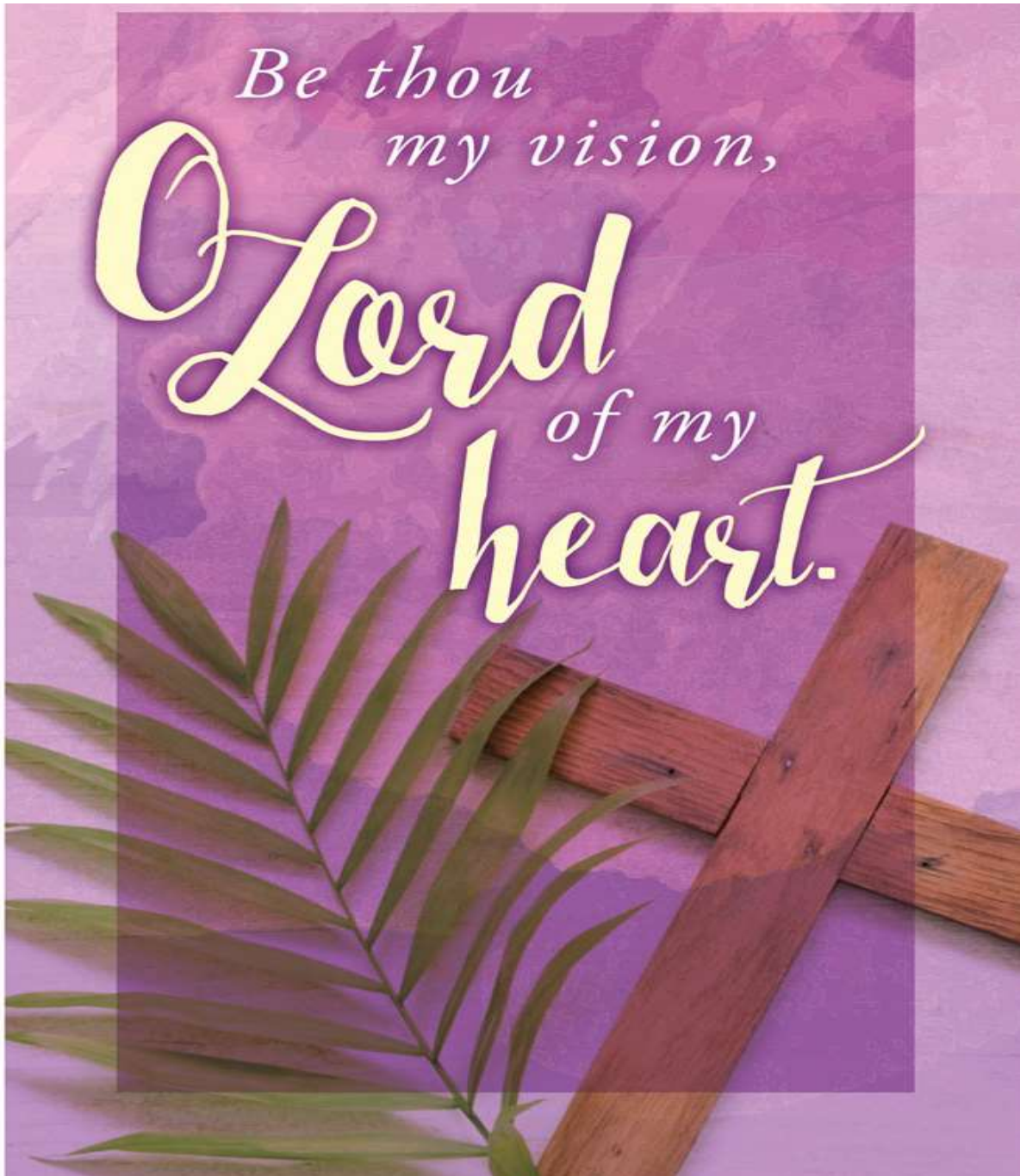


ZION UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST OF TREMONT

March 19, 2023

Fourth Sunday in Lent

A Service of the Word



Lent – Be Thou My Vision

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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

a just world for all

March 19th, 2023
Fourth Sunday in Lent
Service of the Word

*"There is no greater disability in Society than the inability to see a person as more."
--Robert M. Hensel*

WE GATHER IN COMMUNITY

**please stand as you are able,*

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude- *Keith Konet*

*Call to Worship

One: Kindred of God, a new vision of leadership is called forth and God calls upon the least likely, the unheard of, and the humble of heart to assemble to receive anointing.

