

ZION UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST OF TREMONT

February 26th, 2023
First Sunday in Lent
A Service of the Word



Art for Church Bulletins - Lent
Unique crayon and digital worship art
by Stushie
a Scottish pastor, ministering in East Tennessee
Stushie Art - Stushieart.com



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

a just world for all

February 26th, 2023

First Sunday in Lent

Service of the Word

“Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life
as by the obstacles by which he has overcome while trying to succeed.”

--Booker T. Washington

WE GATHER IN COMMUNITY

**please stand as you are able,*

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude- Betty Funk

***Call to Worship**

One: We are people of impatient hungers.

Many: We want to be filled with all good things immediately. We don't want to wait.

One: We are people who seek power and authority.

Many: We want to be in control, not to be controlled.

One: We are people whose individual safety is of highest concern.

Many: Protect and guide us.

One: Stop our greed and selfishness, O Lord.

Help us to listen to your words of comfort and hope.

Many: Open us up to all the wonders of your love.

Heal our hardened hearts. Give us lives of loving service to others. Amen.

***Invocation**

**Divine One,
we are thankful for the restoration
that can be found in you.
Your presence is welcomed here.
We delight in knowing
that you want to be wherever we are.
Because you are love, you show up for us.**

In this space, may we delight in your assurance
that all you made is good.
Amen

*Hymn - NCH 304 - All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name vv. 1, 2, & 4

All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name

Author (st. 4): John Rippon, 1787; alt.

Author (st. 1-3): Edward Perronet, 1779, 1780; alt.

Tune: CORONATION C.M.

Composer: Oliver Holden, 1793

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1 All hail the power of Jesus' name!

Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown Christ servant of all.
Bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown Christ servant of all!

**2 Adorn, O martyred saints of old,
the coronation hall;**

Extol the wounded One foretold,
and crown Christ bearer of all.
Extol the wounded One foretold,
and crown Christ bearer of all.

4 Before the cross, with heaven's throng,

we on our knees shall fall;
We'll join the everlasting song,
and crown Christ savior of all.
We'll join the everlasting song,
and crown Christ savior of all.

LENTEN CANDLE LITURGY

First Sunday in Lent

Meditation

Extinguish one of the Lenten candles

Hymn - NCH 207 - Just As I Am (one verse)

Just As I Am

Text: Charlotte Elliott, 1836; alt.

Tune: WOODWORTH L.M.

Composer: William B. Bradbury, 1849

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**1 Just as I am, without one plea
but that your blood was shed for me,
and that you called inviting me,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!**

Lenten Candle Prayer

One: Let us pray:

**Many: Loving God, as we journey through this holy season of Lent, give us strength
and courage to make the changes that are needed in our lives. Open our hearts
and minds to your steadfast presence and help us to put our trust in you. Amen.**

A READING OF THE WORD

First Reading: Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

On this first Sunday in Lent, we read the story of God's allowance to eat any fruit in the garden of creation, except for the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 2. The first human being was given that command, but in Genesis 3, the serpent tempts the woman and man to eat of the fruit, so that their eyes are opened to the knowledge of good and evil. This creation story centers on the knowledge that God has given us everything, yet when we desire what we do not have, we can be led into sin.

2 15 Then YHWH took the earth creature and settled it in the garden of Eden so that it might cultivate and care for the land. 16 YHWH commanded the earth creature,

“You may eat as much as you like
from any of the trees of the garden----
17 except the Tree of
the Knowledge of Good and Evil.
You must not eat from that tree,
for on the day you eat from that tree,
that is the day you will die—yes, die.”

3 1 But the snake was even more cunning of all the animals that YHWH had made. The snake asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat from the trees in the garden?”

2 The woman answered the snake, “We may eat fruit from all the other trees in the garden.
3 But of the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘Don’t eat it and don’t touch it, or you will die.’”

4 The snake said to the woman, “Die? You won’t die! 5 God knows well that on the day that you eat it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil!”

