance to see the moon landing. We were homeless, having fled my physically and emotionally abusive father only a few weeks before.

When we left, my mother had no job prospects, no savings, and no reliable support network. We carried with us two suitcases full of our belongings. This is the sort of desperate gamble a mother will take when her husband points a gun at her and then puts that same pistol in her son's face. By the time we settled into living with my maternal grandparents, I had started high school and my address had changed seventeen times. My life contained a heavy dose of chaos, and I teetered on the edge of cynicism and despair.

It was in the middle of this disarray that I took the first steps toward the kind of faith that sustains me and gives me hope to this day. Many Christians refer to it as a contemplative faith. And it may surprise you to learn that it began with the study of philosophy. Philosophy was an advanced religion elective when I was a junior or senior in high school. My teacher Ms. Smith started the term with Plato. I was hooked immediately, because Plato sought to make sense out of a ceaselessly changing world.

My own life experiences had led me to worry that the only constant in life was that there is no reliable constant in life. You're always standing on shifting sand. For me, this was an unbearable thought. In Plato I found someone who not only acknowledged the flux of everyday life but also had discovered a deep, abiding truth within that very turbulence. Plato's point is that everything in this unstable, confusing life of ours points beyond itself to something upon which it depends for its very existence, identity, and meaning. Or, as I say now, when we learn how to look, we can see everything under a divine horizon.

Plato inspired me to look at the world in front of me as the place where God reaches out toward me to be known—or, more accurately, where God reaches out to embrace me and to be embraced by me. Receiving and returning this embrace is at the heart of contemplative faith. This embrace is more than an intellectual assent to doctrines, creeds, and dogmas. It's an opening of the heart, mind, and soul, an opening of our entire being. There is more to our earthly existence than meets the eye.

From the depths of our messy places, someone is reaching out to us—seeking to connect to us, transform us, and guide us in healing the whole creation. And that is where I find an enduring hope.

Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, July 15**, at Noon. Email to: publisher@fcc-hsv.org

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

SAVE THE DATE: AUGUST 8

Mission Family Kickoff Event
Details coming soon



**SHORT TERM
PRAYER CONCERNS**

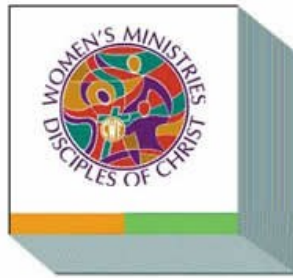


THANK YOU!

We had a nice turn out for our Church Work Day on Saturday, July 10. We weeded, pruned, and spread mulch on the north end of the church. There is still more work to be done and we will have another Work Day in the next few weeks - watch for an announcement in an upcoming *Journey*. A special thank you to Lynn Abernathy, Rev. Paul Allen, Mary Ann Anderson, Don Coburn, John Hall, Bob Senn, and Rick Shrout.

YOUR BLESSINGS BLESS OTHERS

Women of FCC, have you taken the time to practice the Spiritual Discipline of keeping a Blessing Box in a prominent place in your home, office, or both where you can drop a coin or coins in to acknowledge a blessing, small or large? Could you pause in a busy day to be grateful for God's daily blessings: a sunny day, a safe journey, a good meeting, a baby's smile, a call or message from a friend, an unsolicited "I love you," meeting a deadline, a gentle rain? Collections will be gathered in the spring of 2022 continuing a long tradition of the Christian Women's Fellowship since the 1880's in supporting the mission of the whole church and specifically supporting women's ministries. **Blessing boxes provided by CWM are available on the welcome table in the Narthex of the church.** All women are invited to participate.



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

Valley Christian Church
Birmingham, AL

WORSHIP ATTENDANCE SUNDAY, JULY 4

Service: 70
Small Groups: 20

OPEN DATES FOR FOOD BASKETS

September 5, 12, 19 & 26
October 17
November 14
December 5 & 26



THIS WEEK'S FOOD BASKET is in memory of Gina Anderson by Mary Anderson



SUNDAY COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

(Approved by the Board on June 10.)