All: In peace, we anoint the forgotten, the youngest, smallest, and unlikeliest of siblings whom God has raised up to serve.

One: Though the call may involve risk and danger, we are called to listen, obey, and live a love unwavering.

All: In peace, we anoint those who are disinherited and dismissed.

One: God's call does not depend on our outward appearance or our earthly achievements.

All: In peace, we anoint neighbor and kin alike, knowing God looks upon the heart.

All: Let us open our hearts to God this day. Amen.

*Invocation

**Anointed One, your love comes peaceably
into our lives if we will but let it.
We are so fixated on the gold standard,
the familiar, and the safe choice
that we often lose sight
of what you are raising up right
in our very midst.**

Enliven us with your Spirit this day
so that we might get a glimpse of your peace.
Take what we might imagine as too small
for your kin-dom and use it to open the world
to your overflowing abundance and provision
for all that you have created.
In the name of Jesus the Christ we pray.
Amen.

***Hymn - NCH 193 – In the Cross of Christ I Glory vv. 1, 2, 3, & 4**

In the Cross of Christ I Glory

Text: John Bowring, 1825

Tune: RATHBUN 8.7.8.7.

Composer: Ithamar Conkey, 1849

Source: Columbia Harmony, Cincinnati, 1829

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**1 In the cross of Christ I glory,
towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
gathers 'round its head sublime.**

**2 When the woes of life o'ertake me,
hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me:
Lo! it glows with peace and joy.**

**3 When the sun of bliss is beaming
light and love upon my way,
From the cross the radiance streaming
adds more luster to the day.**

**4 Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
by the cross are sanctified;
Peace is there that knows no measure,
joys that through all time abide.**

LENTEN CANDLE LITURGY

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Meditation

(Silent time)

One: As we extinguish this light, we acknowledge the darkness and pain caused by the lack of basic needs—lack of food, of shelter, of education, of healthcare, of love.

(a candle is extinguished)

Lenten Candle Prayer

One: Let us pray:

Many: Loving God, we thank you that you are with us, and that we may call upon you no matter where we are, or what we are feeling. Keep us mindful of your presence and trusting in your promise—that you are working with us in the moment-by-moment unfolding of our lives. Amen

.Hymn - NCH 207 - Just As I Am v. 4

Just As I Am

Text: Charlotte Elliott, 1836; alt.

Tune: WOODWORTH L.M.

Composer: William B. Bradbury, 1849

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**4 Just as I am, your love unknown
Has broken every barrier down;
Now to be yours, and yours alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!**

A READING OF THE WORD

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

The call and anointing of King David happen while Samuel was still grieving Saul in 1 Samuel 16. Saul, chosen by God, turned from God's ways. As a prophet, Samuel anointed Saul, and perhaps took it as a personal failure that Saul didn't work out. Nonetheless, God sent Samuel to Jesse in Bethlehem to offer a sacrifice, and God promised to show Samuel who to anoint. Although Samuel assumed it would be one of the eldest, tallest, or strongest, none of Jesse's first sons were chosen by God. Jesse had not brought the last, youngest, smallest son who was out with the sheep. Instead, God chose the one who was known probably for being too cute. Too small, too young, probably picked on by his brothers for his looks. And God told Samuel, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one."

16 1 YHWH said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve for Saul since I rejected him as ruler of Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and be on your way. For I am sending you to Jesse in Bethlehem, for I have chosen my ruler from among his children."

