



GPS GUIDE: SEPTEMBER 26, 2021

Grow. Pray. Study

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon: Renew Mission

Luke 4:14-21

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

This week, as the reminders of homecoming are fresh, we look forward to the ways God is calling us to live and grow as individuals and as the community of First Christian Church. These reflections offer a deeper look at our mission statement and core values. You are invited to take a moment today and consider who is God shaping us to be, how is God inviting us to live, what is it that God is asking us to do. Let’s be the church we say we are.

We embrace God’s creation

By Katie Matthews

Monday: Read Genesis 1:26

Dominion. God’s people have tried to live up to this responsibility for as long as we’ve been on the earth. We miss the mark, though, when we forget that God gave us dominion only after establishing that we would be made in God’s own image. To understand what our dominion should look like over the earth, we must first know what God’s dominion looks like over us. This is where the first line of FCC’s mission statement guides us: *We embrace God’s creation.* The word *embrace* invokes action borne from affection. We embrace whom and what we love. And if we’re going to embrace something or someone, we better be willing to do what must be

done for their wellbeing. We care for those we embrace. We protect them. Isn't that what God's dominion looks like? Think for a moment about an ocean wave moving you along with its power. Or of a stream swimming around your toes when you couldn't resist dipping them in. Recall a particularly stunning sunset painting the sky. Consider the birds' choir singing in the morning. Contemplate that the same awe-struck beauty adorns expansive overlooks and fleeting wildflowers alike. Appreciate the sacred bond of a beloved pet. Wonder at the healing power of a quiet forest hike. To say creation embraces all of us is an understatement. Our charge as God's people is to simply return the favor. How can you delight in creation today? How can you protect creation today? What can you do for creation's wellbeing today?

Prayer: Creator God, reveal to us the richness of embracing your creation. Amen.

Explore God's purpose for our lives.

By Jim Brooks

Tuesday: Read Isaiah 43:19

One of the first things I thought about when reading our mission statement was the line from the movie *All about Eve*, "Fasten your seat belts, it's going to be a bumpy night," and the Harry Potter movie *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, "Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy ride." Well, after reading our mission statement I thought to myself, "Fasten your seat belts, it's going to be a bumpy ride"! I have had the good fortune of serving a number of churches with amazing drive with many hopes of serving God and community through their presence and ministry. All of them—every last one of them—thought that if they continued doing ministry in the way they had been doing it, all the goals, objective, hopes and dreams would happen in just a matter of time. By now you and I know, it is not that easy, is it? It is challenging, even difficult at times to hold true to those things we have agreed to do (think weight loss). We slip back to our old ways. Believing that change is the enemy, and surely God wants us to keep doing everything like it has always been done. It didn't work in Galilee. It will not work in Birmingham. We often stumble along our way, forget that the journey to wholeness is a daily, lifelong pursuit requiring something different. No instant gratification here! Anything worth having is worth our time, commitment, and love. There is a lot happening in the world out there distracting us from our main goal of wholeness. A spirit of hope and a promise of dreams realized, becomes the foundation on which we can grow towards faithfulness. The scriptures are full of examples of new beginnings. It seems the gathered community today struggles with the idea that new things need to be nurtured within the practice of our faith. The corner stone of our faith is the idea that "all things will become new." Now, how will we nurture that idea? How will we commit ourselves to a fresh new way of sharing the Gospel? How will we let go of old habits that inhibit our growth?

Prayer: Holy One, change is hard, we are comfortable doing things as we always have, but you call us to new things, to grow in faith and love, to do the work of the gospel. Give us the courage, the passion, the determination to follow your mission. Amen.

Extend love and respect to all.

By Libby Carpenter

Wednesday: Read Exodus 20: 3 - 17

At First Christian, we boldly declare that "we extend love and respect to all". There are many Biblical instructions to love one another. Jesus even instructed us to love our enemies. But what does it mean to extend respect? In many ways respect may be more challenging than love. Websters says that respect is to have due regard for the feelings, wishes, rights or traditions or

others. To show respect, one must take an interest in others to know their feelings, wishes, rights and traditions. Jesus did this when he sat with the woman at the well and when he went to the tax collector's house for dinner. He spent time with these people. He showed respect. When I was giving thought to a Biblical teaching of love and respect, the ten commandments came to mind. We must begin with love and respect for our Lord, then our families and those close to us, and then ALL others. This is the tradition that Jesus was taught, and the lesson that he taught to others, even to love our enemies. Respect is intentional. It is love in action. I propose that the best way to show deep love is to extend respect, to take an interest, discern feelings, learn of traditions and the rights and privileges longed for. When appropriate, help another to move forward. Fight for a cause. Live the commandments, a tradition and teaching as old as time. In your life, when is it difficult to show love and respect? What are new ways we can extend love and respect at FCC?

