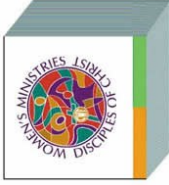


YOUR BLESSINGS BLESS OTHERS

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.



Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, July 22**, at Noon publisher@fcc-hsv.org



First Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
3209 Whitesburg Drive
Huntsville, AL 35802



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

Our 2021 Vacation Bible School is now underway! At the time of the writing of this article, we have 88 children registered for this year's VBS, making it the biggest one ever!

This year at VBS, we are exploring 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 have been invited to see the ways Jesus welcomed and cared for all people and be challenged to welcome and share that same hospitality with everyone.

Isn't that a message that we all need to hear? That we are ALL welcome at God's table! It doesn't matter what age we are, what gender we are, where we come from, where we are heading, if we are new to the faith or a life long believer. ALL are welcome!

Growing up, I don't think I missed one summer of attending VBS. I loved going to VBS as a child, and the volunteers helped to shape my spiritual journey. As much as I loved attending, I could not wait until I was old enough to volunteer myself. Volunteers really do make a positive difference in the life of a child. I am very thankful for all of the volunteers who have given of their time and talents to make this VBS a successful one.

On Sunday, July 25 at the worship service we will have our VBS Sunday Celebration. During the worship service we will share what we learned each day of VBS. The children will also sing their VBS songs for us. I hope that you will join us as we discover all are welcome at the table!

~Pastor Laura

The Journey

Volume XXIX No. 29
July 19, 2021
www.fcc-hsv.org

3209 Whitesburg Drive, Huntsville, Alabama 35802 Telephone: 256-881-0150

Online and In-Person Sunday Worship Service: 9:30 a.m.

Reserve your meal for the...

2021-23 MISSION FAMILY KICKOFF!

August 8, 2021 at 430pm

McMains Hall and Family Services Area
FCC will provide box suppers (sandwich, chips, drink and cookie)

Choose a ham, turkey, or veggie sandwich from Schlotzsky's

Contact the office by August 3rd with your order

256 881-0150 or office@fcc-hsv.org

Following the meal, we will break into our four new groups to briefly introduce our leaders, mingle with fellow members, and discuss ideas for the new term.

All, please come!



SHORT TERM PRAYER CONCERNS



Not Posted 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

Arbol de Vida Christian Church
Pensacola, FL



THIS WEEK'S FOOD BASKET is in memory of Rebecca Denise Ball from Matt, Karen, & Stan Ball.

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 pervious services anytime, on facebook.com/fcchsv, twitch.tv/fcchsv, or search First Christian Church Huntsville on Youtube.

MOUNTAINS AND MOLEHILLS

By Vince Amlin

If you have raced with foot-runners and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? - Jeremiah 12:5a (NRSV)

Ben Nevis is Scotland's tallest mountain. Which, at around 4400 feet, is not saying much. But the ascent starts basically from sea level, so you earn every foot.

I had climbed the first few dozen stairs when the path curved around the mountain, and for the first time, I got a view of what lay ahead: the longest staircase I had ever seen.

My mind balked. Could I make it up all those stairs? Did I want to? In thirty minutes I could be back down in a pub eating a full Scottish breakfast.

Grudgingly, I started up, praying just to make it to that final stair in the distance.

And when I did, heaving in triumph, the path turned again, and I found a staircase three times longer than the one I'd just finished.

This is not God's best pep talk: "If you have raced with foot-runners and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses?"

Jeremiah complains. And God assures him: it's gonna get so much worse.

Mountains continued next column...

...*Mountains* continued.

You think *this* is a big staircase?

But there is a note of hope in God's reply. If you can hear it from the bottom step.

You are meant to run with horses.

Not only will you climb these stairs, but the ones after them. And the scree switch-backs after that, and the steep icy section, and the boulder field.

You will step onto the highest rock and look down on the clouds. Because you were made for the mountaintop.

Which is so much farther than you imagine.

Prayer Give me the strength for this mountain. And the one beyond it.

THANK YOU FOR CARING!

Because of your generosity, thirty-four \$25 gift cards were donated to a very grateful Foster Care Unit at DHR! Funding is never enough to take care of the children in care and this gives the social workers a cushion for those times when finances are tight. Also, DHR is in desperate need of foster parents; with more and more children coming into care, that need is great. If you have ever considered this much needed service but did not know where to start, please contact Jennifer Taylor (DHR Foster Care Supervisor) at 256-427-6298 or email at jennifer.taylor@dhr.alabama.gov

OPEN DATES FOR FOOD BASKETS

September 5, 12, 19 & 26
October 17



ATTENDANCE SUNDAY, JULY 18

Worship 77
Small Groups 29

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. 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.

A Dwelling Place for God

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV Sermon July 18, 2021
Scripture Verses: Ephesians 2: 11-22

As a minister in Kansas I was asked to do something that was out of my comfort zone. Our Associate Regional Minister needed someone to become the director of a new camp that focused on Horseback Riding. It was what we called, a specialty camp, one focused on a smaller group of individuals but hopefully, it would appeal to youth that did not normally go to church camp.

I had not ridden a horse in years, so I went for the training, just like all of the youth, on how to care for horses, ride them safely, and even how to clean their stalls. That part did not concern me, what did make me nervous was that our camp was so small we would be sharing the campground with two other camps. Our Primary camp, for very young children, and Music and Drama camp.

