

ZION UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST OF TREMONT

March 26, 2023

Fifth Sunday in Lent

A Service of the Word



Lenten Cross -Fragmented Journey

Unique crayon and digital worship art

by Stushie - a Scottish pastor, ministering in East Tennessee

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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

a just world for all

March 26th, 2023
Fifth Sunday in Lent
Service of the Word

“Jesus told her, ‘I am the Resurrection, and I am Life: those who believe in me will live, even if they die; and those who are alive and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?’”

John 11:25-26

WE GATHER IN COMMUNITY

**please stand as you are able,*

Welcome and Announcements:

We welcome the Rev. Doug Horner to our pulpit today! Rev. Horner served as Senior Pastor of St. Paul’s Community Church UCC in Ohio City for 17 years, retiring in 2020. Rev. Horner has been active in the United Church of Christ, neighborhood and community activism, and long-time advocate for our unhoused neighbors through the Homeless Ministries of St. Paul’s Church. Rev. Horner has visited here with Zion Church and brought the message on several occasions, and we are pleased and honored by his presence with us here today!

Prelude - *Betty Funk*

*Call to Worship

One: Breath of Life, you animate us.

Many: We come before you are seeking revival from within.

One: Holy One, when you speak, great things happen.

Many: Empower us to make great things happen.

One: Matchless One, you bring good things to life.

Many: We desire to bring good things to life too.

*Invocation

Life Giver,
come and revive us again.
In dwell us with your Spirit
and let our souls awake to joy.
We come boldly
that you might breathe on us.

May what we experience with you today
change us forever and for the better.
Amen.

***Hymn – Pilgrim Hymnal (Blue) 38 - Morning Has Broken**

Morning Has Broken

Author: Eleanor Farjeon, 1881-1965

Tune: BUNESSAN 5.4.5.4.D.

Gaelic Melody

Harm: David Evans, 1874-1948

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**1 Morning has broken
like the first morning,
blackbird has spoken
like the first bird.
Praise for the singing!
Praise for the morning!
Praise for them, springing
fresh from the Word!**

**2 Sweet the rain's new fall
sunlit from heaven,
like the first dewfall
on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness
of the wet garden,
sprung in completeness
where God's feet pass.**

**3 Mine is the sunlight!
Mine is the morning
born of the one light
Eden saw play!
Praise with elation,
praise every morning,
God's recreation
of the new day!**

LENTEN CANDLE LITURGY

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Meditation

(Silent time)

One: As we extinguish this light, we acknowledge the darkness and pain of war and oppression in the world.

(a candle is extinguished)

Lenten Candle Prayer

One: Let us pray

Many: Loving God, we open our hearts to you. We invite you into our inmost being, only to find you already there. Strengthen us in our quiet places and then lead us into the work of justice and peace. Amen.

.Hymn - NCH 207 - Just As I Am (v 1)

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!**

A READING OF THE WORD

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

The prophet Ezekiel had been taken into exile during the first wave of the Babylonian invasion of Judah, though he continued to prophesy through the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. He beheld strange visions of what God had done and would do. Like his contemporary, Jeremiah, he saw through the corruption of the priests and prophets who only told the Judahite kings what they wanted to hear, and they failed to listen to God's warnings. In this reading, the prophet beheld a vision of a battlefield, a valley of dry bones. In dialogue with Ezekiel, God asked the prophet rhetorical questions about whether the dead could live and commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones. The bones rose from the earth, with sinews, muscles, and skin, but they were just lifeless bodies. Then God called upon Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath. The Hebrew word for "breath" is the same as "wind" and "Spirit." The four winds came upon the bones and the bodies came to life with breath. God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the people, that God would open up the graves, that God would bring to life what was dead, and that God would put Spirit into their own bodies so they would live on their own land. A prophecy of hope for the exiles, that God would be with them in spirit and they would find new life.

37 1 The hand of YHWH was upon me, and it carried me away by the Spirit of YHWH and set me down in a valley—a valley full of bones. 2 God made me walk up and down among them. And I saw that there was a vast number of bones lying there in the valley, and they were very dry. 3 God asked me, "Mere mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "Only you know that, Sovereign YHWH."

