

February 28, 2021

Second Sunday in Lent



St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail
Fairview Heights, IL 62208
Telephone 397-6323
Secretary – Judy Hartman

Rev. Rosemary Captain
Prayers and Liturgy by
Rev. Elsa A. Cook

“BETWEEN ME AND YOU”

“For most of us, it seems like it’s easier to talk about God being in-between here and there than to actually experience that presence. We are more likely to insert our own words, as Peter does – denials, deflections,

distances– when we could be listening for God to speak. Imagine a way that we could feel the presence of our In-between God.” – Rev. Elsa Cook

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 • Psalm 22:23-31
Romans 4:13-25 • Mark 8:31-38

CALL TO WORSHIP:

“Walk before me, and be blameless,” said God to Abram, “And I shall make my covenant between me and you.” (Genesis 17: 1-2, paraphrased) Quite openly, we’ve measured that distance.

Quite openly, we’ve stayed away.

Quite openly, we’ve distanced ourselves.

Quite openly, we didn’t want to be closer.

Quite openly, we are not blameless.

Quite openly, we are here.

**We are here to open ourselves
to our In-between God.**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

We are quite open about our successes.

We feel free to boast when we have done well, but we are not quite so open when things have gone wrong.

We do not praise God anyway.

Instead, we recognize the distance
between me and you
between you and God
between God and me.

Let’s be quite open about it

as we open ourselves
to our Living God in silence. (*prayerful silence*)

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

You can look behind.
You can search ahead.
God will meet you in between.
God promises to always be right there.
If you believe this to be so,
If you believe God is
between here and there
between me and you,
Share that peace with your neighbor.

SCRIPTURE TEXT: Mark 8:31-38

³¹ Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: “The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and then, after three days, rise from the dead.” ³² He said this plainly. But Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him. ³³ Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, then sternly corrected Peter: “Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.”

³⁴ After calling the crowd together with his disciples, Jesus said to them, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. ³⁵ All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them. ³⁶ Why

would people gain the whole world but lose their lives? ³⁷ What will people give in exchange for their lives? ³⁸ Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Human One will be ashamed of that person when he comes in the Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

MESSAGE: “Don’t Nobody Bring Me No Bad News”
as sung by Evilene in the musical “The Wiz”

No one likes bad news, especially Peter and the disciples. Verse 31, “Then Jesus began to teach his disciples. ‘The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and, then after 3 days, rise from the dead.’”

I doubt that Peter and the other disciples heard the good part of that sentence from Jesus; the part about rising from death. It was hard to understand something impossible. Being from the dead was never heard of.

What they **did** hear was the part about suffering, rejection, and being killed and they didn’t like what they heard. And then Jesus continues by telling them, and the crowd of people around them, that “anyone who wants to come after him must take up their cross and follow him”, (verse 34). More bad news!

And then “all who want to save their lives will lose them.” What?!! Even more bad news! This is just too much!! It’s like when the dog dies in the movie. You have to shed a few tears.

Then Jesus says, “but all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them.” **What is the good news Jesus is talking about? Did I miss that?**

Just to be clear, is Jesus saying “What will people give in exchange for their lives?” Now that’s a heavy question, one difficult to answer. Who would you throw under the bus to save your own life? We usually say things opposite to that. “I would gladly die if my children r family or friends could live.”

Maybe that statement is **not** so opposite. What is the value of my life and who decides? That answer is in verse 38. “³⁸ Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Human One will be ashamed of that person when he comes in the Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

Here’s another difficult question? Are we ashamed of being Christians? Are we embarrassed when your friends ask you if you “do church”? After all, its not a “popular” thing to be these days, a Christian.

If we say we are Christians, what does that mean? What are we willing to do? What “cross” are we willing to carry if we chose to follow Jesus? Are we proud to call ourselves Christian? Are we willing to show and tell others that we follow the “Human One” who was crucified, yet conquered death as he was resurrected? That’s the **Good News** of the Gospel. Amen.



PRAYER FOR GRIEVING 500,000 DEAD OF COVID-19 IN THE UNITED STATES – Maren Tirabassi

Holy One, who blesses those that mourn and do not hurry into being comforted, we sit down into the loss of those we know, and those that now we’ll never have a chance to know.

We grieve the stories they will not live,
the songs they will not sing,
the children they will not have,
the hope they will not offer to those around them,
the inventions they will not patent,
the art, poetry, ink, music, shingling a house,
legal argument, good tune-up and tire rotation,
diagnosis, surgical procedure, gentle placement of a ventilator,
dental cleaning, quilt, strawberry picking,
produce counter stocking, life-guard undertow rescue,
lullaby, recipe and vote that will never be made.

We grieve the birthday candles on cakes they will never taste.

We grieve for their parents and their children, their families, their colleagues and their friends.

We grieve memories slipping away
waiting for memorial services.

We grieve that the very sadness ebbs away from weariness or the new whisper of good news.

O God, our masks are wet with tears and our fingers
shake holding balloons at nursing home windows.

Comfort us, we pray. amen

THANK YOU FOR SHARING:

Without talking back,
Without asking questions,
Let us move into God's love.
Let us go in-between with
God to offer our gifts.



Let us give God our thanks in our tithes and offerings.

DEDICATION OF THE OFFERING:

In-between God, bless these gifts with your love
So that we might share them quite openly
With all who need your change. Amen.

BENEDICTION (based on Mark 8:31-38)

Turn and look!

We want to become followers of Christ.

Turn and look!

We will speak quite openly.

Turn and look!

We will speak quite openly.

Turn and look!

We will open ourselves to our In-between God.

Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, hallowed
be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today 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 forever. Amen.

PRAYER LIST: We pray for the health and well-being
of all affected by the pandemic and we especially
pray for: Urban Baum, Rich Schmitt, Donna Isselhard,
Shari Hamilton, Becky Ballard, P.J. Bennett.

**If all goes well, we will restart in-person
worship on March 7 at 10 am.**

**Masks will still be required
plus sitting 6 feet apart. Still no singing**