2 But Samuel replied, "How can I go? For if Saul learns about it, I will be murdered." YHWH replied, "Take a heifer with you: I am sending you to Jesse. Tell him that you came to offer a sacrifice to YHWH, 3 and invite Jesse to the sacrifice. Then I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me my selection."

4 Samuel did what YHWH said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met Samuel. They asked, "Do you come in peace?"

5 Samuel said, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to YHWH. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his children and invited them to the sacrifice.

6 When they arrived, and Samuel saw Eliab, and said to himself, “Surely, God’s anointed stands here before YHWH.”

7 But YHWH said to Samuel, “Pay no attention to appearance and height; I have rejected him. YHWH does not see as mortals see; mortals see only appearances but YHWH sees into the heart.”

8 Then Jesse called Abinadab to pass before Samuel, who said, “No. YHWH has not chosen this one.”

9 Next came Shammah, but Samuel said, “Not this one either.”

10 Seven sons were presented to Samuel by Jesse, who said, “YHWH has not chosen any of these.”

11 Samuel asked, “Are these all the sons you have?” “There is still the youngest,” Jesse said, “but he is tending the sheep.” Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not begin the sacrificial banquet until the lad arrives.”

12 So they sent for the boy, a ruddy youth with bright eyes, and handsome to behold. YHWH said, “Rise and anoint this one.”

13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed the boy in the presence of his brothers, and from that day forward the Spirit of YHWH came upon David and was with him. Then Samuel set out on his way to Ramah.

Psalm Response: Psalm 23 (Responsively)

A song long associated with David, Psalm 23 sings of the assurance of God’s presence even in the most difficult times. God is the one who provides, protects, and shelters us, and whose presence is with us in the valley of the shadow of death. God is the one who honors us, even in the presence of our adversaries, and the psalmist concludes with a blessing of knowing God’s steadfast love and mercy all of our days, and dwelling in God’s presence forever.

1 God, you are my shepherd—
I want nothing more.

**2 You let me lie down in green meadows;
you lead me beside restful waters:**

3 you refresh my soul. You guide me to lush pastures
for the sake of your Name.

**4 Even if I’m surrounded by shadows of Death,
I fear no danger, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff—
they give me courage.**

5 You spread a table for me
in the presence of my enemies,
and you anoint my head with oil—
my cup overflows!

**6 Only goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,**

**and I will dwell in your house, God,
for days without end.**

Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14

The Epistle reading shifts from Romans for one week in Lent to Ephesians 5:8-14. The writer uses the images of light and darkness to show that everything in light is exposed, and we ought to live with nothing hidden in us. We ought not to hide any part of who we are—for if we do, it is because of shame—and instead we should live as people without shame. Live with the fruits of the Spirit, the fruits of light, and know that everything will become visible. The writer concludes this section with “Sleeper, awake!” In other words, be alert and ready for Christ, coming at an unexpected time, and live with nothing to hide before God.

5 8 There was a time when you were darkness, but now you are light in Christ. Live as children of the light. 9 Light produces every kind of goodness, justice and truth. 10 Be correct in your judgment of what pleases our Savior. 11 Take no part in deeds done in darkness, which bear no fruit; rather, expose them. 12 It’s shameful even to mention the things these people do in secret; 13 but when such deeds are exposed and seen in the light of day, everything that becomes visible is light.

14 That’s why we read, “Awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”

Gospel Reading: John 9:1-41

The account of the blind person receiving their sight in John 9 must be approached with caution. There was a societal view that disability was the result of sin, which is the question the disciples have when they find someone who is blind from birth. Jesus’ reply is that no one has sinned. However, Jesus uses this moment to show that God’s work might be revealed in this person. The work that is revealed is one of deconstructing cultural and theological beliefs that are harmful, for the person born blind could only beg; they were not able to or allowed to work until they were freed from the marginalization of society. Far too often we have focused on a miraculous healing and that the person could then see, instead of the liberation that Jesus proclaimed from society’s sin of marginalization and oppression. Jesus then used sight and blindness as spiritual metaphors for those opposed to the kind of radical liberation he brings. Again, approaching with caution the anti-Semitic ways John’s gospel has been interpreted, this was a general societal belief that forced disabled people to beg, instead of inclusion of all people in the community. Some of the leaders opposed Jesus because he was claiming to be the Chosen One, something blasphemous to their religion and culture, and therefore they questioned his authority.