4 And God said, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: 'Dry bones, hear the word of YHWH! 5 Sovereign YHWH says to these bones: I am going to breathe life into you. 6 I will fasten sinews on you, clothe you with flesh, cover you with skin, and give you breath. And you will live; and you will know that I am Sovereign YHWH.' "

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded, and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and all the bones came together, bone to matching bone. 8 As I watched, sinews appeared on them, flesh clothed them, and skin covered them. But there was no breath in them.

9 Then God said to me, “Prophecy to the wind; prophecy, mere mortal, and say to it: ‘Thus says Sovereign YHWH: Approach from the four winds, Breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.’ ”

10 I prophesied as I was commanded, and breath came into them; they came alive, and stood up on their feet—a vast multitude.

11 Then God said to me, “Mere mortal, these bones are the whole House of Israel. The people keep saying, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is gone, and we are doomed.’ 12 Prophecy, therefore, and say to them, ‘Thus says Sovereign YHWH: I am going to open your graves and raise you up from the dead, my people. I will return you to the land of Israel. 13 When I open your graves and raise you up, you, my people, will know that I am YHWH. 14 Then I will put my Spirit into you and you will return to life, and I will settle you back on your own land. Then you will know that I, YHWH, have spoken and made all this happen, says Sovereign YHWH.’ ”

Psalm Response: Psalm 130 (Responsively)

Psalm 130 is a prayer of hope and forgiveness. The psalmist prays on behalf of the people, knowing that if God held their sins against them, no one could come before God. However, God is the one in whom there is hope and forgiveness. God will deliver them, just like a sentinel waits all night for dawn, they know that God will bring deliverance and redemption. They are forgiven, for God is all powerful, and God’s steadfast love endures forever.

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, God!

2 God, hear my voice!

**Let your ears be attentive
to my voice, my cries for mercy!**

3 If you kept track of our sins, God,
who could stand before you?

**4 But with you is forgiveness,
and for this we revere you.**

5 So I wait for you, God—
my soul waits,
and in your word I place my trust.

**6 My soul longs for you, God,
more than sentinels long for the dawn,
more than sentinels long for the dawn.**

7 Israel, put your hope in God,
for with God is abundant love
and the fullness of deliverance;

**8 God will deliver Israel
from all its failings.**

Second Reading: Romans 8:6-11

Paul uses the image of flesh and spirit in Romans 8:6-11 as a metaphor of the ways of the world humanity has created and God's ways. For those who live by the Spirit, they know God's ways and are not tempted by what the world offers. Those who have the Spirit are alive in Christ, and death has no hold on them. Christ is the one who brings us true life and will raise us from the dead, giving life to our mortal bodies.

8 6 The mind of the flesh is death, but that of the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mind of the flesh stands in opposition to God; it is not subject to God's law—indeed, it cannot be, 8 since those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Those who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, then though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit lives because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then the One who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through the Spirit dwelling in you.

Gospel Reading: John 11:1-45

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in John 11. There is much to unpack in this story and various points of interest in John's account. Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha, and while they sent word that Lazarus was ill, Jesus delayed in going to them. When Jesus finally decided to travel to Judea to visit, the disciples tried to talk him out of it because they knew some of the community leaders wanted to kill him. Nonetheless, Jesus insisted on going, though he knew that Lazarus was dead, for he was going to awaken him. Thomas, in his first appearance in this Gospel, was ready to go with Jesus even to the death. Martha was the first to greet Jesus as he arrived, stating that if he had been there, her brother would not have died. Yet she claimed her faith, knowing God would give Jesus whatever he asked. Jesus declared to her, "I am the resurrection and the life," and Martha proclaimed her belief in him as the Messiah. Martha then went back and called Mary to see Jesus. Mary said the same thing Martha did, that if Jesus had been there, her brother would not have died. However, instead of boldly claiming her faith as Martha demonstrated, Mary knelt and wept. Jesus' response to her was different. He also wept. For even bold declarations of faith did not keep Jesus from grieving himself. When other neighbors began to question why Jesus could not keep Lazarus from dying, Jesus rose, went to the tomb, and ordered them to roll away the stone. Martha warned him about the smell, since her brother had been dead for four days, but nonetheless, Jesus prayed, and called Lazarus out of the tomb. The dead man walked out, and many who witnessed the event came to believe.