- **Enter the church through the Bell Tower Garden/Narthex doors.** The doors by the church office will be locked.
- **Fully vaccinated individuals may choose to attend with or without masks.**
- **Attendees who are not fully vaccinated, and children who are able, will continue to wear face coverings/masks inside the church until further notice.**
- **One 9:30 a.m. service** is offered for the next 12 months. First Christian Church offers 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) every Sunday. While FCC and State recommendations are good benchmarks, we invite all people to worship with us based on their comfort level.
- Hand sanitizer and masks are available for those who have not brought their own.
- Prepackaged communion elements are available in the Narthex.
- The **nursery** is open for the 9:30 a.m. service and the 10:30 a.m. small group time.
- Attendance is limited (approximately 75) to the ability to social distance. Every other pew will be roped off for social distancing until after Vacation Bible School. There will be a section in front, on the choir side, that will continue to have rows of pews roped off to allow individuals to practice social distancing so that they may worship at their level of comfort.
- **Members may vocalize** during the service, such as stating the Lord's Prayer, litanies, etc., and sing hymns/songs when lyrics are projected on the screens.
- Offerings may be placed in the brass plate when exiting the sanctuary or sent by mail.
- Food, coffee, and other hospitality services remain suspended until further notice.
- **Small groups** (including Sunday school classes) will meet at **8:30 a.m. or 10:30 a.m.** A list of groups is available at the welcome table as you enter the church.
- 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.

IN THE MIDST By Martha Spong

We ponder your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple. - Psalm 48:9 (NRSV)

On my first Sunday back in the sanctuary after fifteen months, I made sure to mark the moment. Masked, I looked for a pew labeled with the service time, every other one wearing a sign for 8:15 or 11 a.m. During Covid-19, the sanctuary received a glow-up; the new cushion on which I sat felt firm and supportive, grounding me in a well-loved space that is familiar but different after all this time. Fresh paint, new blinds and lights, and new flooring have changed the landscape, but not whose it is. This space belonged and belongs to God.

Sitting up front, knowing the limited seating would fill up quickly, I felt the weight of waiting's end in a space that – like so many churches I have loved – breathes the Spirit of God into me. Like mouth-to-mouth, it resuscitates me.

We have not arrived at normal, whether the old version or a new one we may yet reach. On that morning, in the midst of the sanctuary, I pondered the steadfast love of God that sustains me and mine, and I hope yours, too. While the organ played, I heard murmurs behind masks, “Holy, holy, holy,” one of the hymns I have known the longest and sung the most in my 60 years. Early in the morning, 8:25ish, my song, though not full-throated, rose, hopeful.

Wherever we are, God is there with us.

Prayer

Holy God, we give thanks that you are in the midst of all the spaces, virtual and in-person, where the faithful gather, and we give thanks for your love that never ends. Amen.

IN PERSON & ONLINE WORSHIP SERVICES

Sunday in-person worship services are at 9:30 a.m. but you may still stream them live at 9:30 a.m., or watch previous services anytime, on [facebook.com/fcchsv](https://www.facebook.com/fcchsv), [twitch.tv/fcchsv](https://www.twitch.tv/fcchsv), or search First Christian Church Huntsville on Youtube. See **New COVID-19 Protocols** on page 4.

To Tell the Truth

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV Sermon July 11, 2021

Scripture - Mark 6: 14 - 29

Is it ever appropriate to lie? That seemed a rather inappropriate question during a seminary class on Christian ethics, yet our Professor posed it to us once again, "Can a lie be less harmful than the truth?"

Of course we know that lying is wrong, it is one of the Ten Commandments, but it seems as if lying, or at least not telling the whole truth, has become a part of our culture. An undergraduate College professor posed this question to a group of young people, "Under what conditions are you willing to tell the truth or speak your mind?" She was surprised by their answers. For these college students telling the truth was optional and often only done in "safe environments." Do we believe the same thing?

Before you answer, let me ask another question. Do you think there are different kinds of lies? Have you ever told a white lie, "Honey the meat-loaf was wonderful, I love it when it is dry and crunchy." Or what about a lie that protects another person?

Going back to my seminary class, when we answered that lying was wrong our professor gave us a hypothetical situation. A woman knocks on your door in the middle of the night and asks you to hide her because her husband is trying to hurt her. After you hide the woman the husband knocks on the door and asks you if you have seen his wife. Do you tell him the truth that she is in your house? Or do you tell him that she is not there?

In the scripture lesson for today we are told of the fate of John the Baptist. We are used to hearing about John during Advent, as he prepared the way for the coming of Christ. Every December, while we do our Christmas shopping, John tells us, and everyone with ears, to hear, repent and be baptized.

It feels strange to encounter news about John in July, and it is startling news at that. The man who baptized Jesus is dead. The voice in the wilderness has been silenced. Mark throws this pro-

nouncement down in front of us with a thunk, like a wet newspaper.

We also read that Jesus' fame has spread to important figures in society. King Herod, not the Herod of the nativity but Herod Antipas, his son, had heard of Jesus and the miracles that his disciples accomplished after he sent them out into the region of Galilee.