9 1 As Jesus walked along, he saw someone who had been blind from birth. 2 The disciples asked Jesus, “Rabbi, was it this individual’s sin that caused the blindness, or that of the parents?” 3 “Neither,” answered Jesus, “It wasn’t because of anyone’s sin—
not this person’s, nor the parents’.
Rather, it was to let God’s works shine forth
in this person.
4 We must do the deeds of the One who sent me
while it is still day—

for night is coming,
when no one can work.
5 While I am in the world,
I am the light of the world.”

6 With that, Jesus spat on the ground, made mud with his saliva and smeared the blind one’s eyes with the mud. 7 Then Jesus said, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam”—“Siloam” means “sent.” So the person went off to wash, and came back able to see.

8 Neighbors and those who had been accustomed to seeing the blind beggar began to ask, “Isn’t this the one who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some said yes; others said no—the one who had been healed simply looked like the beggar. But the individual in question said, “No—it was me.” 10 The people then asked, “Then how were your eyes opened?”

11 The answer came, “The one they call Jesus made mud and smeared it on my eyes, and told me to go to Siloam and wash. When I went and washed, I was able to see.”

12 “Where is Jesus?” they asked. The person replied, “I have no idea.”

13 They took the one who had been born blind to the Pharisees. 14 It had been on a Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud paste and opened this one’s eyes. 15 The Pharisees asked how the individual could see. They were told, “Jesus put mud on my eyes. I washed it off, and now I can see.”

16 This prompted some Pharisees to say, “This Jesus cannot be from God, because he doesn’t keep the Sabbath.” Others argued, “But how could a sinner perform signs like these?” They were sharply divided.

17 Then they addressed the blind person again: “Since it was your eyes he opened, what do you have to say about this Jesus?” “He’s a prophet,” came the reply.

18 The Temple authorities refused to believe that this one had been blind and had begun to see, until they summoned the parents. 19 “Is this your child?” they asked, “and if so, do you attest that your child was blind at birth? How do you account for the fact that now your child can see?”

20 The parents answered, “We know this is our child, blind from birth. 21 But how our child can see now, or who opened those blind eyes, we have no idea. But don’t ask us—our child is old enough to speak without us!” 22 The parents answered this way because they were afraid of the Temple authorities, who had already agreed among themselves that anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23 That was why they said, “Our child is of age and should be asked directly.”

24 A second time they summoned the one who had been born blind and said, “Give God the glory instead; we know that this Jesus is a sinner.”

25 “I don’t know whether he is a sinner or not,” the individual answered. “All I know is that I used to be blind, and now I can see.”

26 They persisted, “Just what did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

27 “I already told you, but you won’t listen to me,” came the answer. “Why do you want to

hear it all over again? Don't tell me you want to become disciples of Jesus too!"

28 They retorted scornfully, "You're the one who is Jesus' disciple. We're disciples of Moses.
29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this Jesus comes from."

30 The other retorted: "Well, this is news! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes! 31 We know that God doesn't hear sinners, but that if people are devout and obey God's will, God listens to them. 32 It is unheard of that anyone ever gave sight to a person blind from birth. 33 If this one were not from God, he could never have done such a thing!" 34 "What!" they exclaimed. "You're steeped in sin from birth, and you're giving us lectures?" With that they threw the person out.

35 When Jesus heard of the expulsion, he sought out the healed one and asked, "Do you believe in the Chosen One?"

36 The other answered, "Who is this One, that I may believe?"

37 "You're looking at him," Jesus replied. "The Chosen One is speaking to you now."

