

FEBRUARY 18, 2024
FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT



“Here comes God’s Kingdom”
Mark 1:15

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CHURCH OF CHRIST

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***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP: adapted from**
Psalm 25, 1-3

ONE: To you, O GOD, we lift up the spirit of our whole selves.

MANY: O God, we trust unashamedly in you;

seeking that you be not ashamed of us;

ONE: May we begin our Lenten journey together in right relationships;

MANY: Teach us. Show us. Guide us in your paths. Grow us to know your ways more clearly.

ONE: You are the God of our salvation and the Sustainer of good relations.

MANY: For you we wait. May integrity, a clean conscience, and upright living preserve us. Amen.

***INVOCATION:**

As in days of old, Creator God, we come to look for your signs of covenant promises. Like the rainbow days of Noah, we see and know your signs and hear your voice again directing us to places of preparation and transformation in our lives and in our world.

Thank you God, for your covenant signs in this season of Lent. Amen.

***INVITATION TO CONFESSION:**

Sisters and Brothers, in our daily lives we need the gift of the season of Lent. These 40 days can help us restore right relationships with God and with others. This is a fine time to focus, clear our hearts and minds of distractions, and re-orient and restore our whole selves. May God be with us. Let us pray:

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

Creating and Renewing God.

In this Lenten season we each need the opportunity to clear our eyes of the glaze of indifference and apathy. Help us get our minds off distractions, obsessions and self-pity so that we don't feel helpless. Help us to start over. Re-orient head and heart so that we may fill our whole selves with life-affirming activities and thoughts. May I be in right relationship with you and all your creation and join the United Church of Christ in over-coming violence, hunger, and injustice. May I find courage and clarity to assist me in works of justice and compassion which make daily life bearable for many. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

***ASSURANCE OF GOD'S STEADFASTNESS:**

Brothers and Sisters, God hears our prayers and, even in our human frailty, promises to be with us in the wilderness times. Observe, find comfort, and offer with courage to restore and build relationships among God's people. Experience a new and renewed sense of hope. Amen.

FIRST TESTAMENT LESSON: Genesis 9:8-17

⁸ God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ "I am now setting up my covenant with you, with your descendants, ¹⁰ and with every living being with you—with the birds, with the large animals, and with all the animals of the earth, leaving the ark with you."^[a] ¹¹ I

will set up my covenant with you so that never again will all life be cut off by floodwaters. There will never again be a flood to destroy the earth."

¹² God said, "This is the symbol of the covenant that I am drawing up between me and you and every living thing with you, on behalf of every future generation. ¹³ I have placed my bow in the clouds; it will be the symbol of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember the covenant between me and you and every living being among all the creatures. Floodwaters will never again destroy all creatures. ¹⁶ The bow will be in the clouds, and upon seeing it I will remember the enduring covenant between God and every living being of all the earth's creatures." ¹⁷ God said to Noah, "This is the symbol of the covenant that I have set up between me and all creatures on earth."

EPISTLE LESSON: 1 Peter 3:18-22

¹⁸ Christ himself suffered on account of sins, once for all, the righteous one on behalf of the unrighteous. He did this in order to bring you into the presence of God. Christ was put to death as a human, but made alive by the Spirit. ¹⁹ And it was by the Spirit that he went to preach to the spirits in prison. ²⁰ In the past, these spirits were disobedient—when God patiently waited during the time of Noah. Noah built an ark in which a few (that is, eight) lives were rescued through water. ²¹ Baptism is like that. It saves you now—not

because it removes dirt from your body but because it is the mark of a good conscience toward God. Your salvation comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who is at God's right side. Now that he has gone into heaven, he rules over all angels, authorities, and powers.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Mark 1:9-15**

⁹ About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. ¹⁰ While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. ¹¹ And there was a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness."

¹² At once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.

¹⁴ After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, ¹⁵ saying, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!"

These are the ancient words revealed anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: "Now is the Time"

Mark's Gospel is known for being brief and right to the point. In just a few verses, he covers Jesus'

baptism, trial in the wilderness, and the beginning of his ministry. It's as if Mark is in a hurry.

In these few verses, Mark gives us the readers much to think about. We are amazed that a voice, presumably God's, spoke to tell us who this man from Nazareth truly is; God claims him as God's son.

We are bewildered at why the Spirit would force Jesus out into the wilderness for 40 days. Jesus was tempted by Satan but the angels provided for him. And then Jesus begins his ministry by announcing God's good news, saying, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and live, and trust this good news." I hear the urgency in these words. Jesus also sounds like he is in a hurry. I'm out of breath just reading what Jesus said.

Jesus' message to us could be, "Don't miss your chance! Get with the program! You have exactly 40 days in Lent to change your hearts and live. Don't let Satan tempt you to die to sin. Leave the wilderness. You can live and have new life in the love and grace Jesus offers us. The angels will lead you out of harm's way into the arms of Jesus.

"You can have joy as you help others. You can have peace when you change your hearts knowing that Jesus has come to save you from your old, destructive way of living. Stop hurting ourselves and others.

"Stop being tempted by the things of this world and trust Jesus to bring you to a better world; his world. A world where everyone is loved; where no one is left behind unless they choose not to join

Jesus.” What is this new world? It’s the KINGDOM OF GOD.

HURRY before it’s too late! Don’t miss out on this chance of a life time. Rush to Jesus. He has room for you. Don’t keep him waiting! Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: God of Creation, at our end of the rainbow, help us to wisely use the world in which we live. Help all of us to have respect for your creation. As we enjoy it’s beauty, help us to keep it safe so all generations can also enjoy it.

Hear our prayers for our families, our neighbors, our friends who are sick, at this time. Grant them health and strength according to their day that they may rejoice in your healing balm. Grant them patience of spirit during the time of their healing that they may be stronger spiritually as well.

Bless all who are in authority over us that they may use their powers with the acknowledgement that they are accountable to you if not to us for what they do or fail to do.

God our Savior, we thank you for all the blessings you have give us and most of all, for the mercy and forgiveness you give us when we least deserve it. We are amazed at the love you send us throughout our entire lives. Grant us courage to extend that love to others. Jesus loved all. May we do the same.

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.

CALL TO OFFERING:

Psalm 25:10 reminds us, “All the paths of God are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep God’s covenant and decrees.”

Our church’s ministries are extensions of God’s love and faithfulness made possible through the generous giving of our time, energy, and money.

With love let us continue to offer our gifts to God.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

God of all bounty and blessing, receive our lives and our gifts to be bounty and blessings to you, our church, and the world. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: “This is My Father’s World”**

**This is my Father’s world, and to my listening ears,
All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.**

**This is my Father’s world: I rest me in the thought of
rocks and trees, of skies and seas – his hand the
wonders wrought.**

This is our Father’s world: O let us not forget

that though the wrong is great and strong, God is the ruler yet. He trusts us with his world to keep it clean and fair – all earth and trees, all skies and seas, all creatures everywhere.

This is my Father's world: he shines in all that's fair; in the rustling grass I hear his pass, he speaks to me everywhere. This is my Father's world: why should my heart be sad? The Lord is King let heaven ring! God reigns; let earth be glad.

***BENEDICTION:**

Mindful of your mercy, forgiveness, and instruction, O God, we go into the world renewed, refreshed, and full of courage to be your people.
We go in peace to work for justice. Amen.

PRAYER LIST: Becky Ballard, Urban and Mary Lou Baum, Ronald Bopp, Jackie canterbury, Carson Edwards, Josh Mueller, Marilyn Paul, Syd Safriet, David Seneczyn, Amy Smith, Yvonne Weber, Joan Williams, Rosemary Williams.