6 The woman knew that the tree was enticing to the eye, and now saw that the fruit was good to eat—that it was desirable for the knowledge it could give. So she took some of its fruit and ate it. She gave some also to the man beside her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were

opened, and they realized that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Psalm Response: Psalm 32 (Responsively)

Psalm 32 is a psalm of confession sin before God. The psalmist acknowledges that in trying to hide what was wrong, their entire body suffered and they felt the weight of what they'd done upon them in the form of God's hand. However, when they turned to God and confessed, God forgave "the guilt of their sin." The guilt of sin often weighs on us more than the wrongdoing itself, that can only be released when confessed. The psalmist encourages those who are faithful to pray and to follow God's instructions and counsel. Those who put their trust in God will know God's faithfulness and steadfast love.

1 Happiness comes from having your rebellion taken away,
from having your failure completely covered.

**2 Happiness comes from God not counting your mistakes,
from having nothing to hide.**

3 As long as I kept my stubborn silence,
my bones grew weak because of my constant complaints.

**4 Day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped by a summer's heat.**

5 Finally I admitted my sin to you,
and stopped hiding my guilt.
I said, "I confess my rebellion, God,"
and you took away the guilt of my sin.

**6 That's why people of faith everywhere
should pray to you—they'll find you.
Even when the flood begins rising,
it will never touch them.**

7 You are my hiding place;
you'll protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of freedom.

**8 "I'll teach you
and show you the way you should walk;
I will counsel you,
and keep watch over you.**

9 Be wise! Don't be like horses and mules,
who need to be harnessed with bit and bridle
before they'll come to you."

**10 Wrongdoers are prone to many sorrows,
but those who trust in God
are surrounded with unfailing love.**

11 Be glad in God and rejoice, you who love justice!
Exult, you upright of heart!

Second Reading: Romans 5:12-19

The Epistle readings in Lent are in the book of Romans for weeks 1-3 and week 5. The apostle Paul juxtaposes Adam and Eve with Christ in this passage, with the first humans' sin bringing death into the world and Christ's death bringing life back into the world. Their actions condemned all and lead to death, but Christ's actions justify all and lead to life. Paul concludes this section with juxtaposing sin with grace. Sin had dominion through death, but grace has dominion through Christ's death, giving us eternal life.

5 12 Therefore, sin entered the world through the first humans, and through sin, death—and in this way death has spread through the whole human race, because all have sinned. 13 Sin existed in the world long before the Law was given, even though it's not called "sin" when there is no law. 14 Even so, death reigned over all who lived from our first parents until Moses, even though their sin—unlike that of our first parents—was not a matter of breaking a law.

15 But the gift is not like the offense. For if by the offense of one couple all died, how much more did the grace of God—and the gracious gift of the One Jesus Christ—abound for all!

16 The gift that came to us is not at all like what came through the ones who sinned. In the one case, the sentence followed upon one offense and brought condemnation; in the other, the free gift came after many offenses and brought complete acquittal. 17 If death began its reign through one couple because of an offense, so much more will those who receive the overflowing grace and the gift of justice live and reign through the One Jesus Christ.

18 To sum up, then: just as a single offense brought condemnation to all, a single righteous act brought all acquittal and life. 19 Just as through one couple's disobedience, all became sinners, so through one person's obedience, all will become just.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

Matthew's account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness occurs in Matthew 4. Unlike Mark, Matthew lists three temptations that Jesus faced, which are the same in Luke but the last two are reversed. In all three temptations, Jesus quotes scripture back at the devil to refute, rebuke, and refuse. The first temptation takes place when Jesus is hungry after fasting and praying, the purpose of which was to draw closer to God by emptying himself. The temptation to abuse the power within him is refuted when he quotes the Torah, holding on to the reason of his fast. The Child of God draws closer to God by becoming as human as possible, hungry and in need. The second temptation also involves abusing his power as the Only Begotten, to prove himself to others by testing God. The devil quotes Psalm 91 atop the pinnacle of the temple, but Jesus rebukes the devil by quoting again from the Torah to not put God to the test. We draw closer to God when we rebuke the powers of the world we have made, the power of empire and oppression. Finally, the devil offers Jesus all the empires of the world if

Jesus will bow down and worship him. At this point, Jesus tells the devil to go away and again quotes from the same portion of Deuteronomy, refusing to worship the devil, and to worship and serve only God. Once the devil left Jesus, angels came and waited on him. Jesus drew closer to heaven in his refusal to serve or desire the empires and powers of this world, and so we, too, draw closer to the reign of God when we refuse to serve powers of oppression and domination.