11 1 There was a certain man named Lazarus, who was sick. He and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were from the village of Bethany. 2 Mary was the one who had anointed the feet of Jesus with perfume and dried his feet with her hair, and it was her brother Lazarus who was sick. 3 The sisters sent this message to Jesus: "Rabbi, the one you love is sick." 4 When Jesus heard this, he said, "This sickness will not end in death; it is happening for God's glory, so that God's Only Begotten may be glorified because of it." 5 Jesus loved these three very much. 6 Yet even

after hearing that Lazarus was sick, he remained where he was staying for two more days. 7 Finally he said to the disciples, "Let's go back to Judea." 8 They protested, "Rabbi, it was only recently that they tried to stone you—and you want to go back there again?" 9 Jesus replied, "Aren't there twelve hours of daylight?"

Those who walk by day don't stumble,
because they see the world bathed in light;
10 those who go walking by night will stumble
because there is no light in them."

11 After Jesus said this, he said to the disciples, "Our beloved Lazarus has fallen asleep. I am going to Judea to wake him." 12 The disciples objected, "But Rabbi, if he's only asleep, he'll be fine." 13 Jesus had been speaking about Lazarus' death, but they thought he was talking about actual sleep. 14 So he said very plainly, "Lazarus is dead! 15 For your sakes I am glad that I wasn't there, that you might come to believe. In any event, let us go to him." 16 Then Thomas, "the Twin," said to the rest, "Let's go with Jesus, so that we can die with him." 17 When Jesus arrived in Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Since Bethany was only about two miles from Jerusalem, 19 many people had come out to console Martha and Mary about their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, while Mary stayed at home with the mourners. 21 When she got to Jesus, Martha said, "If you had been here, my brother would never have died! 22 Yet even now, I am sure that God will give you whatever you ask." 23 "Your brother will rise again!" Jesus assured her. 24 Martha replied, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

25 Jesus told her, "I am the Resurrection,
and I am Life:
those who believe in me
will live, even if they die;
26 and those who are alive and believe in me
will never die. "Do you believe this?"

27 "Yes!" Martha replied. "I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, God's Only Begotten, the One who is coming into the world." 28 When she had said this, Martha went back and called her sister Mary. "The Teacher is here, asking for you," she whispered.

29 As soon as Mary heard this, she got up and went to him. 30 Jesus hadn't gotten to the village yet. He was at the place where Martha had met him. 31 Those who were there consoling her saw her get up quickly and followed Mary, thinking she was going to the tomb to mourn. 32 When Mary got to Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, "If you had been here, Lazarus never would have died." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the other mourners as well, he was troubled in spirit, moved by the deepest emotions.

34 "Where have you laid him?" Jesus asked. "Come and see," they said. 35 And Jesus wept.

36 The people in the crowd began to remark, "See how much he loved him!" 37 Others said, "He made the blind person see; why couldn't he have done something to prevent Lazarus' death?"

38 Jesus was again deeply moved. They approached the tomb, which was a cave with a stone

in front of it. 39 “Take away the stone,” Jesus directed. Martha said, “Rabbi, it has been four days now. By this time there will be a stench.”

40 Jesus replied, “Didn’t I assure you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”
41 So they took the stone away. Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said, “Abba, thank you for having heard me. 42 I know that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd, that they might believe that you sent me!”

43 Then Jesus called out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”

44 And Lazarus came out of the tomb, still bound hand and foot with linen strips, his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus told the crowd, “Untie him and let him go free.”

45 Many of those who had come to console Martha and Mary, and saw what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

Choral Response – His Name is Wonderful

Music by Audrey Mieir, 1959

Choir: Keith Konet, Bob Bucklew and Barbara Rossington

Reflection -- “Out of Death, Creating Life” by the Rev. Doug Horner

We Respond

***Prayer of Response**

**God of All Seasons,
as spring arrives in the north
and autumn in the south of the world,
we remember our ancestors
marked the Equinox
as a turning point in the year.
If we have struggled,
this is a time of change and renewal.
This is a time when colors burst forth
in autumn leaves to the south
and in budding flowers to the north.
This is a time when we are reminded
that all things change,
and you bring about both
the challenge and promise of change in our lives,
through repentance, reformation, and redemption.
Your Holy Spirit is moving among us now.
Help us to grow in new ways,
to experience the new life
you have promised us in this moment.
You are making all things new.**

Help us to embrace
hope and the challenge
to change our hearts and lives for you,
Spirit of Life, Spirit of Seasons.
Amen.

