

MARCH 17, 2024
FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT



**ST. JOHN UNITED
CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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Rev. Rosemary Captain
Pianist – Nancy Eisenhauer
Liturgy – Rev. Dr. Chad Abbott

**REMINDER: Thursday March 28 is Maundy
Thursday and we will commemorate the Last
Supper and Tenebrae beginning at 5:30 pm in
Fellowship Hall (the L room) beginning with a
light supper. Please RSVP.**

I hope to see you there.

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: New life rises!

MANY: That which rises, must first fall and die.

ONE: Single grains merely remain as they are unless they are released to the ground.

MANY: The grains of the earth that fall will multiply and nourish. Come, die to the self and live a life of service to the Living God. And God will raise us up anew. Amen.

***INVOCATION:**

God of grains and grace, we gather today seeking to follow in the way of Jesus. The path he chose for his disciples was one of service and it requires of us that we lay down our desires, our ambitions, and serve you with our whole heart. May our worship this day inspire our dying and rising with you as we seek to love and serve like Jesus. May it be so. Amen.

***INVITATION TO CONFESSION:** The doubts and intentions that mark our response to God summon us now to confess our sin. The promises of God which we have ignored draw us back to consider the covenant God offers. The obedience of Jesus can inspire in us a reverent submission to God's will. Let us seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

***PRAYER OF TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE**

God of love, we confess that our ego can all too often get in the way of our ability to serve you and others with our lives. Our false self is driven by our lack of trust in you to provide for our every need. We rely on our own strength. But, our true self can let go and be formed anew by your love. Forgive us our false ways and transform us and raise us to new life. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Friends, Jesus reminds us that those who serve him will have the assurance of his presence with them. Trust that you are you are forgiven, that new life rises, and that Jesus abides with you. In the name of Christ, Amen.

***GLORIA: Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here.
(repeat two more times.)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Jeremiah 31:31-34 ³¹The time is coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. ³²It won't be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant with me even though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³No,

this is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel after that time, declares the LORD. I will put my Instructions within them and engrave them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴They will no longer need to teach each other to say, "Know the LORD!" because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD; for I will forgive their wrongdoing and never again remember their sins.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 51:1-12 Page 657

EPISTLE LESSON: Hebrews 5:5-10 ⁵In the same way Christ also didn't promote himself to become high priest. Instead, it was the one who said to him, *You are my Son. Today I have become your Father,*

⁶as he also says in another place, *You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.*

⁷During his days on earth, Christ offered prayers and requests with loud cries and tears as his sacrifices to the one who was able to save him from death. He was heard because of his godly devotion. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. ⁹After he had been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for everyone who obeys him. ¹⁰He was appointed by God to be a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

***GOSPEL LESSON: John 12:20-33**
Jesus teaches about his death

²⁰ Some Greeks were among those who had come up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and made a request: “Sir, we want to see Jesus.” ²² Philip told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip told Jesus. ²³ Jesus replied, “The time has come for the Human One to be glorified. ²⁴ I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me. Wherever I am, there my servant will also be. My Father will honor whoever serves me. ²⁷ “Now *I am deeply troubled*. What should I say? ‘Father, save me from this time’? No, for this is the reason I have come to this time. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

²⁹ The crowd standing there heard and said, “It’s thunder.” Others said, “An angel spoke to him.”

³⁰ Jesus replied, “This voice wasn’t for my benefit but for yours. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment of this world. Now this world’s ruler will be thrown out. ³² When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me.” (³³ He said this to show how he was going to die.)

MESSAGE: “The Time Has Come”

Last week we read from the third chapter of the Gospel of John. This week we read from the 12th. Much has happened in between and thus we are near the time of Jesus’ passion.

In verses 20 – 22 we hear of some Greeks who want to meet Jesus. You might think it is odd to have these verses here. After all, Jesus doesn’t really seem to acknowledge that they are there, but he does. When Jesus declares that, if he is “lifted up” from the earth, he will draw all people to himself. In other words, if the Greeks want to see him, want to benefit fully from what he’s been sent into the world to do, his proper response is to carry on and complete the work the father has given him. Only by this strange vocation will the non-Jewish world, come to gain the truest and deepest access to him that God intended. They wouldn’t just see him, as they’d asked; they would come to him, in the sense of being drawn by the powerful love of God, drawn into fellowship and new life.

