



REBUILDING THE CHURCH

The religious world as we know it has changed. Every time I meet with ministers from our own denomination and from other denominations this topic continues to resurface. Even though the COVID-19 crisis is beginning to abate, even though churches are opening up throughout the country, programs are restarting, and more and more people are attending worship services, it is still very clear that the church has gone through a great deal of transformation in the last year and a half.

Some of these changes should probably have happened years ago, the understanding that new technologies can assist in disseminating information and provide resources for those who are unable to attend services in person, or idea that connecting with members can be done through new means. Others provide different challenges, such as what constitutes being a member of a congregation and how do you build community with online worshippers.

All of these discussion hold a basic question at their center. Can the church rebuild, or can something new be brought from these experiences? How does the church recover and renew itself? Rev. Rebekah Simon-Peter believes that yes, a church can rebuild if:

1. The church is willing to SIMPLIFY. Let go of ministries or activities that no longer have a champion. Many ministries hang on by a thread because they were once vibrant, but if the champion has moved or is no longer interested, and no one else is stepping up, it's time to let it go. If the ministry or activity doesn't forward the mission and the vision of the congregation, consider the lack of a champion is a gift in disguise.

2. The church is willing to SHED. Let go of items that drain you financially. Properties or programs that do not forward your vision or drain you financially can undo a church. Release the sentimentality and get back to your main mission.

3. The church embraces SOCIETY. Gone are the days when a church could simply focus on itself and expect to maintain or grow. Pastors must be called to both church and society, but it is not just the pastor who must have this focus. If the congregation refuses to extend themselves, the pastor is sunk, and frankly, so is the church. Church improvement plans don't keep a congregation alive.

4. The church cultivates SPIRITUALITY. People are deeply hungry for spirituality that makes a difference. Let prayer and Bible study move you beyond a discussion about God, or a rehearsal of beliefs, into the realm of experiencing God. It's easy for church life to stray into the mundane. Too much focus on budgets and buildings, though, can tempt you to forget the miraculous. Don't allow that to happen.

If the church is willing to simplify its activities, shed unnecessary properties, embrace society and cultivate spirituality, it has a good chance to rebuild. However, rebuilding will remain forever out of reach without one more crucial element in place. No, not money, not even younger people, or a prime location. The most critical element for rebuilding is a willingness to dream like Jesus. In order to rebuild in a sustainable

Rebuilding continued next page...

Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, July 8**, at Noon. Email to: publisher@fcc-hsv.org

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

...**Rebuilding** continued. way, the church must have a big, bold, God-sized vision. Something compelling enough, and risky enough, to require them to grow in faith, depend on each other, and partner with God. Only a vision of this size and scope will draw people forward into the rebuilding phase and only God's vision can sustain us in the future. Yes, the church can rebuild and be renewed, together we can be a part of that mission and be the Body of Christ for our community and the world. Thanks be to God, Amen.



**SHORT TERM
PRAYER CONCERNS**



Not Listed Online

SAVE THE DATE: AUGUST 8
Mission Family Kickoff Event
Details coming soon

Volunteers Needed!

In- Person Vacation Bible School!

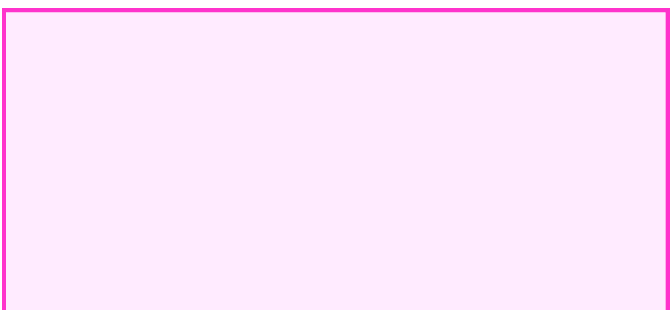
July 19-23 (9:00-11:30 am)

Ages 3 through 5th Grade

This year at VBS, we will explore five stories about Jesus from the Gospels of Luke and John. These stories reveal the generosity of God, the transforming power of Jesus' welcome, and offer a model for living and sharing God's hospitality. Children will be invited to see the ways Jesus welcomed and cared for all people and be challenged to welcome and share that same hospitality with everyone. Join us as we discover all are welcome at the table!



To register your child **or to volunteer** to help please contact Pastor Laura (256) 881-0150 or laura@fcc-hsv.org



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
New Bethel Christian Church, Greenville, AL

OPEN DATES FOR FOOD BASKETS
August 15
September 5, 12, 19 & 26
October 17
November 14
December 5, 12, 19 & 26

THIS WEEK'S FOOD BASKET is in memory of Barbara Keller by Don & Norma Muncy.