4 1 Then Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit, to be tempted by the Devil. 2 After fasting for forty days and forty nights, Jesus was hungry. 3 Then the tempter approached and said, “If you are the Only Begotten, command these stones to turn into bread.”

4 Jesus replied, “Scripture has it, ‘We live not on bread alone but on every utterance that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

5 Next the Devil took Jesus to the Holy City, set him on the parapet of the Temple 6 and said, “If you are the Only Begotten, throw yourself down. Scripture has it,

‘God will tell the angels to take care of you; with their hands they will support you that you may never stumble on a stone.’ ”

7 Jesus answered, “Scripture also says, ‘Do not put God to the test.’ ”

8 The Devil then took Jesus up a very high mountain and displayed all the empires of the world in their magnificence, 9 promising, “All these I will give you if you fall down and worship me.”

10 At this, Jesus said to the Devil, “Away with you, Satan! Scripture says, ‘You will worship the Most High God; God alone will you adore.’ ”

11 At that the Devil left, and angels came and attended Jesus.

Choral Response – His Name is Wonderful

Music by Audrey Mieir, 1959

Choir: Keith Konet, Bob Bucklew and Barbara Rossington

Choir Director and Accompanist: Betty Funk

Reflection – In the Wilderness - The Rev. Scott Rosenstein

We Respond

***Prayer of Response**

**Holy Spirit,
one who is with us in the wilderness,
guide our path.
Some of us are lost and confused,
others have gone astray.
All of us, at one point, feel distant from you.**

Remind us that we need to be
fed by spiritual food, the bread of life,
the living water of salvation.
Remind us that there is no need
to test others or God,
and that if we wait,
we will know your presence.
Keep us to the promise
that if we live for you,
the powers of the world
humanity has made
will not have a hold on us.
We can belong and participate
in the kin-dom here on earth
as it is in heaven,
and the power and dominance
and oppression of empire
will not endure.
Holy Spirit, guide us forward.
Amen.

***Hymn of Response –When We Are Tested (sung to the tune NCH 451 – Be Now My Vision)**

When We Are Tested

Text: Ruth Duck, b. 1947.

© 1996, Hope Publishing Company.

Tune: SLANE 10.10.9.10

Traditional Irish Melody.

Harm David Evans, 1927

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**1 When we are tested and wrestle alone,
famished for bread when the world offers stone,
nourish us, God, by your word and your way,
food that sustains us by night and by day.**

**2 When in the desert we cry for relief,
pleading for paths marked by certain belief,
lift us to love you beyond sign and test,
trusting your presence, our only true rest.**

**3 When we are tempted to barter our souls,
trading the truth for the pow'r to control,
teach us to worship and praise only you,
seeking your will in the work that we do.**

**4 When we have struggled and searched through the night,
sorting and sifting the wrong from the right,
Savior, surround us with circles of care,
angels of healing, of hope, and of prayer.**

Invitation to Share Our Tithes and Offerings

God gives good things to us, so let us give good things to God. Let us bring gifts that can be like water in dry places. May these resources be used to testify to the goodness of God. Amen.

The Offertory – Betty Funk

***Presentation of Offerings - Doxology**

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

***Blessing of the Gifts**

**Divine One, receive our gifts from the open hearts
from which we give them.
Thank you for blessing us with gifts to share,
so that good works can abound.
We offer our gifts gladly.
May what we give
be used to meet the needs of all.
Amen.**

Choral Hymn - NCH 208 – God Loved the World

**Words: Heiligges Lippen und Herzens Opfer, Stettin, 1778
Transl. August Crull, 1845; alt.
Music: ROCKINGHAM L.M.
Anon. Adapt. Edward Miller, 1790
Choir: Keith Konet, Barbara Rossington, and Bob Bucklew
Choir Director and Accompanist: Betty Funk**

***The Lord's Prayer – using “debts” and “debtors”**

**Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

GOING FORTH

***Parting Hymn - NCH 197 - Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross vv. 1, 2, & 3**

Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross

Author: Fanny Crosby, 1869; alt.