38 The healed one said, "Yes, I believe," and worshiped Jesus.

39 And Jesus said, "I came into this world to execute justice—to make the sightless see and the seeing blind."

40 Some of the Pharisees who were nearby heard this and said, "You're not calling us blind, are you?"

41 To which Jesus replied, "If you were blind, there would be no sin in that. But since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Choral Response – His Name is Wonderful

Music by Audrey Mieir, 1959
Choir: Keith Konet, Bob Bucklew and Barbara Rossington
A Capella

Reflection – A World Exposed, Uncovered, Made Plain, Laid Bare - The Rev. Scott Rosenstein

We Respond

***Prayer of Response**

**Holy Spirit, fall afresh on us.
Fill us, renew us,
mold us and shape us
into who you need us to be.
Help us to let go of the ways
this world confines us,
so that we might be free in you
to love, care, and lift up one another.**

Holy Spirit, inspire us when the well is dry.
Care for us when we cannot rise again.
Empower us to rise up,
and to keep rising when we fall down again.
As we are reminded from scripture,
from the beginning to the end,
you breathed life into us
and formed us into a community of faith.
We are not on this journey alone.
Refresh us, Loving Spirit,
and remind us that you are with us,
now and always,
and we have one another.
Amen.

***Hymn – A Man Who Could Not See (to the tune of NCH 24 – “The God of Abraham Praise”)**

A Man Who Could Not See

Text: Copyright © 2011 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights reserved.

New Hymns: www.carolynshymns.com/

Tune: Traditional Hebrew melody – Yigdal Elohim Chai (“The God of Abraham Praise”)
LEONI 6.6.8.4.D.

Adapter: Meyer Lyon, 1770

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**1 A man who could not see received the gift of sight;
O Lord, you spoke and he believed and saw the light.
His joy was greater still than sight that was restored;
He saw, when you had made him well, that you are Lord.**

**2 Some leaders were distressed and said it was a sin,
For it was on the day of rest that you healed him.
They could not see the grace or know how much God cares;
The lack of vision in that place was truly theirs.**

**3 O Christ, you are the light to all who follow you
You give to us the gift of sight — a new world-view.
When culture hems us in with values that destroy,
Lord, help your church to see again your kingdom’s joy.**

Invitation to Share Our Tithes and Offerings

One: It is not the outward appearance or size of the gifts we have to share that matters to God.

It is the loving generosity of our hearts that is closest to the heart of God. We are invited to give this day out of the abundance of our lives, from our heart, knowing that no matter the size of the gift that God knows our hearts.

Many: We give this day from our hearts and may it be pleasing to God. Amen.

The Offertory - Keith Konet

***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**

**Generous God,
you remind us that
you “anoint our heads with oil”
and that our “cup overflows”
with your abundance.
We do not take for granted
all that you provide.
Take these gifts and use them
for the healing and tender care
of your hurting world.
May your cup of love overflow
and abide with those who are
hurting and heartbroken, forgotten and despised,
so that we may all be made whole.
Amen.**

Choral Hymn – NCH 546 – Jesus, Lover of My Soul

**Author: Charles Wesley, 1740; alt.
Tune: MARTYN 7.7.7.7.D.
Composer: Simeon B. Marsh, 1834
Choir: Barbara Rossington, and Bob Bucklew
Accompanist: Keith Konet**

***Prayers of the People**

***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 451 – Be Now My Vision

Be Now My Vision

Versifier: Eleanor H. Hull, 1912; adapt.

Translator: Mary E. Byrne, 1905

Ancient Irish text, c. 8th century

Word alterations © 1992 The Pilgrim Press

Tune: SLANE 10.10.9.10.

Harmonizer: David Evans, 1927

Harmonization © 1927 Oxford University Press. From THE REVISED CHURCH HYMNARY, 1927.

