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Meditation

“The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.”

~Eleanor Roosevelt

“Don’t try to understand Cuba, just experience it.”

~Javier Huerta

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

Rev. Cheri Dennis, Interim Pastor

Jon Weddell, M.Div, MSW, Minister of Music

Dawn Simmons, BSBF, Executive Assistant

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HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

March 5, 2023 10:55 am

Prelude "Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" arr. M. Sedio

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome and Announcements Cheri Dennis

One: May the peace of Christ be with you.

Many: And also with you.

Introit “Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley” LONESOME VALLEY

Jesus walked this lonesome valley.

He had to walk it by himself.

Oh, nobody else could walk it for him.

He had to walk it by himself.

* Call to Worship

Ed Vickery

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

Many: “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.

Many: “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. We ask with Nicodemus “How can this be?” 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.

Many: 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.

** Please take a comfortable posture that supports your worshiping, reading, and singing.*

* Invocation (*unison*) Ed Vickery
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.

* Hymn 211 “Lord Jesus, Who Through Forty Days” ST. FLAVIAN
Lord Jesus, who through forty days for us did fast and pray,
Teach us with you to mourn our sins, and close by you to stay.

As you with Satan did contend, and did the victory win,
O give us strength to persevere, in you to conquer sin.

And through these days of penitence, and through this Passiontide,
Yes, evermore, in life and death, O Christ, with us abide.

Abide with us, till when this life of suffering shall past,
An Easter of unending joy we may attain at last.

Prayer for Transformation and New Life (*unison*) Cheri Dennis
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. May God’s mercy surround our weaknesses with grace for restoring us to hope everlasting. Amen.

Song “God, Be Merciful to Me” REDHEAD 76
God be merciful to me; on your grace I rest my plea.
My transgressions I confess; grief and guilt my soul oppress.
Wash me, make me pure within; cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin.

Words of Grace Cheri Dennis
One: 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.

Song **“Nothing Can Trouble”** **NADA TE TURBE**

Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.
Those who seek God shall never go wanting.
Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.
God alone fills us.

Stories for All People Laura Hankins

Solo “God Weeps” **DELGADO**
 Eric Miner, Vocalist

God weeps at love withheld, at strength misused,
At children's innocence abused,
And till we change the way we love, God weeps.

Pastoral Prayer

Hebrew Scripture **Genesis 12:1-4a** **Ed Vickery**
Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

One: May we hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church;
Many: Open our ears, our hearts, our minds.

* Gospel Lesson

John 3:1-17 (18-21)

Cheri Dennis

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?’

‘Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.’

One: For the word of God in scripture, for the word of God among us, for the word of God within us.

Many: Thanks be to God.

Prayer of Thanksgiving & Dedication

Ed Vickery

One: Gracious and Giving God, you have called us to give of our resources so that others may experience the new life you are inviting us into. Let us together now dedicate those offerings Holy Covenant has received to the work of bringing in God's beloved kindom.

Many: 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.

* Doxology

GIVE THANKS

Give thanks with a grateful heart; give thanks to the Holy One;
Give thanks because God's given Jesus Christ, God's Son. (2x)
And now let the weak say, "I am strong,"
Let the poor say, "I am rich
Because of what the Lord has done for us." (2x)
Give thanks.

SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

Invitation

Cheri Dennis

One: God is with you!

Many: And God is with us all.

One: Open wide your hearts.

Many: We open them completely to the Spirit of God.

One: May God's love nurture your wandering spirits each day.

Many: May God's light sustain our souls each night.

* Prayer of Communion

This is a season of wilderness-

The season we grasp to understand the Divine just a little more.

This is the time for us to reach inwards to find the self that God sees.

This is the chance for us to gaze outwards, caring for the Christ in our midst.

The Lenten roads are long

Yet full of gifts.

The Lenten paths often seem chilly

Yet warm with the winds of the Spirit.

The Spirit of God is the light that leads us in the hushed nights.

The Christ is our companion on the journey in the intense sunlight of day.
We remember his time in the wilderness-
The struggles. The hunger. The peace.

And as we seek the Divine in our midst,
On this journey, we crave the bread of life.
On our desert roads, we thirst for the fruit of the vine, the cup of blessings.

Through Jesus the Christ's story, we remember the night before his arrest,
The night of serenity, solemnity, and love.
Jesus took in his hands bread from the table.
He broke it and blessed it.
Eat in remembrance of me, he said.

And after supper,
As the night grew long,
Jesus took a cup, and filled it with the fruit of the vine.
As he blessed it, he spoke aloud to them
Take and drink and always remember me.

May the Spirit who traveled with Christ in the wilderness
And fills us with the hope of God
Surround these elements.
May the Spirit speak to us in this season of wilderness
Becoming our strength on this journey
And filling our lives with love. Amen.