Tune: NEAR THE CROSS 7.6.7.6. with refrain

Composer: William H. Doane, 1869

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**1 Jesus, keep me near the cross;
there a precious fountain,
free to all, a healing stream,
flows from Calv'ry's mountain.**

Refrain:

**In the cross, in the cross,
be my glory ever,
till my ransomed soul shall find
rest beyond the river.**

**2 Near the cross, a trembling soul,
love and mercy found me;
there the bright and morning star
sheds its beams around me. [Refrain]**

**3 Near the cross! O Lamb of God,
bring its scenes before me;
help me live from day to day
with its shadow o'er me. [Refrain]**

***Commissioning and Benediction**

One: God of the Sahara and the Amazon,
Maker of dry places and wetlands.

**Many: We have come before you with parched hearts
or living in this world has made them so.**

One: Holy One, your ability to renew us is unmatched.

Many: You renew us from within and without.

One: Ancient of Days, you held us in the beginning,
and you are holding us now.

**Many: We reach out to you
and draw as close as we can**

One: As we depart this space
and enter the wilderness of the world,
help us to know that you are with us.

**Many: Whatever may come, may you, O God,
be our safe place to go
and our soft place to land. Amen.**

***Postlude – Betty Funk**

* * * * *

Credits

- (1) The Call to Worship is adapted from *Call to Worship #4 of Worship Connection: March 1, 2020* posted February 2, 2020 on the blog *ministry matters*. <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/4548/worship-connection-march-1-2020>
- (2) The Invocation, Invitation to Share Our Tithes, and Commissioning and Benediction are adapted from *What Have You Done?: Service Prayers for the First Sunday in Lent*, written by The Rev. Tena T. Nock, Associate Pastor of Digital Ministry, First United Church of Tampa, United Church of Christ. Permission given to reproduce or adapt this material for use in service of worship or church education. All rights reserved.
- (3) The Prayer of Response is adapted from *Worship resources for February 26th, 2023*, written by Rev. Mindi Welton-Thomas, and posted February 16th, 2023, on her blog, *Rev-o-lution*. <http://rev-o-lution.org/>.
- (4) Permission to stream music in this service obtained from ONE LICENSE, License #A-736636. All publishing rights reserved .

Ministers, *All of Us*
Scott Rosenstein, *Pastor*
Betty Funk, *Pianist and Music Director*
Keith Konet, *Council President*
Beverly Wurm, *Administrative Assistant*



NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

God is Still Speaking...

No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you will find a spiritual home in this United Church of Christ congregation. WELCOME!

Tithes and Offerings - Checks and Money Orders can be made payable to: "Zion United Church of Christ" and placed in the offering basket or mailed to:

**Zion United Church of Christ
c/o Keith Konet
1039 Bridlewood Drive
Copley, OH 44321**

Questions: Contact Keith Konet at 330.604.6939

Administrative Assistant, Beverly Wurm

Beverly began a part-time position with us. She is keeping some limited Office Hours at church/home. The days and hours are:

Monday – 9am – 1pm

Wednesday – 10am-2 pm

Thursday – 9am – 1pm

Beverly can be reached at: zionchurchtremont@gmail.com or by phone at: 216-273-7561 (church) or 216-310-6810 (mobile).



The season of Lent

The day of Ashes marked the opening of Lent in the liturgical season. For six and one half weeks, Christians around the world will prepare themselves spiritually for the celebration of their highest Holy Day: Easter. Many of us will take on spiritual disciplines – prayer, charity, and fasts (make personal sacrifices), focusing through these long days on the sacrifices Jesus made as he set his face toward Jerusalem.

The liturgical calendar is asking us to do this in the Lenten season: prepare ourselves spiritually for our collective celebration of life overcoming death.

The season of Lent invites introspection, an inward act, that often gets made concrete through spiritual disciplines, action, to reinforce their meaning and to translate them into a way of living. If the spiritual transformation is missing, however, the actions become meaningless and a mockery. Repentance, reconciliation, and repair require an inward transformation of mind, body, and spirit - represented by the heart. In ancient Hebrew tradition, the heart reflected more than emotional response; it encompasses both reason and feelings in an integrated fashion.