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**1 Be now my vision, O God of my heart;
Nothing surpasses the love you impart -
You my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Your presence my light.**

**2 Be now my wisdom, and be my true word;
Ever within me, my soul is assured;
Mother and Father, You are both to me,
Now and forever, Your child I will be.**

**3 Riches I need not, nor life's empty praise,
You, my inheritance, now and always;
You and You only are first in my heart,
Great God, my treasure, may we never part.**

**4 Sovereign of heaven, my victory won,
May I reach heavens' joys, O bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.**

*Commissioning and Benediction

One: Now go to take the love of God into the world.

Many: We will show others the way to God's fields of grace.

One: Now go to take the grace of Jesus into the world.

Many: We will seek to bring others to the still waters of peace.

One: Now go to take the community of the Spirit into the world.

Many: We will work to restore the lives of all whom we meet. Amen.

*Postlude – *Keith Konet*

* * * * *

Credits

- (1) The Invocation, Call to worship, Invitation to Share Our Tithes, and blessing of the gifts are adapted from *Come Peaceably : Service Prayers for the Fourth Sunday in Lent*, written by The Rev. Rev. Dr. Chad Abbott, Conference Minister for Kentucky Indiana Conference United Church of Christ, and resides in Indianapolis, Indiana. Permission given to reproduce or adapt this material for use in service of worship or church education. All rights reserved.
- (2) Lenten Candle Liturgy – Fourth Sunday in Lent is adapted from *Lenten Candle Liturgy*, contributed by Jeanyne Slettom, and posted May 27, 2015 on the website, *Process & Faith*. <https://processandfaith.org/lenten-candle-liturgy/>
- (3) The Prayer of Response is adapted from *Worship Resources for March 19th, 2023*, written by Rev. Mindi Welton-Thomas, and posted March 10th, 2023, on her blog, *Rev-o-lution*. <http://rev-o-lution.org/>.
- (4) Commission and Benediction are adapted from *Alternate texts Liturgy w/communion from March 19th, 2023* written by the Rev. Thom M. Shuman, and posted March 12, 2023, to his blog, *Lectionary Liturgies*. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>
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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 (2700 W.14th)/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.

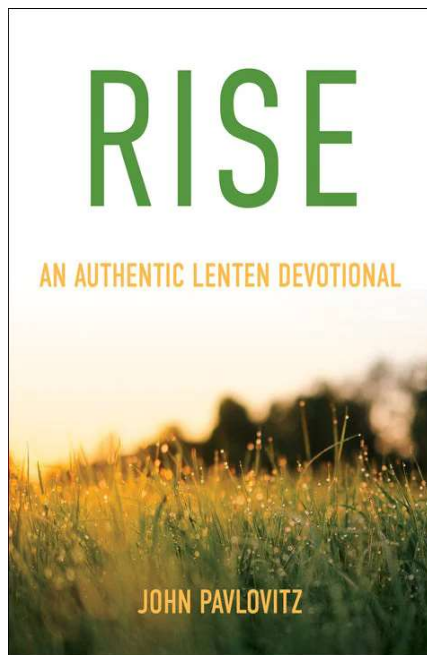
Open yourself up to the ancient rituals that invite us to turn away from things that distract us from, or learn anew spiritual disciplines that focus us on, spiritual awakening.

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.

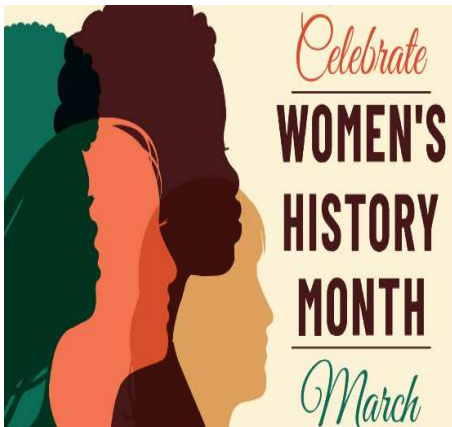
Please Remember in Prayer

- 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 50,000 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 44,374 deaths have been reported in Turkey, while 5,951 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 112 mass shooting incidents have occurred in the US as of March 15th, 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.
- Globally, as of 11:31am CET, 16 March 2023, there have been 760,360,956 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 6,873,477 deaths. In the United States of America, there have been 102,417,985 confirmed cases of COVID-19, and 1,113,229 deaths. 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 – receiving care in a medical rehab unit*)
 - 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 : Altenheim 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 for her Cousin Paul Kevin McCray*) - Prayers for her family at the loss of her brother, Keith Matheny, who grew up in the Zion Church. Also the loss of a dear friend, Craig Lucas.
 - 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 Women’s History Month



