



The Journey

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SABBATH REST

Last year, in the middle of the pandemic, we realized that we would probably not be able to take our family vacation together as we normally did. Since it was Abby's senior year in High School, and wanting to do something as a family, we decided to take our saved vacation money and purchase a small pop-up camper. My family has always loved camping. One of the first true vacations Patti and I took after we were married was to camp at a friend's pond in a small two person tent. There is nothing like setting your own fire and cooking over it. Pulling fish from a creek for your dinner or hiking a trail you have never been on and finding a natural garden, a beautiful waterfall, or the glory of a sweeping meadow.

Our camping adventures also give us a chance to put away our phones, turn off the TV, and talk to one another face to face. When you do not have a device to hide behind it is amazing where conversations will lead and what you will learn about those you are close to and yourself. Our trip last year was wonderful as Joe and I were able to fish while Patti and Abby took care of the campground and decorated our small camper. We were able to have wonderful discussions, play games, cook with one another, and find time to relax.

I feel close to God in church and when I am around other people but I learn more about my relationship with God when I am alone, when I have time to pray, when my mind can wander, and when I can hear the voice of God in the trees, rocks and streams. We all need time to reflect and rest, in the scriptures it was mandated and called the Sabbath. The Sabbath was more than the day you went to the temple, it was an opportunity to devote an entire twenty-four hour cycle to God. During that time the Jewish people were called to pray, worship, study, share, take time with family and yes, rest, just as God did on the seventh day.

I wonder if we have lost this sense of Sabbath in our world. Even when we are not at work physically we are still working, answering emails and phone calls, or completing projects we did not have time for in the office. Or we find work at home, mowing the lawn and trimming the bushes, fixing the gutters or completing the project we started a few weeks ago. When do we find time to rest and to open ourselves to God?

I hope in the weeks ahead you will find time for Sabbath rest, a time to renew your faith and listen for God's voice. It may be in the wilderness, or in your home, it could even be in church, but wherever you choose let the Spirit of God fill you, so that you will be refreshed, and then let God's call guide you so that you can spread the good news of Christ in all that you do. I hope you will share your Sabbath experiences with your church family and with me in the days ahead. Thanks be to God, Amen.

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](https://www.facebook.com/fcchsv), [twitch.tv/fcchsv](https://www.twitch.tv/fcchsv), or [youtube.com/channel/UCzQCRY8Vfa-IDhuqUnUhCKw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzQCRY8Vfa-IDhuqUnUhCKw)

Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, September 9**, at Noon. Email to: publisher@fcc-hsv.org

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

NEW WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

Beginning September 9



SHORT TERM PRAYER CONCERNS



What: The Book of Romans

Materials Needed: A Bible and our text *Invitation to Romans* by Pamela M. Eisenbaum . The text can be found on Amazon at a cost of \$9.59. The following is the web link to order: www.amazon.com/Invitation-Romans-Participant-Short-Term-DISCIPLE-ebook/dp/B00XPZ1B2I

When: We will meet on 9/9/2021 at 10:00 until 11:30 a.m. and each Thursday thereafter.

How Long: Eight (8) weeks.

Where: Family Services room.

If you are interested or have any questions please contact Lisa Fitzgerald by phone at 256----- or email at - - -

Not Published Online

Christian Women's Ministries service project for September is Hope Place. Hope Place is an agency of Crisis Services of North Alabama that provides emergency shelter, counseling, court advocacy, etc. for victims of domestic violence and their children. Please join our Circle members in supporting this worthy cause during September. You may include your donation with your church offering by noting "Hope Place" and the amount.

Thank you, Nancy Woodall

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**

CHURCH CALENDAR

- Sept. 6 **Labor Day Church Office Closed**
No Quilters
- Sept. 8 6 pm Men's Group
7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- Sept. 9 10 am Women's Bible Study
6 pm Board Meeting
- Sept. 12 11:45 am Community Outreach
- Sept. 13 9:30 am Esther Circle
10:30 am Quilters
5:00 pm Convener's Meeting
- Sept. 15 6 pm Men's Group
7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- Sept. 16 10 am Women's Bible Study
- Sept. 20 10:30 am Quilters

REGIONAL PRAYER REQUESTS

New Hope Christian Church, Letohatchee AL

OPEN DATES FOR FOOD BASKETS

September 19	October 17
November 14	December 5 & 26

THIS WEEK'S FOOD BASKET is in memory of Ira & Betty Landrith by Pat Blackman.