To rend one's heart is to deliberately open ourselves to revitalized thoughts, attitudes, and emotions. It is to become vulnerable and malleable.

Other faith traditions have something very similar to this: whether it is the arduous month-long fast of Ramadan practiced by Muslims, the 24 hours of fasting practiced by the Jewish people during the annual time of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), or the various means of using fasting for spiritual awakening by many Native American tribes. It seems almost universally accepted that an intentional and thoughtful act of self-sacrifice can not only deepen spiritual connections with the Sacred, but also

make us all more mindful of the excesses with which we are prone to live and grow oblivious to.

No matter what your spiritual pathway is, or how you explore and deepen connections to the Sacred, take time to assess your spiritual health. Discover ways that the entrapments of this world burden you – whether in the ongoing and seemingly insatiable pursuit of treasures and pleasures that attract, or in the simple fact that such treasures and pleasures, once acquired, only serve to distract us from our higher callings.

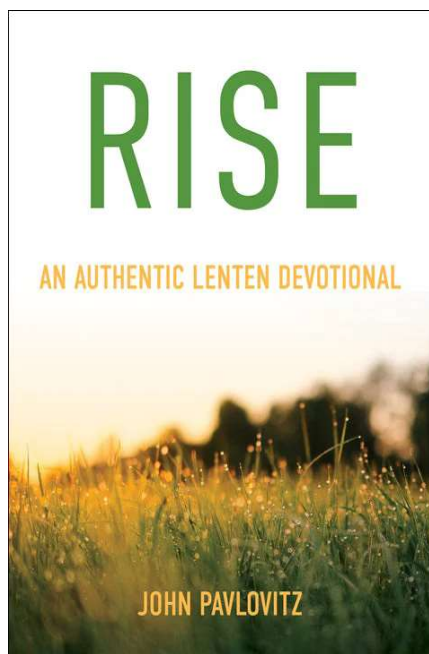
Open yourself up to the ancient rituals that invite us to turn away from things that distract us from, or learn anew spiritual disciplines that focus us on, spiritual awakening.

During this season of Lent, may you be encouraged to lighten your load if it be overladen with excesses that distract; may you be invited into times of spiritual wholeness that come when we are less distracted; and may the Eastertide find you ready to celebrate once again the joy of life overcoming death. May you deepen your relationship with the Sacred on this, your journey into the Mystic.

Did you know?

Lent is longer than the 40 days as Sunday was seen as a special feast day to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, so it is excluded from the calculation of Lent. Lent is the Monday to Saturday in the six weeks before Easter Sunday (6 days x 6 weeks = 36 days) and adding the Wednesday to Saturday in the week before brings us to the 40 days.

The Orthodox Christian church has no tradition of ashes - and Holy Week (the week before Easter) is excluded from the calculation of Lent, though Sundays are included. This all means that Lent begins instead on Orthodox Shrove Monday, also known as Clean Monday.



Rise: An Honest Lenten Devotional

From the bestselling author of *LOW: An Honest Advent Devotional* comes a new devotional for Lent and Easter considering the ways we are called to rise from the depths in our spiritual journey.

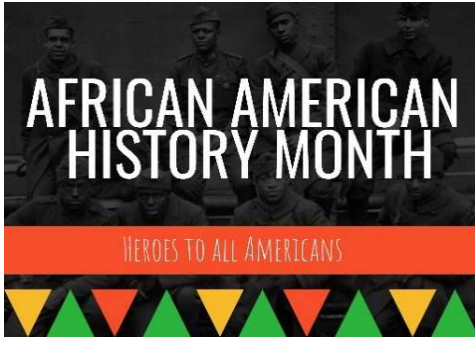
In this new Lenten devotional, popular progressive Christian author John Pavlovitz once again takes us on a transformative spiritual journey. Like the human experience, the spiritual journey is not a level path. It is about the falling and the rising. We allow our hopes to rise when we are in the middle of the struggle. We wait for the sun to rise, knowing that joy comes in the morning. We rise to our feet after falling to our knees in desperate prayer. We rise when we are knocked from our feet, persistent in this. We rise to meet the coming day, knowing we are held by a Love that will have the last word. Rise is a 40-day journey of elevated hopes and ascending spirits. Each entry includes scripture and a reflection.

