

THE MESSENGER

"For all to know and share the Love of Christ"

The Newsletter of First United Methodist Church Surgoinsville, TN
Elaine Ruth, Pastor



April 2021

Church: 345-2279

Pastor's Corner

The Rev. Fred Craddock was Bandy Distinguished Professor of Preaching and New Testament Emeritus in the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. He was an ordained minister of the Christian Church from rural Tennessee. He was the director of the Craddock Center, a non-profit service group which operates in rural Appalachia. He died in 2015. This is one of his sermons.

The Absence of Christ

John 14:1-14

In this scripture passage lies what is, in my judgment, the most extraordinary story there is. The teller of the story is the person we call John, and the story simply is this:

Once upon a time, not in a fairy tale sense, but once upon God's time, there was a man in the little country of Israel from the town of Nazareth named Jesus. Early in his adult life, many of those who knew him began to see he was more than the son of Mary, more than the son of Joseph, more than a mere carpenter. There was something about him that made them think "God." His character, his words, his work, what he did, what he said, the way he behaved, made them believe that when they were in his presence they were in the presence of God.

This doesn't mean that in some obvious way he was different. He didn't shine in the night, he didn't dress in unusual clothes, he didn't have a strange look on his face, he didn't go around saying a lot of religious things all the time. It is just that who he was and what he did and the way he related to people caused them to say, "He is a revelation of God and in him we have seen God's glory."

I am sure all of you have known a person like this, a person who, when you're in his or her presence, makes you think better thoughts, live a better life, reflect on God, become more devotional, more spiritual. Multiply that a thousand times and you have Jesus of Nazareth. I do not want to imply that apart from him people had no experiences of God. They did, and they do. For some, dreams conveyed that special meaning of God; for others, it came through visions; some spoke of voices in the night. Many people saw in nature the hand of the Creator. How can anybody spend five minutes outside and not think "God."

Some had the experience of God implanted in their hearts. Have you ever gotten up in the morning before the rest of the family, gone out on the back steps with a cup of coffee, and cupped your hands around it against the morning chill? Or, late in the evening, have you ever walked down the back roads and along the rivers of your memory? What do you think about? People have had experiences, but we don't often talk about them.

Of course, only a minority of humanity experienced God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And some of those who followed him quit. When the price got a little high, they turned away, and this prompted Jesus to say to his immediate friends, "Are you going to leave too?" They said, "Where would we go? You have the words of eternal life." And so it was. No one has ever seen God, but the only begotten son from the bosom of God has made God known. This is the reason he came into the world: to reveal God.

The painful side of it, however, is that, just as Jesus came into the world, he had to go from the world and return to God. During his life, his brief life here on earth, he bonded with a lot of people. He had family. The other Gospel writers tell us about his brothers and his sisters. He had a mother. He had friends. Toward the close of his life, he said to his disciples, "I don't call you 'servants' anymore, I call you 'friends.'" John says that he loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus, their brother. He had bonded with a lot of people. But then he had to go.

You do not have to be elderly or senile to face death. Death can come down the center lane of the highway and snatch eighteen-year-olds from twisted steel and broken glass and feel nothing. Death doesn't care. You know that as well as I do. You read the paper, you watch the news.

I think of Jesus, snatched away from his friends and family. Absence is even more painful sometimes when we consider the way somebody dies. I can't even speak of that in Littleton, Colorado. Those boys with those guns and assault rifles, classmates of those they killed—senseless, senseless. Everybody says that, senseless, senseless. And I think of Jesus. Does that make sense, up there on the cross? Do you know what they did? They stripped him naked.

They put him up there in front of everybody. Vulgar-mouthed soldiers did. Unbelievers walked by, saying, "If you are the Son of God, God will get you down." Somebody else yelled, "Why don't you jump, Jesus?" They had a big time, and there he died. People laughed. Jesus hung naked, in public. Make sense of that. Think of the girl in Littleton. "Do you believe in God?" they asked her, and she said yes. Make sense of it.

Continued on next page

Pastor's Corner continued

The pain of absence is even more intense when you think about the character of the one who goes away. I think of Jesus. I have never in my life heard anybody say that there was ever an occasion when Jesus turned his back on human need, said a cruel word to anybody, hurt anyone, rejected anyone, excluded anyone. It is his character that makes his absence so much more keenly felt.

Jesus knew this. He knew the depth of the pain created by absence, so, in John 13–21 he became a counselor to his friends, and he is still talking to them. He is trying to soften the blow, trying to get them ready. He says, “I know I’m leaving, now listen to me. You trust in God, trust in me. I am going, it is true, but I am going to prepare a place for you, so that when I come again, we will all be together forever. I will send another counselor while I am gone, and he will guide you into truth and be with you and help you and will never leave you. The Holy Spirit will be with you.”

Jesus is trying to get them ready for his absence. Does he succeed? I don’t think so. They are still confused, still asking questions. “We don’t know where you are going or how you are going to get there. We don’t understand anything you’re saying. Just show us God, and we will be satisfied. We don’t know what you’re talking about. We don’t like all this.” Jesus tried to get them ready, but you can talk and talk and talk and there is still the pain. Jesus left his disciples, and they felt his absence keenly and painfully. It just doesn’t seem to work until later.

Do you believe that God is ever absent from you? Do you believe that God ever withdraws from you, that God is not close to you? I know that a lot of people say they experience the absence of God, but this is not to say that God is really absent; they just experience God as absent. We remember the prayers and the psalms, all those prayers, “Lord, don’t turn your back on us. Don’t hide your face from us. Don’t go away from us. Please God, don’t leave us alone.” The people in the Bible must have felt it too: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” I do not know if the distance between us and God increases sometimes. Maybe God needs to let us do it on our own sometimes to develop some strength.

