

MARCH 1, 2026 LENT 2A
JOHN 3:1-17 "OF WATER AND SPIRIT"



St. John United Church of Christ

10207 Lincoln Trail

Fairview Heights, IL

Telephone 618-397-6323

e-mail– stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com

Website: www.stjohnfairview.org

Rev. Rosemary Captain

Organist – Sharon Banjavcic

Liturgy – Rev. Dr. Chad Abbott

Ushers -

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

From "Preaching Through the Christian Year" Fred Craddock

The church turns to consider human faith and divine faithfulness, God's promises and human responses.

Genesis 12:1-4a the account of God's call and promise to the patriarch and Abraham's faithful response.

Psalm 121: 1-8 celebrates the faithfulness of God, who does not sleep but is the helper who watches over the faithful.

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 Paul lifts up Abraham as one whose faith "was reckoned . . . as righteousness" and stresses that the promise came through grace and not the law.

John 3:1-17 the account of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, calls for rebirth and emphasizes God's love in sending God's only Son.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

THE BELL IS RUNG:

PRELUDE: "It Is Well with My Soul" Jerry Ray

PENNIES FOR MISSION:

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: From the safety and comfort of home, God called Abraham to go from all he knew to embrace a future yet to be revealed.

All: “Go from,” God says, and our hesitant hearts place one foot in front of the other to trust God with the unknown.

ONE: By night, Nicodemus came seeking greater insight into the teachings of God for the journey set before him. Jesus called him out of the shadows and towards a life born anew.

All: “Go towards” God says, and a new life awaits us. We reach towards a God who has not come to condemn the world but to offer a salve that can heal all wounds.

ONE: We fear the unknown and that which we lack in understanding. “How can this be?” we proclaim with Nicodemus. And yet, God’s call is one that urges us to go with our whole self into that unknowing, trusting that God will provide a way.

All: Love calls us forth into lives of transformation, born anew into new paths of faith. Though we do not know where we are going, God has promised to never leave us alone. Let us worship the One who will show us the way.

***INVOCATION:**

God of calls and courage, you draw us towards your loving embrace even as we face what seems like impossibility. We experience heartache and grief, injustice and cruelty, fear and anxiety as daily teachers

on this path of faith. As you call us to go into an uncertain and unknown future, O God, grant us the courage needed to let go of all that we have known so that we can take hold of the new life you are bringing about even now. Though we may not know where we are going, God, your way is revealed moment by moment, step by step, and breath by breath. In the name of the One who so loves the world we pray. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 204 “Take Up Your Cross”**

***SEEKING TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

O God, we all too often wish to go our own way, maintain control, and rely on our own strength rather than trust that you will provide. Forgive us in our unwillingness to live by faith or to not trust you with providing all that we need for the journey.

All: May God’s mercy surround our weaknesses with grace for restoring us to hope everlasting.

***WORDS OF GRACE/ASSURANCE OF GOD’S LOVE:**

Friends, the call of God does not leave us isolated and condemned on a road of uncertainty, fear, and mistakes made. God’s unending love and compassion is for all whose burdens are heavy and whose weary journey brings tears. May the tender arms of God carry you forth in strength.

All: God has not come to condemn, but to offer a healing salve for our wounds. We welcome God's healing and salvation through Jesus 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 LESSONS:

**Old Testament: Genesis 12:1-4a From "The Message"
Abram and Sarai**

12 God told Abram: "Leave your country, your family, and your father's home for a land that I will show you.

²⁻³ I'll make you a great nation and bless you.

I'll make you famous; you'll be a blessing.

I'll bless those who bless you; those who curse you I'll curse.

All the families of the Earth

will be blessed through you." ⁴⁻⁶ So Abram left just as God said, and Lot left with him.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 121:1-8 Page 704

Epistle: Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

Abraham's faith was credited as righteousness

4 So what are we going to say? Are we going to find that Abraham is our ancestor on the basis of genealogy? ² Because if Abraham was made righteous because of his actions, he would have had a reason to brag, but not in front of God. ³ What does the scripture say? *Abraham had faith in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.* ^[a] ⁴ Workers' salaries aren't credited to them on the basis of an employer's grace but rather on the basis of what they deserve. ⁵ But faith is credited as righteousness to those who don't work, because they have faith in God who makes the ungodly righteous.