WORSHIP ATTENDANCE SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

Service: 57	Small Groups: 23
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IN THE DOORWAY

Donna Schaper

One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So, whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. ... Elisha called her and she stood in the doorway. "You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you?"

2 Kings 4:8-15 excerpts (NIV)

Elisha wanted to repay the woman for her hospitality. She stayed in the doorway, uncertain about whether to accept the gift.

"I have a home among my own people," she said. She had offered her hospitality freely and didn't want any reciprocity.

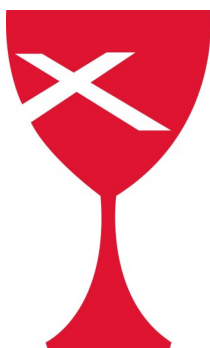
More often than not, we are too proud to accept gifts. We do want to be held, we do want to be thanked, but we don't want to be "beholden." There is a difference.

There are many kinds of doorways, front, back, cellar, attic. A good door lets you go in and out. I like to prop my back door open with a stone. Otherwise, I have to put my packages down to get in. Some of my packages I should leave behind. I have stuff in my luggage about being beholden that doesn't help me. Other times I need to dwell securely with my own people and shut the door.

Some doorways lead to spiritual experience. All doors are good, unless we stand in our own way, uncertain about which way to go.

Prayer

God, you who give us independence and on whom we may also dare depend, help us know what to do with offers of help, when to say yes and when to say no. Amen.



COVID-19 CHURCH PROTOCOLS

(Approved by the Board on August 12.)

- **One 9:30 a.m. service** will be offered at least through May 2022. First Christian Church offers virtual services (facebook.com/fcchsv, 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.
- **Enter the church through the Bell Tower Garden/Narthex doors.** The doors by the church office are locked.
- **Wearing face coverings/masks at all times inside the church is encouraged for everyone.**
- 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.
- **Every other row of pews is roped off on the pulpit side of the sanctuary to allow individuals to practice social distancing so that they may worship at their level of comfort. The front section on the pulpit side is the least impacted zone with our heating and cooling system.**
- **Attendees 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.**
- 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.



ALL ARE WELCOME

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV Sermon Sept. 5, 2021
Scripture Verses: James 2: 1-10, 14-17

My father once told a story about a surprising encounter that changed his understanding of who was welcome in church. My dad was a wonderful cook and often, when he hosted a meeting, he would whip up some snacks so the group would feel comfortable and the meeting would be more enjoyable.

One Sunday, before a meeting, my father had laid out food in the fellowship hall and then went into his office to wait for the guests to arrive. He heard a noise in the church, so thinking that someone was early he went out to greet them.

He found an older woman he did not know moving around the table eating the food there and wrapping other bits in a napkin to place in her purse. She was not one of the people he had invited, so grumbling under his breath he decided to confront the woman and ask her what she was doing there.

She told him that she was passing by the church and came inside because she was hungry and needed someone to talk to. As my father continued to speak with the woman he realized that all she needed was a kind voice and a welcoming ear. He sat and talked with her even as his other guests arrived, offering welcome and assistance, and when she left he packed up some of his carefully prepared food for her to take home.

When I asked my father if he ever saw the woman again he told me, "No." "Then, who was she?" I asked. "What did she want?" "She was Jesus." My father replied. "She was a part of the Body of Christ, and it was my honor to serve her."

The book of James offers a radical departure on how we welcome others in the church. James asks in his very straightforward manner, who do you favor? The rich with heavy rings, fine clothes, and expensive tastes; or the poor, those people who need our fellowship the most?

James noticed something that the church still struggles with. Even though we tell our children not to judge how a person looks or dresses. Even though we claim to be impartial and loving, often we fail to see Christ in others.