In observance of Women’s History Month (March) we continue a series begin in African American History Month (February), where **we are introduced to different women leaders, 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. **In the next session, through her pastoral letter, “Cultural Sensitivity – My Story” we will learn about the life, faith, and leadership of the Association General Minister of the Living Water Association (Homeland Conference) of the United Church of Christ, the Rev. Nayiri Karjian.**



Rev. Nayiri Karjian, Association General Minister

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Nayiri has been serving as the General Minister of the Association since February 2018. An Armenian Christian born and raised in Aleppo, Syria, Nayiri graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from Haigazian University, and Near East School of Theology, Beirut Lebanon; and with a Master of Divinity degree from Lancaster Theological Seminary, Lancaster, PA. Since her ordination in 1985 she has served UCC congregations in Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Connecticut, Wisconsin, Chicago, Houston, St Louis, and Colorado Springs. Nayiri has shared her gifts both as settled and transitional Minister, including numerous board and committees on the UCC National Setting.



Cultural Sensitivity My Story

From Nayiri Karjian, General Minister, Living Water Association, Ohio NorthEast, UCC | March 16, 2023

One of the joys of living is discovering that the world is a vast mosaic of cultures and ethnicities, of languages and religions, of nationalities and sexualities, and more. This is especially true in our society, which is made up of generations of indigenous people whose cultures were annihilated, of generations of slaves who were owned by those in power, of indentured servants who were bound to work for another, of a variety of generations of immigrants, who continue to come by their own choice, and others by fleeing danger and harm.

This reality exposes the necessity of cultural sensitivity, a definition for which is – respect and awareness for people’s strengths and gifts, their culture and knowledge, and their unique worldview. Cultural sensitivity implies that one would withhold judgment of these cultural differences and their practices, that one would continue to be open, grow in self-awareness, and learn to deal effectively with these differences. *(variety of google resources)*

I write about this because we, as an Association of 146 congregations, urban, suburban and rural, congregations of European and African descent; an Association of 340 authorized ministers comprised those of European, African and Asian descent, those who identify as BIPOC - black, Indigenous and people of color, those who identify as LGBTQ+ and non-binary, those with different abilities, and more, have covenanted to do the ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ together in this world, at this time, and to live together as the Living Water Association.

As all covenants, this covenant demands our openness, our care and love, our commitment to be safe when we gather, to respect and be aware of the mosaic of which we are part.

Most of you know that I grew up in Syria, lived in Beirut, Lebanon, and when the civil war in Beirut intensified, came to the US to attend Lancaster Theological Seminary in PA. Aleppo is the city of my birth. Yet, I am of Armenian descent, which assumes a Christian faith. Armenians are one of the first Christians and are mostly Orthodox/Apostolic. My family, however, is Protestant/Evangelical, following evangelism work by the Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions of the joint global ministry of the Congregationalists and Presbyterians in New England. To this day, Protestantism is a minority in the Eastern part of the world, where a variety of ethnic Christians are Orthodox. Because Syria was an Arab and Muslim country, we Armenian Christians who found ourselves in exile following the genocide perpetrated by the Ottomans, created communities of our own, including churches and schools.

I grew up speaking Armenian at home, Arabic in school and outside the home, English which was taught as a foreign language by second grade, adjusted to Turkish which my grandparents spoke at home, and some French because Syria was colonized by the French for a long time. Each language holds a culture. During childhood and teenage years, my friends had diverse ethnicities, faiths, cultures and languages. It was just a way of life. We navigated it.

