



THERE IS ROOM FOR YOU TOO by Chris Andrews

Have you ever been surprised by God? You expected God to work one way and God did the opposite, the unexpected? In the New Testament, God is constantly pulling surprises: God loves the most unlikely people, and shows up in the most unexpected places.

This is the message from Acts 10: 44-48. Perhaps a short Bible study will help us appreciate what is going on in today's reading. In the second chapter of Acts, we are confronted with the story of the birth of the church. We call it the Pentecost story. On the day of the Jewish festival of Pentecost something happened that no one expected. The Holy Spirit blew through the gathered community and caused quite a stir as people found themselves speaking in various languages and yet were able to understand what everyone was saying. It is a marvelous moment. Diverse groups of people are brought together through an unexpected visitation of the Holy Spirit and community is created.

However, this experience is a limited one. The gathered community is a community of Jews, the chosen people of God. It is Pentecost and the church has been fashioned by God's spirit. We celebrate this day every year in the liturgical cycle of the church. A lot happens after this dramatic visitation of God's spirit. The story is thrilling and I encourage you to read it for yourself in this early history of the church that we call the Acts of the Apostles.

In the tenth chapter of this book a different kind of Pentecost occurs. It has been called the "Gentile Pentecost" because here we have a record of the Holy Spirit visiting Gentiles, the non-Jews of that world. Now this is a surprise! No one expects God to act in this way. God is the God of the Jews. God's love is reserved for them. They are the people with the great faith tradition that begins with Abraham and continues through the exodus and the kings and prophets of the Old Testament. It would be only fitting that on the day of Pentecost God would do a special work like bringing the Spirit on the believers gathered at the sacred site of Jerusalem.

But God's spirit is always larger than our expectations. In Acts 10, that spirit confirms that God loves Gentiles too. The community of the excluded is included. The ones regarded as a "nonpeople" are elevated to the status of God's children. It is a surprise of monumental proportions! The early church is confronted with God's view and has to open its life and doors to all the people of the world. No longer can the church live in the comfort of fellowship with its own. Now it must make room for all. It is a challenge and a blessing all at the same time.

Such is the story of the New Testament. Reading the Gospels and the Letters of this sacred text one becomes aware of one fact above all others: Jesus Christ is the friend of sinners, sufferers, and Samaritans! Just think about who gets noticed, who gets included in the story: Bartimaeus, the ten lepers, a man born blind, Zacchaeus, a hemorrhaging woman, an insane man living in a graveyard. Their names are legion. No "brightest and best" in this group. No power brokers, no names that graced the local social register, none of

Room continued page 2...

Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, May 13**, at Noon. Email to: publisher@fcc-hsv.org

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

...**Room** continued.

the king’s palace advisors. These are the marginalized, the forgotten, and the overlooked. And God loves them all! This is the message of our text for today.

It is a reminder to us that Jesus is constantly moving toward those from whom others are moving away. And it is the good news that you, too, are included in the fellowship of the redeemed! No wonder we call this the gospel, which means, literally, “good news.”

So here we are at church. We are an interesting group. We are the well behaved and the rebels. We are the righteous and the lost. We are the consistent and the inconsistent, the saints and the sinners. And, we all belong! Such is the grace of God that God’s spirit of love reaches all.

I remember making a call many years ago to acknowledge someone’s presence at our church. A woman had attended worship along with her children. I visited her home the following Monday hoping to see her and talk to her about our church. I wanted to invite her to come again and consider joining this community of faith. The woman was not at home, but her husband was. He and I had a pleasant visit at the front door. He told me his name was Bill. His wife’s name was Betty. As I concluded my visit with Bill, I said, “Please tell Betty that we would love to have her visit our church again.” And Bill said that he would. And then, as I turned to walk away, Bill called out, “And me too.” And I said, “Of course . . . and you, too, Bill.”

That scene has remained with me. “And you too, Bill.” That is God’s way. That is Jesus’ example. That is the church when it is at its fullest with the inclusive spirit of the living God! Today the message comes to all of us: And you too! Surprise! There’s room for you, too, in this place of sacred love. No wonder we call this the “good news” place!



**WEEKLY
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
Cedar Plains Christian Church
Falkville, AL

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.

WORSHIP ATTENDANCE		
April 25 - 65	May 2 - 76	May 9 - 70



MAY
BIRTHDAYS



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.

Please join us on **CELEBRATE**
 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.

YOU WERE SO GENEROUS!

Through your generosity, CWM received enough donations to sponsor three children at the House of Hope in Haiti! What a wonderful gift for three children whose lives will be dramatically changed because of this gift. They will have a safe place to live and will receive an education that would not have been available to them. We will not know them or they us but these children will know that there are caring people in this world. You have made a difference - thank you!

MAY CHURCH CALENDAR

The following are the known church related activities.

- 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

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/fchsv/videos

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

HEALS

(Health Establishments at Local Schools)

HEALS, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization that provides school-based primary healthcare 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

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](#), 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.