*Hymn – Lord, If Only You Had Been Here

*(Sung to the tune of NCH 332 -
"As We Gather at Your Table")*

Lord, If Only You Had Been Here

Author: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, © 2017

New Hymns: www.carolynshymns.com/

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Tune: BEACH SPRING 8.7.8.7.D.

The Sacred Harp, 1844

Harm. The New Century Hymnal, 1992

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1 "Lord, if only you had been here,
one I love would not have died"
Martha shared her grief with Jesus
in these words she sadly cried.
Jesus said, "I'm resurrection.
Martha, do you know it's true?"
I'm the life for which you're longing"
She said, "I believe in you"

2 "Lord, if only you had been here"
Jesus heard these words again.
Mary, sitting home and waiting,
spoke to Jesus of her pain.
So our Lord was deeply troubled
in this world of death and sin.
Sometimes all we see is struggle;
death and evil seem to win.

3 "Lord, if only you had been here"
we cry out when all goes wrong —
When our grief is overwhelming,
when life's troubles seem so strong.
Then, O Lord, we hear your answer:
"I am resurrection — See!
Not just in some distant future —
I am life! Now live in me!"

4 When we share your resurrection,
when we know that you are life,
We find courage for our living
in this world of pain and strife.

**We your church will work for justice,
welcome strangers, help the poor.
Faced with death, we'll be a witness:
you are with us, Risen Lord.**

Invitation to Share Our Tithes and Offerings

One: God is the source of our supply. Let us give from what we have been supplied.

May this supply meet every demand. An usher will wait upon you now for your tithes, gifts,
and other offerings of faith. 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 Sustainer,
receive this offering that we gladly give.
May it be used
to revive and restore those in need.
Amen.**

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

Author: Charles Wesley, 1740; alt.

Tune: MARTYN 7.7.7.D.

Composer: Simeon B. Marsh, 1834

Choir: Keith Konet, Barbara Rossington, and Bob Bucklew

Accompanist: Betty Funk

***Prayers of the People/Pastoral Prayer**

***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 191 - Before Your Cross, O Jesus**

Before Your Cross, O Jesus

Author: Ferdinand Q. Blanchard, 1929; alt.

Tune: ST. CHRISTOPHER 6.7.6.7.6.6.6.6.

Composer: Frederick C. Maker, 1881

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**1 Before your cross, O Jesus,
our lives are judged today;
the meaning of our eager strife
is tested by your way.**

**Across our restless living
the light streams from your cross,
and by its clear, revealing beams
we measure gain and loss.**

**2 The hopes that lead us onward,
the fears that hold us back,
our will to dare great things for God,
the courage that we lack,
The faith we keep in goodness,
our love, as low or pure,
on all, the judgment of the cross
falls steady, clear, and sure.**

**3 Yet humbly, in our striving,
we rise to face its test.
We crave the power to do your will
as once you did it best.
On us let now the healing
of your great Spirit fall,
and make us brave and full of joy
to answer to your call.**

***Commissioning and Benediction**

One: Now go forth with God's hope!

Many: We have put flesh on our faith and will go to serve others.

One: Now go forth to fill others with Christ's Light!

Many: We will go to call others to new life, wiping away their tears.

One: Now go forth with the steadfast love of the Spirit!
Many: We will go to share that hope for which all people long. Amen.

***Postlude – Betty Funk**

* * * * *

Credits

- (1) The Invocation, Call to worship, Invitation to Share Our Tithes, and Blessing of the Gifts are adapted from *Prophecy to the Bones : Service Prayers for the Fifth 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.
- (2) The Prayer of Response is adapted from *Worship resources for March 26th, 2023*, written by Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell, and posted March 17th, 2023, on her blog, *Rev-o-lution*. <http://rev-o-lution.org/>.
- (3) Lenten Candle Liturgy -Fifth 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/>
- (4) Commission and Benediction are adapted from *Alternate texts Liturgy w/communion from March 26th, 2023-Lent 5-A*, written by the Rev. Thom M. Shuman, and posted March 19, 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.