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, 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 (6 feet apart for non-household members). Every other pew will be roped off for social distancing.
- **Members may vocalize** during the service, such as stating the Lord's Prayer, litanies, etc., and sing the Doxology within the service.
- 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



SATURDAY, JULY 10

Inside and outside work. Please call 256-881-0150 or email publisher@fcc-hsv.org if you plan on volunteering (we need an idea of how many will be here so we can plan the projects). **Currently there are only 5 people signed up to work.**

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, twitch.tv/fcchsv, or search First Christian Church Huntsville on Youtube. See **New COVID-19 Protocols** on page 4.

WORSHIP ATTENDANCE SUNDAY, JULY 4

Service: 63
Small Groups: NR

NEVER GIVE UP

by Anthony Robinson

*Look to the rock from which you were hewn,
and to the quarry from which you were dug.*

Isaiah 51:1b (NRSV)

The old coach had been invited to give the high school commencement speech. He approached the podium, looked out on the graduates, and said slowly, "Never give up." He paused and cast his eyes over the students once more, then said, a second time, "Never give up." Another pause, another look, and for a third time, "Never give up." Then he turned and walked back to his seat.

Never Give Up continued page 4...

...*Never Give Up* continued.

Our times are such we may be tempted to give up. To give up on a nation so deeply polarized and divided. To give up on a democracy so vulnerable to manipulation of fear and by falsehood. To give on the hope of being and building a beloved community when bruised by acts and words of cruelty and callousness.

Isaiah's words in today's reading are a kind of "Never give up." The people to whom the prophet spoke had plenty of reason for discouragement, for giving up. They dwelt in exile in a foreign land - strangers in a strange land. Their beloved homeland was now a waste land.

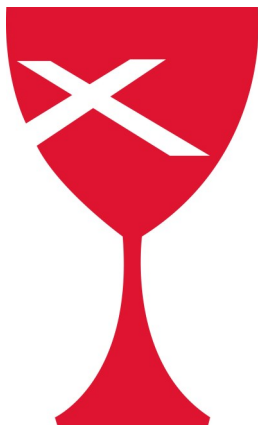
But the word of God came: Never give up. "Look to the rock from which you were hewn." Remember who you are. "Look to Abraham your father and Sarah who bore you. He was but one when I called him, but I made him many." Never give up.

However discouraging the present moment, do not give up on people. Do not give up on the church. And never give up on yourself. God isn't finished with you yet.

"For the Lord will comfort Zion, God will comfort all her waste places, and make her wilderness like Eden." Never give up.

"Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and voice of song." God never gives up.

Prayer Gracious God, we're concerned. Grant us sustaining hope, steady perseverance, and deep faith for the living of these days. Amen.



Moving On and Trying Again

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV

Sermon July 4, 2021

Scripture - Mark 6: 1-13

As football fans you know what home field advantage is and you know what it means to be the 12th man, to be so involved in the game that we feel as if we are a part of the team. The amazing thing is that home field advantage is very real. The energy and passion of the fans spurs on the team, I have been a witness to this many times.

Yet, I have also been to stadiums where the silence was deafening. Where there was no energy and the crowd was disinterested in the game or disgusted with their own players. In those situations the crowd became a detriment as the players tried whatever they could to get the fans into the game, often making mistakes because of the chances they took. They wanted the crowd to support them at any cost.

When you go home, to the place where you grew up, you expect support, encouragement and love. You expect to be treated well, to have a place at the table, a chance to rest and relax. You expect to be welcomed and cheered on, but what would be the case if this didn't happen? Would it still be home or just a stop along the way?

In today's gospel passage Jesus was going home. In the past months he had traveled throughout the region, crossed the Sea of Galilee, and taught and healed in Samaritan lands, now he was going home to Nazareth, probably breathing a sigh of relief, and looking forward to some home cooking and a little rest.

On the Sabbath Jesus went to the synagogue to preach and the whole town must have turned out to hear the local boy who was now so famous. But what Jesus said astounded them and made them uncomfortable. Where could he have gotten this information, what was the source of his wisdom? Was this the Jesus that they had watched grow and develop into a man?

They saw Jesus in human terms. "This is the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. We know him, he is just a carpenter." And with that they stopped listening. In this case familiarity led to skepticism. The people of Nazareth knew Jesus in ways that his other followers could not. They had seen him grow up and been a part of his education. They knew Jesus and his family intimately and so were

Moving continued page 5...

not open to new religious ideas or interpretations, especially from the boy next door.

That was the problem. They could not believe that God would speak through someone they knew, a man who had grown up and worked beside them? To the crowd it was inconceivable that God could work in the commonplace, in the ordinary, in the things and people they saw every day.