Abraham's promise is received through faith

¹³ The promise to Abraham and to his descendants, that he would inherit the world, didn't come through the Law but through the righteousness that comes from faith. ¹⁴ If they inherit because of the Law, then faith has no effect and the promise has been canceled. ¹⁵ The Law brings about wrath. But when there isn't any law, there isn't any violation of the law. ¹⁶ That's why the inheritance comes through faith, so that it will be on the basis of God's grace. In that way, the promise is secure for all of Abraham's descendants, not just for those who are related by Law but also for those who are related by the faith of Abraham, who is the father of all of us. ¹⁷ As it is written: *I have appointed you to be the father of many nations.* ^[a] So Abraham is our father in the eyes of

God in whom he had faith, the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that don't exist into existence.

***Gospel: John 3:1-17**

Jesus and Nicodemus

3 There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. ² He came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could do these miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him."

³ Jesus answered, "I assure you, unless someone is born anew,^[a] it's not possible to see God's kingdom."

⁴ Nicodemus asked, "How is it possible for an adult to be born? It's impossible to enter the mother's womb for a second time and be born, isn't it?"

⁵ Jesus answered, "I assure you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, it's not possible to enter God's kingdom. ⁶ Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Don't be surprised that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' ⁸ God's Spirit^[b] blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. It's the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

⁹ Nicodemus said, "How are these things possible?"

¹⁰ "Jesus answered, "You are a teacher of Israel and you don't know these things? ¹¹ I assure you that we speak

about what we know and testify about what we have seen, but you don't receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Human One.^[c] ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so must the Human One^[d] be lifted up ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. ¹⁶ God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life. ¹⁷ God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Footnotes

- a. [John 3:3](#) Or *from above*
- b. [John 3:8](#) Or *wind*
- c. [John 3:13](#) Or *Son of Man*
- d. [John 3:14](#) Or *Son of Man*

MESSAGE: "The Night Time Visitor"

In a small and suggestive detail, the author of the Gospel of John tells us that Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. This description invites us to imagine his approach to the teacher as a secret and hidden. Why? Did Nicodemus want to avoid the crowds of people who surround Jesus

in the daytime? Or did he want to avoid his colleagues from thinking he was visiting “the enemy”.

He was very curious about Jesus. He praised him for healing all those who were ill. I think he truly saw a different way to be righteous Jew. It wasn't all about following all the rules. There was something missing from what Nicodemus was preaching and teaching the other Pharisees. Jesus was bringing something else to the people. And now Jesus was trying to explain to Nicodemus that a change of mind was necessary to enter the kingdom of God.

I imagine this was a shock to Nicodemus who thought he already had a golden ticket to the throne of God. As the conversation between these two teachers continued, Nicodemus' problem seems to be not so much that he does not want to see clearly as that he wants to continue to trust the clarity of his own vision.

Let's stop right there and think about this. Has there ever been a time when your long-held beliefs have been challenged, just as Nicodemus' is experiencing in this scripture text? Hearing a different way or new thought about God and Jesus and salvation and the whole religious thing, can be very frightening? You thought you knew everything about being a Christian and how to please God. What if you had it all wrong?

Perhaps when we hear something different, we try to logic our way into the revelation that we seek. We try to

fit something different into the vision we already have. Jesus tells Nicodemus that his familiar life in which he perceives, teaches, and judges truth is not the one in which he will be able to see the kingdom of God. He needs a life from above, one that requires faith. The ultimate invitation to which Nicodemus must respond is an invitation into trust.

Jesus calls for trust from a person who visits him in darkness. Jesus calls for trust from a person who wants to apply logic of the flesh to life born of the Spirit. Jesus calls for trust, because trusting him is ultimately at the center of the life that Jesus came to proclaim. In the dark, we have to trust what Nicodemus and WE have to trust what we cannot see, and that is where new life begins.

As an aside, the season of Lent is a good time to take stock of our beliefs. Is there something we could see differently? Perhaps it may be how we judge others. We are very good at judging how people dress, how they live, how they raise their children, what kind of car they drive, and on and on and on. Now may be the perfect time to ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to our faults and walk into the daylight with Jesus. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC: “God So Loved the World” Video

PASTORAL PRAYER:

You are great, O God; for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you. Because of your promises, and according to your own heart, you have brought us salvation in Jesus Christ and called us as new people to share the good news with all the world.

Pour your Spirit upon all of us as your children and give blessings to your offspring. Call your people to more constant prayer, more fervent faith, and such confidence in you that the coming of your rule may not be delayed by half-heartedness.

Bless this land we love despite its faults. Sustain our government leaders in administering just laws and governing us with wisdom and integrity.