Mark reminds us that the people did not know what to make of Jesus. Some said he was Elijah, others a prophet, some even said that he was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Mark tells us that this is what Herod believed and that he is afraid of Jesus. Is he John the Baptist come again or another prophet that Herod will have to kill?

The strange thing about Herod is that it seems he really did not want to kill John. It was John's prophetic voice that got him in trouble. He charged Herod, the highest-ranking local bureaucrat, with having an unlawful marriage. Evidently Herod had put aside his wife and married his half-niece, Herodias, the daughter of one of his half-brothers and the ex-wife of another man.

This seems to have been a rather sordid and complex arrangement that was embarrassing to Herod and his new wife. As Tetrarch of Galilee Herod could not allow John, an unimportant peasant in Roman eyes, to assault his character. More to the point John was making Herodias, his new wife, angry. So John lands in jail and Herod is happy. John's voice is silenced and Herod did not have to kill him, thereby angering the people of Galilee.

But this was not enough for Herodias. Her honor had been insulted so she concocted a plan with Herod's daughter, who was also named Herodias in this gospel. She danced for Herod and his guests at his birthday party and danced so well that Herod told her, in front of some very important people, that he would give her anything she asked for, even half of his kingdom.

Herodias asked her mother, "What should I ask for?" and we know the end of the story. Even though Herod did not want to do it, Mark tells us that he is deeply grieved by the request, John is

Truth continued on page 5...

killed and his head is brought to Herodias on a platter.

This is not a pleasant tale in the gospel; in fact, many have wondered why Mark would tell us what happened to John in such gory detail. What is the point, other than letting us know that John is dead and Jesus is in danger?

The tale itself begins with questions about who Jesus was? The answer that John gave was that he was sent to prepare the way for way for Jesus, he was the Messiah and John was unworthy to even tie the thong of his sandal.

Again and again the stories of John and Jesus touch: John baptizes in the wilderness calling for redemption, Jesus is baptized by John and receives the Holy Spirit. John preaches a message that is popular but not understood just like Jesus. John had a mission and dedicated disciples; Jesus' ministry follows a similar pattern. The innocent John is killed by powerful people threatened by the truth and Jesus dies at the hands of anxious political authorities.

The point is not that Jesus and John are the same, instead we see that John prepares the way for Jesus even in death. Speaking the truth can be a dangerous thing no matter who you are.

The real lesson seems to be that doing what is right and good in the world will not protect you from being hurt. This is a lesson that we need to hear in the church because all too often we believe that the Christian way of life is easy. That if we say and do the right things we will be rewarded, but this is not always the case.

We believe in a Messiah that was rejected and killed by the very people he came to save and so we have to understand that there is danger in naming what is wrong with the world and trying to change it. A Christian life is not about comfort and safety it is about doing what is right no matter the risk.

It is interesting that the news of John's death follows the sending of the twelve to preach and heal with nothing to sustain them but their faith. After the news of John's death the disciples came back and tell Jesus of their success.

Knowing that their lives were in danger Jesus attempted to lead them to a place where they could rest and revive themselves with no success. Their fame followed them wherever they went, as did those who would silence Jesus.

The story of John's beheading is supposed to be shocking. It is supposed to hit us in the gut and remind us that those who follow Christ are called to confront the wrongdoing we see around us, and that confrontation is never easy.

Jesus identified with John; he saw his death in John's death. We are supposed to identify with Jesus and model our lives in his image, but does this mean that we are called to martyrdom, of course not. Thankfully we live in a culture that allows us to express our faith without fear of death as a penalty. But if fear of death is not stopping us why are we hesitant to spread the good news?

Perhaps it is because we are afraid that we will be persecuted in other ways. We will make our friends and coworkers uncomfortable and they will not want to associate with us. We will make our boss uneasy so we will not get a raise or a promotion. Or maybe we are afraid that if we look too deep within ourselves we will see that we are comfortable with our sinful nature, we are lying to ourselves and hoping that no one will figure it out. This is why we are so comfortable with lying because we do it every day.

However, we have to realize that the good news we are called to spread is also for us. Through Christ we can find the strength to take a chance and change ourselves. We can become the people we want to be if we have faith, if we open ourselves to the reality of the cross, and realize that the things we desire most are just an illusion.

What is real, what is true, what is just can be found if we open our hearts, realize that we are broken, ask to be redeemed, experience God in our lives and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. That was John's call so long ago, that is Christ's message, and now this is our story to tell. May we be given the strength and courage to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, Amen.