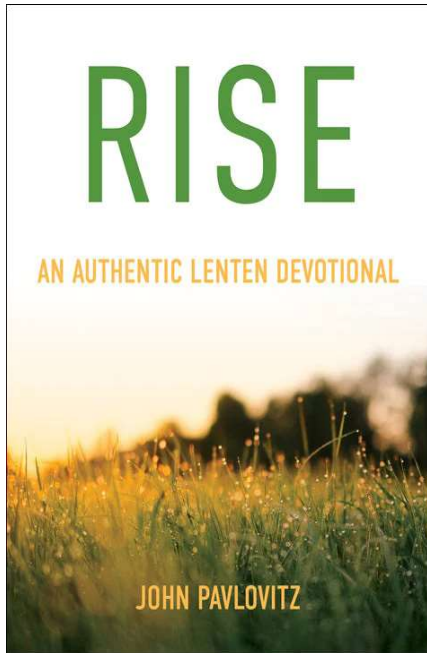
Palm and Passion Sunday, Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter Sunday

Sunday, April 2nd - Palm Sunday (Blessing of the Palms) and the beginning of the Holy Week of the Passion of Christ is a week away.

The Good Friday Tenebrae Service (Service of Shadows) is on Friday, April 7th, 7:00 P.M.

Easter - a festival celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ and our new life in the reign of God is observed on Sunday, April 9th with an 11 A.M. worship service.

An Easter Brunch follows worship on April 9th. You may bring a dish to share (optional) - but join us for a meal of celebration and community!



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

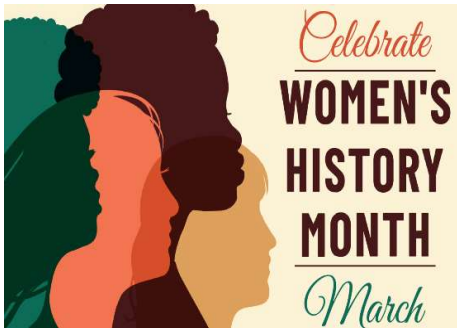
- The Universal Church, its members and mission,
- The nation and all in authority, the leaders of our nation - federal, state, and local.
- For democracy and our democratic institutions and norms in the United States.
- The welfare of the world and the concerns of the local community,
- The interrelationship 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. 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 5,800 951 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 118 mass shooting incidents have occurred in the US as of March 22nd, 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*) has taken a fall, broken several bones-- we remain in prayer for Robert and his family .
 - 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**)
Prayers of comfort for Elaine and family.
 - Linda and James Mortach (*Elaine Lukacs' sister & brother-in-law*) & Linda's daughter
 - Patricia Matheny (*prayers for her Cousin Paul Kevin*) 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.

- **Obituary: KEITH EDWARD MATHENY; 68, Loving son of the late Doris and Ronald Matheny; Dearest father of Sarah Werner (Scott), Alex Matheny, Blair Birinyi, and the late Cassandra Willis; Cherished Papa of Mason and Owen Willis and Riley and Colton Werner. Friends may call at the FERFOLIA FUNERAL HOME 356 W. AURORA RD. (ST RT 82) SAGAMORE HILLS FOR MEMORIAL VISITATION ON MONDAY MARCH 27th FROM 2-4 and 6-8PM. Inurnment Brooklyn Heights Cemetery Mausoleum. Published Ferfolia Funeral Home, 3/21/23.**
- 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.** On Sunday, April 2nd, 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.

Thursday, March 23, 2023

The Sanctity of Water

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



Something deeply spiritual shifted in me last week during the [Akron Weekend for Water](#). I joined my neighbors and friends from all over the region for a prayer walk through my neighborhood along the Little Cuyahoga River. It was a sacred pilgrimage to be reoriented in the truth that water is life.