Compassionate Christ, comfort your children who are faint from the struggle with the ailments and adversities of our mortal life; speak tenderly to those who mourn. We especially pray for all those on our prayer list, especially all those who have had procedures and surgeries this week.

God of the ages, source of all life, we thank you for sending your true and faithful servants around the world to help others in need after disasters, and all those victims of violence in our cities and around the world.

To you, O God, we give all glory and praise as we pray together the prayer your Son taught us. . .

OUR LORD'S PRAYER:

**PRAYER RESPONSE: Three-fold Amen
Amen, Amen, A – men.**

***INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:**

The season of Lent invites us to consider what it means for us to live life sacrificially, to lean into Jesus' call to costly discipleship. How might God be calling you to a new way of sharing your resources to build care and equity in our communities and world? Let us offer whatever gifts we have to love the world like God did in giving God's Son.

OFFERTORY: "Lift High the Cross" Sydney Hutchinson

***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 AND DEDICATION:**

O God who calls us to go out into the world with generosity, may these gifts call us from our lives of comfort and towards a faith journey that embraces your love, justice, and compassion for a world in need of your healing. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

***HOLY COMMUNION:**

May the God of great adventures be with you!

And also with you!

It is God who is able to keep our hearts filled with hope and peace.

We will offer our hearts to the One who is our Keeper.

Trust in the promises whose fulfillment we cannot see.

We lift our songs to the One who is always with us.

You went into the shadows of nothingness, bearing your Light of creation, Keeper of all, so that life might burst forth where there was none: white sands at the edge of blue green seas, shale formed under the crust of the earth, warm mornings and frigid nights to mark the seasons.

You blessed your children with creation's gifts so we might prove to be a blessing to others, but we watched the comings and goings of sin and death, allowing ourselves to be blown about by them.

Prophets responded to your call to them, daring to bring us those words we did not want to hear, calling us back to a way of life we had abandoned, but we knew that we preferred life in the absence of your presence.

For this reason, you sent Jesus into the world, so that we, along with all creation, might be saved. With those who toss and turn in the night,

with those who have responded to your call, we lift our thanksgivings to you:

Holy, holy, holy are you, who neither slumbers nor sleeps. All creation blesses your glorious name.

Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed is the One who comes to answer our questions.

Hosanna in the highest!

Holy One, you are the God of blessings, and Jesus Christ is your Faithful One. The One who could truly boast, he humbled himself to become like us. The One who was truly righteous, he emptied himself to fill us with grace. The One who had spoken life into existence, he embraced death on the cross, so that we might be justified through your grace and wonder.

As we continue on the journey to Jerusalem, as we seek to leave our comfortable lives to follow, we would talk about that mystery we call faith:

Christ died, faithful to the end;

Christ was raised, so all creation might be saved;

Christ will come, to bring us to that home he will show us.

What then are we to say, Keeper of our lives? It is your Spirit poured out upon us and upon the gifts of the Table which brings us new life.

It is the brokenness of the bread which gives us life, that life poured out for those who have no hope, for those who wander in the shadows.

It is the grace of the cup which overflows with your gifts, so we might go to be a blessing to all forsaken by the world.

And when our journey has ended and we find ourselves in that land which you have prepared for us, we will sing our glad songs to you forever, Amen.

SHARING THE ELEMENTS

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:** Eternal God, we thank you for your presence in the simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. By the power of your Holy Spirit, unite us with all whom Christ welcomes, that we may be the servant church of the servant Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 473 Blessed Assurance**

***BENEDICTION:**

Friends, go forth with the courage of God to guide you into those places of restlessness and uncertainty.

For we are called to go...

From our places of comfort.

From our certainties and complacency.

From our old life and into the new.

May the call of God not just call us from but toward a love so compelling that we are willing to trust our whole self into the embrace of the Creator, into the abiding love of Christ, and into the sacred dance of the Holy Spirit.

We go forth in the peace of Christ. Amen!

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE: 571**

“O God of Love, O God of Peace” First verse only

O God of love, O God of peace,

Make wars throughout the world to cease.

The wrath of human wrong restrain;

Give peace, O God, give peace again!

THE BELL IS RUNG:

POSTLUDE: “With Sounding Brass” Chester Nordman

PRAYER LIST: Terry Thorpe, Grandson Landon, Lynne Knecht, Becky Ballard, Mary Lou and Urban Baum, Ronald Bopp, Geralyn Gammon, Sue Ganschinetz, Russ Hartmann, Marilyn Paul, Pam and Syd Safriet, Yvonne Weber, Nikki Chatman.