The rejection of his friends, family, and neighbors must have hurt Jesus. This was the one place where he expected to be understood, where he did not have to worry about the questions or fears of the people getting in the way. They would trust and understand him even if no one else would, because they were his people.

We can identify with Jesus' feelings because we have all been rejected. Each and every one of us has felt anger and resentment when we feel that we do not belong, that our presence is not welcome. At the same time we also have to recognize our own presence in the crowd of witnesses who rejected Jesus.

Who are Jesus' neighbors today? Those who claim they know him but do not listen. Are we in that group sometimes? Have the words and actions of Jesus become so familiar that they have lost their power? Do we take Jesus for granted?

Familiarity can lead to disbelief and ultimately rejection. We turn away from the voice of Christ and choose to see and hear what we want or what we think Jesus should say. When we hear a prophet speaking, telling us that we have strayed from the path; we silence the annoying voice, turn our backs and continue as before.

The rejection of Jesus in Nazareth was a turning point in his ministry. Those closest to him took offense to his words, but rather than seeing this as a setback, Jesus used the opportunity to empower his disciples for the work of ministry. In the gospels the disciples are always slow to get the message. They never fully understand the nature of Jesus. Each time they try they fail, sometimes in spectacular ways, and they struggle not only with Jesus' identity as teacher and Messiah, but with their own place in his ministry.

That is why the second half of this scripture lesson is so intriguing. Jesus takes this group of flawed questioning people and sends them out, with his authority, to the villages in the region of Galilee to proclaim his message.

The mission of the disciples was not solitary; it was grounded within community. They would not be alone. The other believers would support them in their task, each using the talents and gifts that God had given them to ensure their success. The pairing of the disciples also ensured the validity of their witness, they were sent as agents of Christ just as he was sent to proclaim the good news of God.

Jesus told the disciples to travel light packing no supplies or money of any kind; rather, they are to rely on the tradition of hospitality. The disciples were not to put their faith in material things, but in God. The urgency of their message was such that they had no time to pack. They had to go forth quickly and trust that God would supply their needs.

When they entered a village they were to accept hospitality from the first person that greeted them and were to stay with that person as long as they remained in the town. They were not supposed to focus on finding the best accommodations for their stay; but on the accomplishment of the task.

However, keeping in mind his rejection, Jesus also told the disciples how to respond if the good news was not welcomed. He told them to leave the place and shake the dust off of their feet as a testimony against those who would not hear. In Jesus' time when pious Jews left Gentile territory they would often shake the dust off of their feet to symbolize the separation from any remnant of ritual defilement.

Jesus used this gesture as a reminder that ministry is difficult and sometimes the message of God will not be received. But, rather than becoming spiteful and angry, the disciples walk away hoping that the word will be heard later.

The most amazing about this passage is not the instructions of Jesus, but the success of the disciples. We are told in verses 12 and 13 that their words were heard and they were able to perform miraculous deeds. These flawed people, who did not have a clear understanding of who Jesus was or why they were chosen for the task, found that they had the power to do wondrous things.

It is clear that the skills and talents of the disciples had little to do with the spread of God's message. They were sent, but the power came from God. This scripture passage is a missionary manifesto for the early church. These Christians expected Jesus to

Moving continued page 6...

return soon; therefore, they needed to spread the good news as quickly as possible.

Like the disciples their call to mission did not rely on possessions, money, or prestige. Instead, they relied on God to provide whatever was necessary for the completion of their task. This did not mean that preparation was not necessary. Much as Jesus prepared the disciples for their journey, the early Christians knew that no one could go forward into the world without training. However, the overriding ideal was that God would give them what they needed so they would succeed.

Modern Christians have lost this idea. We weigh ourselves down with physical and spiritual baggage that hinders our journey of faith. Often the concern for creature comforts and dependence upon material resources gets in the way of our relationship with God. It is hard to give up the safety and security we believe we possess and step out into new territory.

But that is exactly what God calls us to do. We are participants in the mighty works of our Creator. We have been entrusted with a message of repentance and reconciliation. We are called to take authority over evil and banish it from our midst, to be healers, servants, and ministers to all those who are searching and bring a message of hope to those who are lost. And the amazing thing about our call is that we will succeed if we move forward with Jesus and spread his message because the power is not ours, it is God's.

Today we are not called to be the 12th man. We are not asked to sit in the comfortable seats, be armchair quarterbacks, and question the decisions of the coach. Instead we are asked to get out on the field, to work, to sweat, to persevere, to ask, to try, to fail, to pick ourselves up and try again. We are now the representatives of God in the world, let us go forth and share the good news to all who will hear. Thanks be to God, Amen.