Water is a pervasive biblical symbol. In the first stanza of Genesis, in God's covenant with Noah and Moses. In the Psalms and woven through Jesus' ministry. Indeed, an elaborate depiction of Creation fully restored is found in the last pages of our Bible: "the [river of the water of life](#)...flowing from the throne of God." That spiritual importance is paralleled in the sacred traditions of Indigenous peoples world wide. In those traditions, water connects the physical and the spiritual: the first medicine, Mother Earth's lifeblood. Their wisdom reminds us that our relationship with Creation begins with water.

The Weekend of Water began at the [Shaw JCC](#) in Akron on Friday with the Elder Wisdom Shabbat. As the event's lead organizer Angela Miller put it, "This was a moment so holy that we wanted to take our shoes off." Ojibwe activist [Sharon Day spoke](#) about the sacred role of [Nibi \(Water\) Walkers](#). She emphasized the importance of passing down this responsibility to future generations. In a powerful moment, she asked the audience to consider the value of protecting our rivers, which Indigenous people believe affects the next seven generations. In an altar-call moment, she implored the audience, "Are our rivers worth protecting? Is the future of our great grandchildren worth protecting? What do you love?" In a [powerful response](#), Rabbi Jeremy Lipton of Beth El Congregation invoked the rabbinic tradition: "Torah is water," He proclaimed, "Water is life!"

When I was invited to the front to announce Saturday's Nibi Walk, Sharon Day's probing question still lingered: "What do you love?" I thought of the resurrected Jesus' interrogation of [Peter](#), "Do you love me?" I thought of [John the Revelator's call](#) to repent and return to our first love. I thought of my seven-year-old daughter Joey, then of our home and the

community that has become like family to us. Then I remembered [Winifred Gallagher's](#) phrase that saving our neighborhood means saving the world. I felt a sobering sense of conviction: "I love my family, my home, and my neighborhood, and now I've been beckoned by the heart of God to repent and embody God's love for the river that runs through it."

In a room filled with Jewish love and profound Indigenous wisdom, I spoke about the freedom of personal conscience that we value in the United Church of Christ. I shared how this freedom comes with the responsibility to question the disastrous and sinful history of colonialism in our traditions and practices. I was on a quest, I explained, to decolonize my faith, my spirituality, and my tradition. Saturday's Water Walk was a personal act of *tshuva*, of repentance, of turning around. It was an act of prayer, opening ourselves up to learn from our Creator through Indigenous wisdom how to love our watershed and be more faithful in our relationship to Creation.

On Saturday, in partnership with the Community Life Collaborative, we hosted a neighborhood gathering of conservation and environmental organizations from the area. Then later in the day, we gathered in the cold at the Stuber Street Bridge to offer prayers and songs to bless the water of the Little Cuyahoga. During the mile-long prayer walk, 23 of us followed a sacred vessel of contaminated-now-blessed river water followed by an eagle's feather.

For a moment, Joey and one of our neighbors carried the vessel while I followed with the feather. When we reached the culmination of our pilgrimage on the Otto Street Bridge, Joey and our neighbor each looked up and pointed out our houses on the hill above us. At that moment, as we returned the water to the river and sang Anishinaabe river songs, what crystalized in me was a profound sense of the sanctity of water. As I learned from Sharon Day, caring for our water is a spiritual responsibility. "It is harder to treat something with disrespect once you've honored and [prayed for it](#)," once we know God has called us to it, once its wellbeing has made a claim on our lives.

From Association General Minister

Rev. Nayiri Karjian

You probably have heard the rumor – I have a Sabbatical coming up June through August, with the exact dates being May 22 – August 22.

I am grateful to you, the Association, for granting me this sabbatical for rest, renewal and rejuvenation.

I am especially grateful to our Council, our Committee on Ministry and others for adjusting their calendars in consideration of mine, so that most of our work is handled before my Sabbatical and you, the Association teams and committees, can enjoy couple of months of summer rest as well, doing only that which is necessary.

Our Association's office will remain open and the ministry will continue. Each ministry area will have gifted volunteers handling issues that come up. The central place to reach them will be our Association's office (call 330-940-2220). Kellie Ramirez, our staff for Information Management and Media, will connect you with the appropriate resources, including persons.

For congregations in transition, do not be anxious. Each of you will be assigned a guide, a coach to walk alongside you. Kellie Ramirez will still be available for questions and resources.

I will share additional details closer to the time. Meanwhile, I am still here for two whole months!