My wife, Nettie, and I got acquainted with a minister in New York City who has no arms. He was telling us one day of the experience of learning to put on his own clothes. He said his mother always dressed him. One day, she put his clothes in the middle of the floor and said, “Dress yourself.” He said, “I can’t dress myself.” She said, “You’ll have to dress yourself.” He told us, “I kicked, I screamed, I kicked, I screamed, I yelled at my mother, ‘You don’t love me anymore.’” Finally, he realized that if he was going to get any clothes on, he would have to put them on himself. After hours of struggle, he got the clothes on. He said that it was not until later that he learned that his mother was in the next room crying.

I don’t know if God grows distant from us. I do know that sometimes we feel some distance. How do we manage that? How do we live with the experience of distance from God? I think mainly it is a matter of memory. Remember the good times. Remember the close occasions. Remember the profound worship. Remember the Lord’s Table. Remember your baptism. Remember the bread and the cup. Remember your Christian friends. Remember the songs, and you will get through. It hurts me to think of the young people who do not know a hymn, who do not know a single scripture verse, and who have never sat next to the strong shoulder of a believing man or woman. You see, what we do here on Sunday is that we are making memories. What happens today will be the only food you will have one of these days. But it will be enough. It will be enough.

Craddock, Fred B. *The Cherry Log Sermons* (pp. 58-59). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation.

Now Hiring!

Camp Bays Mountain needs male and female counselors (age 16 and older) and one resource person (age 21 or older). If you know someone looking for a summer job, please call Ms. Jordan Gobble, Program Director, at 423/349-8401.

Registration

Registration for 2021 summer camp is open. Very specific protocols to keep campers and staff safe have been submitted to and approved by the Holston Conference and will be updated as new information or official guidance is received.

Campers may register on-line at www.CampBaysMountain.com. Church Secretary, Gina Skelton, will also be able to assist with registration.



Camp Scholarships

Parents of children and youth in grades 1 – 12: The church has funds to be used toward the cost of attending summer camp. If your child actively participates in church activities, wants to attend camp, and you’d like assistance with the registration fee, please complete a Summer Camp Scholarship Application and leave in the box outside of the church secretary’s office. **The deadline to apply for scholarship funds is April 15.** The amount of the scholarships will be determined by the funds available.

PRAYER PAGE

As you pray this week please remember:

Gerri Pierce
Roger Sizemore (Jean Keirsey's Brother)
Frances Bean (stepmother of Becky Bowman)
Ericka Bellamy
Sarah Williams
John K. Williams
Pat Hughes (sister-in-law of James Hughes)
The Family of Vicki Linderman
Larry Southam

Names on the prayer list will remain there for a month. To keep a name on the list, please contact the church office.



This Month's Birthdays

4/4
Jonathan Reed
Ashton Reed

4/6
Max Hammond

4/7
Richie Crowder

4/12
Joan Amis

4/13
Mattie Crowder

4/16
Lois Williams

4/17
Ronnie Barrett

4/19
John Pevy

4/20
Alexis Johnson
Jenny Hesoun

4/22
Leslie Hurd
Steven Hanson

4/24
Jerry Bowman

4/26
Lora Cardenas

4/27
Sis Byington

4/29
Ed Bryant

Anniversaries this Month

4/3
Phil & Sue Pierce

4/10
Jerry & Becky Bowman

4/16
Tommy & Earline Bellamy
Joey & Jessika Birchfield



WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Sunday in the Sanctuary: 11:00 a.m.

Sunday Facebook Live: 11:00 a.m.

Anytime on YouTube

Sermon By Phone by calling
423-445-4001.

Meeting Notice

The Finance Committee
will be meeting on
Thursday, April 8, at
10:00 a.m.

Treasurers Report for March

Income for the month: \$10,001.00

Received towards the Budget:	\$9,976.00
Received to Special Funds:	\$25.00

Expenses for the month: \$10,444.88

Direct Bill Pension	\$885.40
Direct Bill Health Insurance	\$948.00
Appalachian District Fund	\$238.49
Conference Fair Share	\$945.10

This was for February and paid in March

Total Staff Salaries	\$6,032.26
Operating Expenses:	
Holston Electric	\$453.83
Hawkins County Gas	\$535.85
Water & Sewer	\$111.37
Telephone & Internet	\$72.85
Custodial Supplies	\$34.69

Other Expenses	\$187.04
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Thank you for continuing to support the ministries of the church. Our Financial Secretary is Jean Keirsey. If you mail your offering to the church please send it to her attention.

Submitted by: Gina Skelton



2021 HANDS-ON MISSION PROJECT

SCHOOL KITS FOR ZIMBABWE

Ishe Anesu Project for Underprivileged Children

Goal = 400

The District has a limited number of materials in stock and available for our churches to purchase at cost.

Collect these items in a large (at least 17") backpack:

- 3 pkgs. of 100 sheets, loose-leaf, wide-ruled paper **OR** 3 - 9¾" x 7.5" 100-sheet composition books. *No spiral notebooks.*
- 1 Compass and 1 Protractor (may be packaged individually or as a set).
- 1 (12") Ruler
- 1 pack of Erasers (preferably pencil-top style).
- 1 (10-12 pack) of Pencils
- 1 Small English Dictionary. *No thesauruses.*
- 1 (10 –12 pack) of Black or Blue Pens
- 1 pack Colored Pencils. *No crayons or markers.*
- 1 Ream (500 sheets) Copy Paper

Each backpack requires \$5 for shipping. The church will write one check for shipping to cover all of our backpacks. **Please do not put shipping money in the backpacks.**

The deadline to drop-off backpacks is May 25, 2021.

The District Office is the only drop-off point, due to the pandemic.