Sharing of the Gifts

Prayer of Thanksgiving after Communion (*unison*)

Divine Light of Our Journey-

**In a spirit of gratitude, we give thanks for this time at your Holy Meal.
This time at the Table filled us with strength,
Knowing that as we continue on this Lenten journey,
We will find your peace surrounding us. Amen.**

* Hymn 18

"Guide Me, O My Great Redeemer"

Cwm RHONDDA

**Guide Me, O my great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but you are mighty; hold me with your powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more,
Feed me till I want no more.**

Open now the crystal fountain, where the healing waters flow.
Let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through.
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer, ever be my strength and shield,
Ever be my strength and shield.

When I reach the River Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death and hell's destruction, land me safe on heaven's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises, I will ever sing to you,
I will ever sing to you.

* Benediction

Cheri Dennis

* Benediction Response 497 "Guide My Feet"

Guide my feet while I run this race, (3x)
For I don't want to run this race in vain.

Postlude

"The Old Rugged Cross"

arr. D. Wood

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*Portions of this service adapted from Called to Go: Service Prayers for the
Second Sunday in Lent written by Rev. Dr. Chad Abbott, Conference Minister
for the Indiana Kentucky Conference of the United Church of Christ.
Communion Liturgy written by Rev. Michelle L. Torigian,
St. Paul UCC, Belleville, IL.*

*Candid photographs and/or video recording share our work and witness
and invite others into the fellowship of our congregation. Some pictures/video
may be published in church print publications, on our website or on our
official social media sites. If you do not wish to have your image published,
please contact the church office by phone or email.*

WE PROVIDE OUR EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME WITH HELP FROM:

Keith Dennis, Brian Hankins,
JoAnn Jellison, Carl Johnson, Dawn Schmitz, Shakti Subramanian

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT

IN-PERSON ACTIVITIES UPDATE JANUARY 27

Currently we have been hosting all in-person activities with masking being strongly encouraged. The current Covid community risk for Mecklenburg County has decreased to low. Consistory has made the decision that we will continue in-person worship and activities with masking being optional. We will continue to monitor the situation and make changes as appropriate.

Blessings, Jeff Edwards-Knight, Consistory President

CRAFTER'S CIRCLE has resumed! We'll meet on Mondays at 1:30pm in the Gathering Room. All are welcomed.

FELLOWSHIP TIME, FIRST SUNDAYS EACH MONTH

Join us in the gathering room at 9:30 next Sunday, April 2nd for a muffin fellowship. Coffee & muffins will be provided. Contact Laura Hankins with any questions, laura@hankins-clt.us.

USHERS, GREETERS, LITURGIST AND COMMUNION SERVERS

We encourage sign ups of **greeters and ushers**, ready to welcome and help members and guests starting at 10:30 every Sunday; a **liturgist** to serve with Pastor Cheri; and **communion servers (elders, deacons and ordained clergy) and clean up**. Everyone is welcome in these roles! If you need an explanation of the mechanics of this, please indicate that in the comments on the sign-up and we will make sure you are comfortable on your first Sunday. Ushers and Greeters, please contact the church office with questions. Communion Servers, please contact Laura Hankins with questions, laura@hankins-clt.us. Please sign up on the SignUpGenius link:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44ACAD23A2FE3-ushers>

SOJOURNERS CLASS

We will be reading *The Other Side of the Wall* by Munther Isaac, a native Palestinian Lutheran pastor living and pastoring in conflict. The book is available from Amazon.com in Kindle, Audiobook, and paperback. Join us (in-person or via Zoom) on Sunday mornings at 9:45 for our Sojourners Class. For more information, contact Pastor Cheri (cherid@holycovenantucc.org, 704-519-6016)

Stay connected! Check out all the current happenings in the weekly newsletter via Constant Contact. Not seeing it in your inbox? Sign-up here:
<https://holycovenantucc.org/newsletters/>

PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER
Members

Andrew & Britany Bomely, Linda Carver, Gary & Linda Clark, Cindy Coble, Kevin Decker, Linn Finger & Vickie Griffeth, Tom & Kathy Habel, Sharon Landis, Irene Mikkelson, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Isabelle Reddy Powell, Jerry & Marion Rhyne, Cynthia & Tommy Simpson, Ed & Beth Sharp, Anita Taylor

Friends & Family Members

Tom Chevrier & Rob Lux (Kathleen Wagner), Laura Christian (Beth Sharp), David & Cecelia Griffin (JP Griffin), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Ann Johnson (Joy Johnson), Janey Pernice (Dawn Simmons), Marie Raley (Jean Raley-Dennis), Barbara Rutelonis (Eric Miner), Matthew Sharp, Michelle Sharp (Beth & Ed Sharp), Christopher Sizemore (Tina Ettesen), Eulene Shepherd (Robert Shepherd), Kathryn Vickery (Ed Vickery), Joyce Ward (Ed Vickery), John Zastrow (Barb Schneller)

If you wish to add someone to the list, please send a note to
prayers@holycovenantucc.org.