COURSE CORRECTION

by Kaji Douša

Making a whip of cords, Jesus drove all of them out of the temple. - John 2:15 (NRSV)

What will Jesus find when he comes to visit us?

When Jesus came to the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus was displeased. He saw the bodies being sold in the temple yard. He saw the money changing hands. He saw and was viscerally revolted by the ways that the people had turned his Abba's house into a marketplace.

What Jesus found when he showed up to the temple was something. But it wasn't his. And it was so dangerous that he had to get everyone up out of there.

And they hated him for it. (This would get him executed, you see.)

But what he saw was so wrong. So out of pocket. So harmful. He had to do something.

The temple didn't turn into a marketplace without a series of failures taking place first. Leaders failed their people. They doubled down. They surely lied. They enriched themselves with the selling of bodies in the place of worship in the name of "sacrifice."

Jesus was having none of that. And they hated him for it.

But, there is such a thing as a course correction. There is a path to redemption.

It requires self-examination. It requires penitence – sincerely saying "I'm wrong, I'm sorry." It requires moving on. It requires looking around – maybe even in the mirror – and seeing if there are things in our surroundings that don't fit.

Only then can we step into our truth. And right the wrongs. And be who God put us on this planet to be.

Who and what is that? It's quite simple: we can decide that we will be a blessing. Or, at least, we can try.

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for showing us how to love, learn and bless. Amen.

SERMON TEXT SUNDAY, MAY 9, 2021

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV Sermon **Christ's Abiding Love**

Scripture - John 15: 9-17

They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Now, I have never been sure who the "they" are, but I think that they might have been ministers because we are notorious for using the stories and ideas of others for our own lessons or sermons.

The simple fact is that all human beings imitate one another. We memorize and retell favorite jokes, look to celebrities and designers to see what to wear or how to style our hair, and utilize societal models to see how we are supposed to act toward one another.

The idea of learning by imitation is clearest in young children. This is how babies learn so rapidly; they imitate those who surround them, especially their parents. That is why Patti and I have always watched what we say around Abby and Joe. I heard enough horror stories from my parents or other ministers to realize that preacher's kids are notorious for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time.

Even Jesus realized the power of imitation in his ministry. He knew that the disciples and future Christians would need examples to follow, therefore, he taught in parables and provided models of how we are to live through his actions and words. Today's scripture passage is such an example.

The lesson for today is found in what is called Jesus' farewell discourse in the Gospel of John. This passionate prayer occurs before the Passover during the Last Supper and in many ways is a love letter to humankind so that we might know of the sacrificial love of Christ. That evening Jesus attempted to tell his apostles and followers what was going to happen in the days ahead, but he also called them to look to the future.

The lesson for today is the heart of this discourse because it speaks to the great commandment that Jesus gives us, tells us how we are to relate to others, and what our relationship will be with the risen Christ. Jesus tells the disciples that they are to abide in the love of God as evidenced through Jesus' presence on Earth. And how are the disciples to show this love, by following Jesus' commandments?

When we think of following commands we associate it with giving up control. In order to be commanded there has to be a leader and a follower, so we are putting ourselves in the subservient role and giving away our power to choose for ourselves. But this is not how Jesus sees it. He knew that following his

commandments would bring us joy. But how?

First we have to understand the commandments that Jesus speaks of. He tells the disciples that his only commandment is to love one another as I have loved you. This idea sparks the imagination with its simplicity, but continues to challenge us every day. All of the other commandments are wrapped up in this idea, the understanding that God is love, Jesus in the incarnation of that love, and so as a response to this wondrous gift we are called to love one another.

However, once we begin to think about it, it seems an impossible task. How can we even begin to love others as Jesus loves us, how can we love people who injure our pride, rub us raw, or wish to destroy us?

Jesus does not stop just because we are uncomfortable, he goes further; no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. Of course Jesus is reminding his followers of his coming death but there is more. His act of sacrifice on the cross becomes the definition of love for us. This is how we are called to love others, not friendly compassion or genial interest. We are called to care for others so much that we are willing to sacrifice ourselves for their sake.

The trouble is that we do not understand what sacrifice is. The concept is foreign because we have always been taught to look out for ourselves. We think that we can have our cake and eat it too, that we do not have to work or struggle for anything because we deserve success and expect to be happy.

We have seen in the past years what vanity, pride, and greed can do not just to a person or community but to a nation and the world as well. The decisions of a few have led to turmoil for the whole because no one wanted to think about the long term consequences or even began to contemplate how their actions would affect others.

As Christians, we are called to a better way. The core of the Christian faith is sacrificial love. We are called to imitate Jesus by giving up our delusions of power and sacrificing our lives of sin, so that we are reborn in the likeness of Christ.

I can remember the anticipation building as Patti and I were expecting our first child. This was something I had wanted my whole life, but I did not realize how it would change my life until we took Abby home and we were left alone with a small sleeping baby. I realized very quickly that she was dependent on me. My wants, my needs, my desires, all took a backseat to

Love continued page 6...