We judge people every day, making determinations based on their clothes, jewelry, or haircut. We base our ideas of success, financially and even spiritually, on how a person looks and speaks.

The scene that James observed so long ago still happens every day. Those who look and act, as we think they should, are given our attention, while those who are different are not welcomed as warmly. We may introduce ourselves hesitantly but as we speak we continue to look around the room for another person to talk to. We do not mean to hurt the person, but we do, and often this injury does not heal quickly.

James tells us that we are to show no partiality, or divide ourselves, for all are welcome in the house of the Lord. The keyword in the scripture lesson is favoritism, which in Greek means to "lift up your face." You show favoritism by lifting up your eyes; your cheeks, your smile, and letting your expressive face come alive. When you are excited to meet someone you do this automatically, it is a reflex action.

When James remembered what he saw in the church he had to think to himself, "Does God show favoritism. For who does God's face light up?"

Often when I have traveled on mission trips, especially those who focus on helping people recover from natural disasters, I encounter people who have lost everything. In the case of a flood, fire, or wind damage they have to throw away all that they owned and rebuild their lives from the ground up. I remember a woman I encountered in Gulfport, Mississippi who told us that this was the most embarrassing thing she had ever had to do. She felt as if her whole life was ruined and on display on her front lawn,

Welcome continued page 5...

...**Welcome** continued.
waiting to be picked up and placed in the garbage.

At that time she felt lost and hopeless but then she began to tell me about the people she met who helped her. Volunteers who came from all over the country to rebuild her home, neighbors who offered food and clothing, church members, who had lost their homes, asking what they could do for her, offering money, clothes, and a listening ear. Before other assistance ever appeared, the church, in all its incarnations was there.

This is the unity that James wrote about. It does not matter if these people were rich or poor, black or white, young or old; everyone who needed assistance received it. People who did not even know each other reached out through trying times. When God saw such hope amid despair, God's face was lifted up.

James tells us plainly that faith without works is dead. We can say that we believe in God and base our lives on Christ, but if we do not act according to our beliefs our faith is empty and meaningless.

Martin Luther, the founder of the Lutheran church, once said the book of James did not belong in the New Testament. Luther believed in justification by faith and when he read, "faith without works is dead." he thought that James was refuting Paul's belief that we are saved by grace.

There are many, including me, who believe that Luther jumped the gun. James never states that our works save us nor does he disagree with Paul, in fact, his letter often reiterates Paul's teachings. Rather, James does not want Paul's message to become distorted.

There have always been those in the church who believe that because they are saved they can do anything. They can sin as long as they ask for forgiveness afterward. To this idea, James answers with a resounding, "NO! If you

believe this you are not only putting yourself in jeopardy but others as well."

If we do not meet the needs of those around us, if we do not care for them, if we do not show in our daily lives what it means to be a Christian, then we are hypocrites, and the teachings of Christ have had no impact on us.

Our faith calls us to transform ourselves and become servants of God and each other. In response to our faith, we must reach out and welcome all people because we have been made one by the sacrifice of Christ, the ultimate act of love and compassion.

According to Carmelo Alvarez, who works with the global ministries of the CC(DOC), "Faith, according to James, requires concrete action that demonstrates not only true piety but love, showing our neighbor in need how we go beyond any law, in freedom, to serve God in the 'least of these.'"

Is our faith lifeless and dead, or is it alive and growing? For James, the true test is how we treat others and how we serve God every day in our lives. His words remind us that we must examine ourselves, not only our beliefs but how we live them out, for God calls us to commit ourselves to justice and provide concrete acts of love and compassion.

Faith and works are not two separate theological ideas; they work together as a part of the Christian whole. Faith without works is dead, but in the same manner works without faith are lifeless. The key to this idea does not lie within us but in the transforming love of God who not only offers salvation but a new way to live on earth.

Do we encompass the passionate faith and fire of the spirit that James writes about? Do we serve others reminding ourselves that we could be entertaining Christ unaware? When God looks at our church, our families, and our lives, is God's face lifted up? Thanks be to God, Amen.