Please Remember in Prayer

- The Universal Church, its members and mission,
- The nation and all in authority, the leaders of our nation - federal, state, and local.
- For democracy and our democratic institutions and norms in the United States.
- The welfare of the world and the concerns of the local community,
- The interrelationship of Gospel values and civic engagement
- Ministries of the United Church of Christ and of Zion Church.
- The leaders of our church: local, regional, and national, including our Living Water Association UCC, Association General Minister, The Rev. Nayiri Karjian, and Association Faith in Action Minister, The Rev. Michael Howard.
- The ministers and missionaries of the world.
- Those who are refugees and immigrants.
- For children separated from their parents at detention camps along our southern border.
- For racial and religious justice and reconciliation in the United States and around the world.
- Mother Earth and the global reflection on climate disruption.
- For peace, justice, and freedom throughout the world and particularly for the peoples of Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and the United States.
- The people of Turkey and Syria: more than 46,000 people have died following two devastating earthquakes. Hopes of finding people alive have dimmed and experts fear the toll could rise sharply. Turkish authorities say some 13.5 million people have been affected in an area spanning roughly 280 miles from Adana in the west to Diyarbakir in the east, and 186 miles from Malatya in the north to Hatay in the south. At least 41,020 deaths have been reported in Turkey, while 5,800 people have died in Syria. The US State Department has confirmed that 3 Americans are among the dead. Be with all who grieve and mourn the loss of loved ones, homes, businesses, and infrastructure. Please help the survivors to process and move through the trauma, and to rebuild their lives and communities.
- The people of California profoundly impacted by the atmospheric rivers, flooding rains and winter storms and snow. Be with all who grieve and mourn the loss of loved ones, homes, businesses, and infrastructure. Please help the survivors to process and move through the trauma, and to rebuild their lives and communities.
- According to data from the Gun Violence Archive a total of 84 mass shooting incidents have occurred in the US as of February 23rd, 2023. In 2022 a total of 648 mass shootings. In 2021 a total of 693 mass shooting incident occurred across the US, in 2020 a total of 611, in 2019 a total of 417, with 337 incidents in 2018. While we pray for the families and friends of those whose lives have been taken in violent acts – and we pray for those injured in body, mind, soul, and spirit – and for their neighborhoods and communities across the United States - We know that our words and prayers are not enough. We must repent for our collective inaction and commit to tirelessly working toward meaningful gun violence prevention.
- For those affected by the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic and the omicron variant and various variant surges: for all those who are infected and/or sick, and those who are grieving, for all who are affected, all around the world, for essential workers and frontline workers...we pray for comfort, for safety, for health, and for wholeness.
- The residents and management of the San Sofia Apartments who share a campus with us.

- Those anticipating surgery, recovering from surgery, or undergoing medical procedures, tests, or treatments
- Those living in assisted living or in a nursing home
- Those who are homebound and those who are caregivers
- Those who suffer or are in any trouble, and the departed.
- Those on our church prayer list:
 - Patti Augustine and family
 - Robert O. Bucklew (*Bob Bucklew's Dad*) in Alliance, Ohio
 - Betty Funk (*our Minister of Music - back with us following surgery*)
 - Marian Heffernan (*neighbor to Scott and Bob; friend of Elaine – health concerns*)
 - Ken Kauffman & friends: Nim Bryant, Isadora Almaro, Joe & Janelle Reardon, Barbara Reed, Nancy Moore's sister.
 - Jocelyn Paulette and her parents, Kevin & Jacqui Konet - *prayers for recovery.*
 - Keith Konet and his brother who suffered a broken humerus from an injury caused by a fallen branch - he has undertaken rehab as he heals.
 - Marcia Leslie (*neighbor and friend – health concerns*)
 - **Elaine Lukacs (has been moved to : Altnheim Skilled Nursing Facility: 18627 Shurmer Road, Room 408 Strongsville, Oh 44136– 440.238-3361 ext.5071)**
 - Linda and James Mortach (*Elaine Lukacs' sister & brother-in-law*) & Linda's daughter
 - Patricia Matheny (*prayers also for her Cousin Paul Kevin McCray*)
 - Barbara Rossington (*move to a new senior housing community*)
 - Henry Senyak (*resident community leader – cancer*)
 - Debbie Webb (*Debbie has fallen a couple of times – in one fall she suffered a broken femur – and in a second recent fall, she broke a bone in her arm. She is recovering*)
 - Beverly Wurm and family