Prayer: Jesus, you showed us that loving others is active and participatory, more than just a feeling, loving well is doing, sharing respect for the lives and experiences of others. Help us to truly love others as we offer respect for all of creation. Amen.

Grace - we proclaim God's unconditional love.

By Jeff Jones

Thursday: Read Acts 15: 6-11

"No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." Peter's condemnation of the Pharisees' discrimination was simple and direct: *No. God's Grace is for all.* It is for all because God's grace isn't a utility controlled by man. Amorphous, like wind or water, it is a medium that surrounds and supports us, that can take hold of us and direct us through its currents to where we can be transformed into something more perfect. But, as with Peter's rebuttal, when we are confronted by obstructions in life where that *water* isn't freely flowing, we must pick up a bucket or dig a well and make a way for spiritual irrigation where the dams or droughts of denial exist. Similarly, if we are like geese flying in formation, a wonderful idea Kathy Long has recently shared, then maybe it is God's grace that keeps us aloft. We all rise on the wind first created when the Word was spoken into nothingness; a wind strengthened by Jesus' life, death, and resurrection (John 1:16); and offered to all as freely as a passing breeze. — Though we may often comment about how pleasant a cool breeze is on a hot summer day, let it also remind us of God's ever-present grace. When were you first lifted by God's Grace? When did you last feel the presence of God's Grace surround you? How might you allow God's Grace to move you today?

Prayer: Grace. By grace, in grace, through grace. God's grace is freely given. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Acceptance - we affirm the inherent value of every person.

By Shaina Berry

Friday: Galatians 3:26-28

To my dear church family of 8 years, I will be honest. When I was asked to reflect on our church's core value of acceptance for homecoming, I hesitated. Our core value of acceptance says that "we affirm the inherent value of every person." But after careful thought and reflecting on the sermon from homecoming, here's the thing, true acceptance is *not* FCC's practice. If your reflex is to disagree, let me ask you this. Can a LGBTQ+ individual serve in a leadership role at FCC? No—not according to our bylaws or historical practice. However, can an individual that openly passes judgment and condemnation on an LGBTQ+ individual serve in a leadership role at FCC. Yes, and they have. We like to say that we practice an open table at FCC, but really, we only welcome all for passive participation. If an individual wants to delve deeper into our faith community or

serve at the table, we have erected barriers, deterrents, and judgements that I believe have no place between people and God's table. I implore you to evaluate the impact we have as a church body when we do not publicly affirm and joyfully welcome LGBTQ+ or any other marginalized people into our community. Together, we need to decide if we believe being an open and affirming body is out of line with God's design for humanity and morality OR decide that by holding God's children at arm's length, suggesting that they are broken and out of step with God, *we* are the ones out of line with God's design for humanity and morality. I know my words may be upsetting. You may even think them divisive. But this division existed long before I wrote to you, and I don't know that we can move towards a truer reflection of God's acceptance in our church without first acknowledging where we can grow. Friends, if you are using church as a place of refuge and sanctuary that is not freely extended to all, then this church is not a place of Godly refuge, but a place of privilege. There's no moral value in our perceived neutrality and we must reconcile our beliefs with our practice. As you read this core value, where do you think we have room to grow? What decisions do we need to make as a church to make FCC a Godly refuge for all people? How can you be a part of making FCC a true place of welcome for all?

From my own experience, I know that FCC has so much love and kindness to share. My hope is that we will extend that light and community to every person.

Prayer: Creator God, we praise you for your divine plan that we are all Your children through faith in Christ Jesus and thank you for the love and refuge you offer each one of us. I pray that we can become faithful in extending your love to all people without hesitation so that they too may find the love and peace You so freely offer. May we be bold in our faith in every way. In your holy name we pray, Amen.

Commitment—Our actions demonstrate our faithfulness to God and one another.

By Suanne Ferguson

Saturday: Read Matthew 22:37-39

Commitment means to love God with our whole being. Commitment is an action on our part in response to God. As Disciples of Christ, we strive to be fully committed to God and to each other. Our commitment lies at the heart of our relationship with God. Our commitment is shown in our individual behavior, in our personal integrity, in our loyalty to home and family and community, as well as to the Church. Total commitment is the foundation of our relationship to God. True commitment cannot be imposed from without, but rather springs from within, from our faithfulness to God, and to one another. Spiritual commitment that is made from love, and from the divine impulse of desiring to serve love, touches all and brings greater light and love into the world. It comes from the very core of our being and is a core value. Sometimes we are given challenges that make it difficult to be committed to God and to each other. The last couple years our response to a pandemic has challenged us in more ways than we could have ever imagined. And yet, we continue to be reminded of God's limitless love, and to act in our response to that love. How can we show our faithfulness to God and to each other as we learn to live in, what feels like, a whole new world? What actions can we take that reflect our commitment to God and to each other?

Lord God, we pledge our faithfulness to you and to one another. You continue to show us how to love. May we be fully committed to bringing that light and that love into this world. Amen.