In Beirut, I attended the Haigazian University, an Armenian Protestant University, where classes are offered in English since the student body is diverse. Armenian courses are offered for those who are Armenian. In order to begin my studies, I had to pass TOEFL - Test of English as a Foreign Language. It was during those tests that I was introduced to multiple choice questions. I had not seen them before. My educational culture did not include them.

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During my years in Haigazian University, I lived and took courses at the Near East School of Theology, one of the few Protestant seminaries in the area. The Seminary was comprised students from a variety of Protestant denominations from the Middle East, Iran, India, Africa, Europe as well as professors from the US and Europe. Although the language of our education was English, at any given time, one could hear several languages spoken and cultural experiences shared.

In the US, where I arrived 40 years ago, and Lancaster Seminary was my first home, I was named "the exotic foreigner." I did not know this at the time. It was shared with me months later. Everyone who tried to pronounce my name struggled, which reminded me that even in Syria and Lebanon, most non-Armenians could not pronounce my name correctly. Armenian is an Indo-European language while Arabic is Semitic. There are some letters and sounds they do not share.

In seminary and in churches I visited, I would be asked how many camels my family had. How come I did not cover up? When did I convert to Christianity? This last question was very poignant since Armenia was one of the first states to accept Christianity as a state religion in the year 301. On a church heritage tree, the first churches are Armenian and Coptic. I am grateful no one asks me about camels anymore...

Today, 40 years later in the US, having lived in a variety of states and settings, like all immigrants, I continue to daily navigate and interpret sentiments, concepts, roles, social practices, not to mention the questions that follow as one hears a bit of an accent and a name that sounds foreign. I struggle with the simple question "where are you from?" If I answer "from Syria," the assumption is that I am Arab Muslim. Many don't realize that Christianity was born in that part of the world, and that Middle Eastern countries have some of the most vibrant Christian communities in the world. If I answer, I am Armenian, which is usually my response, I am asked about life in Armenia. I have never lived in Armenia. I am a diaspora Armenian born in exile. I have visited Armenia twice and look forward to visiting again soon.

I dream of the day when I will not be asked, "Where are you from?" But if someone really wants to know my ethnic identity and heritage, they would express a kind curiosity with, "What is, or, may I ask, your ethnic background or identity?"

Today, 40 years later in the US, daily I am asked questions that make me feel like a stranger. Then I think of all BIPOC people, and weep that there are many who are born on this soil, in this society, who are treated as if they're strangers as well.

My worldview is global. When I use the word "here," I usually mean the US. When I talk about church, I usually mean the global, ecumenical church. When I think of God, I don't think "he or she." Armenian has only one pronoun for all humans.

Some of the cultural marks of Diaspora Armenians and Middle Eastern Cultures are - close knit community, sharing and relationships, social roles and norms that everyone follows, generosity and hospitality. To me, community is organic. It happens when individuals gather. But that is not always true here. We work hard to build community because it doesn't happen organically. I feel exasperation when we have to work so hard to build healthy communities and relationships, so together, we can create safe and respectful communities for all. Why does it not happen organically here? I wonder.

So what can we/you do? Remember that there is no right way, that differences are not good or bad, they are simply divergent. Learn about others and cultures where we differ in expression of emotions, in dealing with conflict, in communicating directly or indirectly, in expression of respect, in appropriate topics for conversation, in personal space, gestures, sense of humor, and more. Learn from the variety of resources on google. Do your own work. Ask mindful questions. Be gracious. Open your heart. Don't defend yourself. Don't deny your bias. We all have them. Be aware and respectful, and above all loving.

I do not expect folks to have heard of Armenians or have knowledge about every culture in the world. I don't expect that we will always succeed in respecting diversity and living with it without ever hurting one another. But I do expect that we would treat one another as one human race, with non-judgment and sensitivity toward differences. I expect that in this twenty first century, when the world is increasingly pluralistic, we would be open to the gift of diversity, seeking to learn from one another, recognizing that each culture contributes to the beautiful mosaic, of one medley of humanity created in the image of its artful Creator.