Commemorating African American History Month



The month of February each year is designated as African American History Month. **During February 2023, we will be introduced to a different African American leader, whose faith helped shape their lives, their ministries and their activism.** Join us during our time after the service in the Library where we will learn about people who should be heroes to all Americans. **Today, February 26th, we will learn of the life and legacy of civil rights and women's rights activist, journalist, newspaper editor, and teacher, Ida B. Wells-Barnett.**



Ida B. Wells – 1862-1931 - American investigative journalist, educator, early leader in the civil rights movement, one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and suffragist. Wells dedicated her lifetime to combating prejudice and violence, the fight for African-American equality, especially that of women.

FEBRUARY 23, 2023

GOOD PLACES

From Michael Howard, Minister of Faith in Action,
Living Water Association, Ohio NorthEast, UCC



The language of utopia resonates deeply with the vision of becoming communities healed by Christ. Indeed, Scripture is loaded with passages about building places of justice and shalom. The early church, who held everything in common (Acts 2:42-27; 4:32-27), trusted in God's grace to follow Jesus and live as the embodiment of God's justice in the world. Through their faith, Christ was tearing down dividing walls and abolishing enmity; their resurrected relationships now constituted a new humanity. This, according to the writer of Ephesians, is how peace in Christ happens (2:14-15).

We have Thomas More's 1516 work, *Utopia*, to thank for the language. The original name of More's imaginary island was *Nusquama*, Latin for "no place." He opted instead to name it Utopia, borrowing from the Greek prefix "ou-" meaning "no" and "topos" meaning "place." The name was intended to emphasize the work's fictional nature. It was a thought experiment, not something More thought had or ever will exist. As a fictitious no-place, the term utopianism came to mean wishful thinking, emphasizing the human impossibility of constructing a perfect society.

Rather than a vision of an unachievable no-place, the notion of utopia is a central concept in liberation theology. In Gustavo Gutiérrez's work, utopia is a deeply spiritual word that refers to the gospel vision of right and fruitful relationships. This vision, however, becomes a reality through our willingness to become a new kind of humanity committed to bringing about a just society. Drawing from the work of Paulo Freire, Gutiérrez explains that the utopian vision is always characterized by a twofold relationship with the present. It is a denunciation of the existing order and an annunciation of what yet will be.

Thomas More's *Utopia* was a critique to specific problems in the England of his day, mainly the dispossession of land. In it, he imagined another place with a different history than his own. It created a contrast of the world as he knew it with the world as it could be. It opened a way for us to see that the world around us is more malleable than we imagine. In other words, utopia was not merely an unachievable fairytale; it was a reminder to us that things do not have to be the way they are.

Many of our modern places are the result of an insatiable desire for a disastrous kind of world-building, founded on the imperialist logic of capital accumulation, private property, and whiteness. It is a dystopian logic, rooted in ideas of human perfection that make a mockery of God, continually using progress to justify the destruction of countless communities, innumerable ecosystems, and never-ending cycles of violence and oppression. So often and for so many, the dream of a better world keeps hope alive as a means of survival against the dystopian reality of everyday life. The gospel calls us to denounce and disrupt the disastrous impact of human world-making. We cannot acquiesce to a simple life-after-death utopianism. We need a gospel vision that announces a not-yet world and orients us with a hope for the here and now.

One thing I deeply love about my call is meeting people whose utopianism doesn't make the perfect the enemy of the good. If we consider "eu-" a Greek prefix for good, then creating *eutopias*—good places—has always been our calling. For me, the gospel is a way of life that turns "no places" into "good places." Maybe we cannot create perfect places, but with God's help, we can strive to make good ones.