In the morning, the two camps would separate, each going to their own locations to work on the focus for the week. However, in the afternoon they would come together for Small Groups, Bible Study, and time for recreation. These were two very different groups of youth. My camp had youth from mostly rural areas of Kansas, farm kids, or those more accustomed to outdoor life. The Music and Drama campers were mostly from the larger cities.

I wondered how these different groups would mix. Would there be problems? Would the youth stick to their groups and those they knew, or would they mix, making

new friends who had different interests. Once again, Church Camp worked its magic. Differences were put aside, friendships were made, and unity was found in the act of sharing time in meals, worship, and fun. After the first day, the youth had no problems getting together and sharing how different their days were. They could not wait to tell the other kids how much fun they had or what they learned. That week always filled me with joy and gave me hope for the future.

The writer of Ephesians begins the letter with thanksgiving. He reminds the readers of all the blessings God has given humanity and the work that Christ has done and continues to do on our behalf.

But, soon this letter becomes a reminder of what life was like for the Gentiles before they came to know Christ. Jews and Gentiles were usually separated from each other. The Jewish people were very conscious of the fact that they were a religious minority in the ancient world. Their beliefs were different from the pantheistic religions of their neighbors and it is easy to forget that Gentiles held the power politically and socially in the ancient world.

Yet, something new was happening. After the death of Christ, a group of Jews began to share a different vision of God. They told others that the messiah had come, that being a follower of God no longer meant being Jewish, and that the messiah, God's son, had been sacrificed on a cross so that all people might come to believe.

Dwelling continued on page 4

...**Dwelling** continued from page 3

This vision of the world was unheard of. It was far too easy to think of your nation, your race of people, as the superior group. The others, those who did not look the same or believe the same things, were easy targets for abuse and hatred. People began to follow this religion of peace, love, and kindness.

The Roman system of government and culture was based on the idea that a person should be strong, unyielding, and successful even if it meant devaluing the lives of others. Into this system came a group of people who cared for each other. The widows, orphans, and the helpless in their community were fed. Peace was considered more righteous than violence. They were people who would sing and praise God even when they faced death.

They were no longer concerned about race or nationality. These men and women did not consider themselves to be the elect nor did they claim to hold a mystery that was only available to the few. They belonged to a family of believers who welcomed all people. A community that understood that Jew and Gentile had no meaning anymore. They were useless titles for an age that had seen its end, old labels that no longer found purchase.

The writer of Ephesians reminds the readers that it is Christ's blood that binds us together. Through his sacrifice, he brought new hope, peace, and unity breaking down the walls of hostility that separated humankind.

The early Christians understood that reconciliation needed to occur to unify believers. Many of the stories in the book of Acts and the apostle Paul's letters focused on the idea

that all people were welcomed by God, all were cared for, and all could find a place in God's Kingdom.

As members of the CC(DOC) we accepted this idea years ago when reconciliation became one of our goals for our 20/20 vision. However, reconciliation still needs to occur, and there is still work to do.

The author of this letter wrote about removing the barriers of hostility with the same passion and desperation. In the temple in Jerusalem, there was a barrier that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of Israel. Tradition tells us that there was a sign on this wall proclaiming that, "No man of another race is to enter within the fence and enclosure around the temple." The punishment for disregarding this order was death.

Yet, this was only a symbol of the deep separation between Jews and Gentiles. Some Jews of this time were desperately trying to preserve their way of life and felt that the only way to do so was to completely remove all Gentile influences from their culture.

Yet, through Christ's sacrifice these dividing barriers were removed and the separate became whole. We did not do this ourselves, there is no way that we could or would have. Humans love to be separated; we enjoy being placed into groups. If you get a crowd of people together who do not know each other and leave them to their own devices the first thing they will do is find

...**Dwelling** continued on page 5

... **Dwelling** continued from page 4 ways to group themselves. In this manner, we often turn away from our neighbors and we do not help the stranger because they are not like us.

This passage reminds us that Christ came to unite humanity. He shed light on the hostility between people and showed us a new way so that we might be reconciled with God and with each other.

And so we are now the body of Christ, a dwelling place for God. We are God's family, not only members of the household, but we are the new temple, the holy of holies, the dwelling place of God. God no longer only resides in heaven, unreachable and unattainable, God now resides in us.

The challenges that the author of Ephesians gives to his community of faith sound very familiar because our world is still separated. We hold each other apart choosing to trust in ourselves rather than trusting in God. We are separated by race, religion, nationality, creed, sex, you name it. Our churches are filled with invisible dividing walls that are as solid as the stone wall in front of the temple of Jerusalem.

We are not unified because in our human weakness we choose to be divided. The world has become smaller, we can now communicate with those who live halfway around the world, but we do not communicate with people who live in our community. We can travel to the stars, but we do not care for starving children, the old, or the sick.

The world that we now inhabit is divided,

suspicious, and full of the threat and the very real possibility of self-destruction. Yet, the message for today holds hope that we as Christians must cling to.

This message provides the prospect of being reconciled, unified, and loved; as the church becomes the institution that holds out its hands to all people saying, "Come, be a part of the family of God, for there is a place for you, here."

Today we are called to see that God is our foundation, Jesus Christ is our cornerstone, the Holy Spirit is our strength and through the love of God, we are unified in faith with our brothers and sisters. The sacrifice of Jesus was not in vain, for we have been made anew, into the dwelling place of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

