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### **Gardner-Webb University Art Exhibit Revisits Familiar Biblical Stories Through Unique Perspective**

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# Gardner-Webb University Art Exhibit Revisits Familiar Biblical Stories Through Unique Perspective

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Office of University  
Communications

October 5, 2015

*Work by N.C. Artist Don Sawyer Jr. on Display in Tucker Gallery Until Nov. 4*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—For anyone well-versed in biblical history, stories such as David slaying Goliath, Abraham’s sacrifice of his son Isaac, and Jesus washing his disciples’ feet conjure familiar imagery. But those and other well-known passages take on unique visual perspectives in a Gardner-Webb University exhibit by North Carolina artist Don Sawyer Jr.

Sawyer portrays Bible characters from different vantage points in almost a dozen acrylic pieces that comprise his “Wash Me All Over” show, which is now on display in GWU’s Tucker Gallery through Nov. 4. Viewers see Goliath on the ground with the small figure of David in the background. A row of feet stretches toward the hands of Jesus, whose face and body are not visible. Each piece offers new elements, including the races of the people pictured.

“I always put African characters in the scenes,” Sawyer explained. “I don’t believe people of color are mentioned enough in the Bible. The biblical stories are set close to Africa. There had to be more presence of African people than what is mentioned.”

From an early age, Sawyer was inspired to include dark-skinned figures in his artwork. He shares a story of how, when he was seven years old during the period of American segregation, a white teacher declined to display his drawing of a black Roman soldier. When another white teacher asked why he was recreating the drawing with a white soldier, he explained what happened, leading to the display of his original creation and his drive to continue his art.

Sawyer studied art through high school, but he then departed from his creativity for more than 30 years. That period of his life saw him change careers several times, and it included a battle with cocaine addiction. Five years ago, he was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and told he couldn’t work. He prayed for God to reveal what he could do with his life. The answer he received: art and education. “Sometimes you have to go through a storm to get somewhere,” Sawyer related. “I look at my experience as a blessing and a lesson to go to Him for everything.”

With the encouragement of his wife, he went back to school and completed a bachelor's degree in art earlier this year at Winston-Salem State University in Winston-Salem, N.C., the city in which he was born. It was also the city where he connected with Gardner-Webb through Dr. Nancy Bottoms, associate professor of English and art who was visiting with a group of students.

Sawyer's exhibit at Gardner-Webb will include a reception on Oct. 22, from 4-5 p.m., followed by an artist lecture from 5:15-6 p.m. in Stewart Hall of the Tucker Student Center. He plans to discuss the role of different races in the Bible in his lecture, which will be part of a three-day Gardner-Webb event, "Transcending Boundaries: A Symposium of Race, Class, and Identity."

"As an artist, you can re-create. I love the Bible and its stories, and I wanted to be able to go back and re-create the scenes," offered Sawyer, who at 53 years old is now working on a Master of Fine Arts degree at Western Carolina University (Cullowhee, N.C.). "I want to make you want to go back and revisit the Bible, too."

*The "Wash Me All Over" exhibit is open to the public. The Tucker Gallery is open from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. weekdays, and beginning at 11 a.m. Saturdays and 1 p.m. Sundays. Gardner-Webb students, faculty and staff may enter by using a GWU ID card. For more information about the exhibit, contact the GWU Art Department at 704-406-4656.*

***Auxiliary aids will be made available to persons with disabilities upon request 48 hours prior to the event. Please call 704-406-4253 or email [servicerequests@gardner-webb.edu](mailto:servicerequests@gardner-webb.edu) with your request.***

*Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University's purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).*