Next we hear Jesus’ strange talk about seeds falling into the ground and dying. Here we see, more clearly than John has showed us up to now, how it is that God will save the world through the death of Jesus – which has been hinted at in so many ways since the very first chapter of the Gospel of John. Jesus’ death will be like sowing a seed into the ground. It will look like a tragedy as a tiny seed is “hidden.” But in fact, it will be a triumph: the triumph of God’s self-giving love, the

love that looks death itself in the face and defeats it by meeting it voluntarily, on behalf not just of Israel but of the whole world, the world represented by these “Greeks.”

Verse 23 “The time has come for the Human One to be glorified.” We have, at last arrived at the moment the whole gospel has been moving towards. You may recall when Jesus says to his mother at the wedding in Cana, “my time has not come yet.” And there are other times Jesus has made that same comment. However, three years after his ministry began, Jesus realizes his time has come: the time when the preparation has been completed, and the great even, the final moment of love and liberation has to take place. The fact that foreigners are asking to see him, here in Jerusalem, functions as a sign, like the first leaf of spring, that shows where we are in God’s planned timetable. Now there will be no holding back. Jesus will go forward to meet the moment, with symbolic actions, special teachings, and above all prayer.

As he does so, we are aware that he isn’t just talking about himself. Although Jesus does what he must do in a unique way, standing alone against the power of sin and death so that the rest of us won’t have to, he is also pioneering a route along which his “servants”, his “followers”, must go after him. Perhaps this, too, is part of his challenge both to his followers and to the “Greeks”. If they really want to “see” him, to get to know him and understand what he’s about for

themselves, they must get ready to be “planted” in the same way, to risk all in his service. (REPEAT)
THAT IS TRUE FOR US, ALSO. AMEN.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Creator and Judge of the world, hear our prayers for the world that stands under judgment for the fracture of covenants of law and grace that you have made with human society. Drive out the evil one who draws together forces of hatred and genocide and cleanse us and our society from the prejudices that fail to measure others as we measure ourselves. Replace the hard heart and the narrow construction of what is righteous, with the reverent knowledge of you and your justice with mercy that will bring heaven to earth and earth to heaven.

Make your church an example of love at work with reverence alike for you and the humanity that you have created male and female in your image. May your church be as young as the newest baptized member and as old as the most aged worshiper. May our life together be open to all who need our company in your presence, whatever their age or personality. Grant to all who need it healing of body, mind, and spirit through the medical professions and healthcare institutions that you have made possible. We pray for all those on our prayer list that they may feel your caring and strength.

God of yesterday, today, and forever, you have given us hope for what we do not yet see, so grant us patience to wait. We are grateful for all the blessings you have given us as we pray to do your will in the name of your son, Jesus. . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER: 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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: "Shepherd Lead" NCH 774
Shepherd, lead, lead me in your righteousness,
Make your way plain before my face.
For it is you, God, you, God only,
who makes me to lie down in safety.

***INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:**

As yeast rises to create bread, so do the rising of our gifts multiply the love of God in the life of the world. Give of your treasure, whatever it may be, however large or small. And trust God will use it for the building of the kingdom of God that is emerging among us.

***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.

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

O God who causes our lives to rise, we lay down to you the abundance you have given us and allow it to fall so that you may multiply it to give life to your world. May it be so. Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

God's people, go out and nurture this world so that new life will rise. Let go of that which binds you to distraction and isolation. And look towards your days with the hope of a single grain multiplying into the abundance of God's joy and love. Amen.

PRAYER LIST: Becky Ballard, Ronald Bopp, Jackie Canterbury, Carson Edwards, Amy Iverson, Josh Mueller, Marily Paul, Syd Safriet, David Seneczyn, Amy Smith, Yvonne Weber, Joan Williams, Rosemary Williams.