



Unsplash Photo by Emmanuel Phaeton

“The yoke is hard because the teachings of Jesus are radical: enemy love, unconditional forgiveness, extreme generosity.

**The yoke is easy because it is accessible to all –
the studied and the ignorant,
the rich and the poor, the religious and the nonreligious.**

Whether we like it or not, love is available to all people everywhere to be interpreted differently, applied differently, screwed up differently, and manifested differently.”

– Rachel Held Evans

HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

March 10, 2024, 10:55 am

** Your whole self is welcomed here. Please feel free to take care of your body during worship in ways that work for you.*

Prelude “I Surrender All/Depth of Mercy” arr. J. Vogt

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome and Announcements Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

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 the Heart Jon Heaslet

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

One: God’s love is for all of creation.

Many: **Humanity, animals, the earth, all is God’s beloved.**

One: God has not come into the world through Jesus to condemn us,

Many: **But come to live as God’s love in the flesh among us.**

One: We live as this love and what a mighty force in the world it is.

Many: **It’s the power which overcomes injustice and conquers hate.**

One: Now is the time to unload our hearts, share our lives, and to hear this story again.

Many: **The story of God’s love and let our worship begin!**

Invocation Jon Heaslet

Holy Spirit, whose vastness flows through all of creation, we pause for inspiration. We see the harshness of people, the judgment of certain individuals, yet we cling to the ways in which You moved through the life of Christ in love to liberate, heal, restore, and forgive, not just some, but all of the world. As we worship, may we acknowledge Your presence with us, as You were with him. Amen.

* Hymn

“Lead Me, Guide Me”

arr. R. Smallwood

Refrain:

Lead me, guide me, along the way, for if you lead me, I cannot stray.
Lord, let me walk each day with you. Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

I am weak and I need your strength and power
To help me over my weakest hour.
Help me through the darkness your face to see.
Lead me, O Lord, lead me. (R)

Daily Affirmation

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Yourself: “I am an extension of God’s love in the world.”

Neighbor: “You are an extension of God’s love in the world.”

World: “We are an extension God’s love in the world.”

Prayer of Transformation & New Life

Jon Heaslet

Life-giving God, we confess there are moments when we condemn people or see your love as not being for others, but just a few. Move us to remember your love is bigger than our limited lenses, and broader than we could ever imagine. Help us to see the world as you do, and to hold a vision of a love that embodies all people. For, you were enfleshed in the person of Jesus not to condemn but to show love for the world. 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.

Gracious God, my heart renew, make my spirit right and true.
Do not cast me from your sight nor remove your Spirit’s light.
Your salvation’s joy restore, make me steadfast evermore.

Words of Grace

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

There are blessings to be found in our shortcomings. For in every instance, we fail to live up to the standard Christ sets, we are given the opportunity to once again live and do as Christ would. The grace and mercy given to us is we are a people of resurrection. People, capable of rising from our faults, and reincarnating ourselves into the unabashed, bold, and radical love of God’s image in the here and now. Amen.

* Gospel Lesson John 3:16-21 (The Inclusive NT) Pam Shimberg
Our Gospel Lesson for today comes from John 3:16-21, where Jesus continues his conversation with Nicodemus about being born again, eternal life, and God's love...

Yes, God so loved the world as to give the Only Begotten One, that whoever believes may not die, but have eternal life. God sent the Only Begotten into the world not to condemn the world, but that through the Only Begotten the world might be saved. Whoever believes in the Only Begotten avoids judgment, but whoever doesn't believe is judged already for not believing in the name of the Only Begotten of God. On these grounds is sentence pronounced: that though the light came into the world, people showed they preferred darkness to the light because their deeds were evil. Indeed, people who do wrong hate the light and avoid it, for fear their actions will be exposed; but people who live by the truth come out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what they do is 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.

The Good News “God’s Love Story for the World”
Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Invitation to Generosity Jon Heaslet
Now is the time for our ministry of giving and sharing...

As you prepare your gift, remember this Sunday is the United Church of Christ's One Great Hour of Sharing. One Great Hour of Sharing is one of five special mission offerings collected by the United Church of Christ each year. This Lenten Offering supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of our greater denomination within its Wider Church Ministries efforts. A donation of any amount helps us remain designated as a 5 for 5 Church. In the memo line of your check or online offering please designate: "OGHS".

Today we rejoice in a God who comes to redeem and liberate the world through love. Our gratitude for this act is offered through the generosity of our energy, our spiritual gifts, and our treasure. We are invited as God's beloved children to express our rejoicing this day through the giving of our gifts in love. May it be so.

* 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.

Prayer of Dedication (*unison*)

Jon Heaslet

Please join me in a unison prayer of dedication for the gifts we have received...
Thank you, God, for loving us to the ends of the earth and back. Your willingness to say yes to coming in the flesh of Jesus to be in this world through love and rise above the powers of oppression has led us to give of ourselves generously this day. Take these gifts and multiply them across this world so that your love is known graciously and extravagantly. Amen.

* Hymn 223

"What Wondrous Love Is This"

WONDROUS LOVE

What wondrous love is this, O my soul! O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this! That Christ should come in bliss
To bear the heavy cross for my soul, for my soul,
To bear the heavy cross for my soul!

Poem

“Unending Love”
Barbara Schneller

by Rabindranath Tagore

I seem to have loved you in numberless forms, numberless times...
In life after life, in age after age, forever.
My spellbound heart has made and remade the necklace of songs,
That you take as a gift, wear round your neck in your many forms,
In life after life, in age after age, forever.

Whenever I hear old chronicles of love, its age-old pain,
Its ancient tale of being apart or together.
As I stare on and on into the past, in the end you emerge,
Clad in the light of a pole-star piercing the darkness of time:
You become an image of what is remembered forever.

You and I have floated here on the stream that brings from the fount.
At the heart of time, love of one for another.
We have played alongside millions of lovers, shared in the same
Shy sweetness of meeting, the same distressful tears of farewell-
Old love but in shapes that renew and renew forever.

Today it is heaped at your feet, it has found its end in you
The love of all [our] days both past and forever:
Universal joy, universal sorrow, universal life.
The memories of all loves merging with this one love of ours -
And the songs of every poet past and forever.

* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

* Benediction Response

WORLD PEACE PRAYER

**Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth,
From despair to hope, from fear to trust.
Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace;
Let peace fill our hearts, let peace fill our world,
Let peace fill our universe.**

Postlude

“What Wondrous Love Is This”
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arr. M. Dorian

*Parts of the liturgy for today's service were written and adapted by UCC
Worship Ways and Rev. Christopher Czarnecki.*

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:

D Evans, Brian Hankins, Jo Ann Jellison, Shakti Subramanian,
We welcome all in our congregation to participate! Do you like talking to interesting people and being helpful? **Greeters and ushers, liturgists and readers are needed** starting at 10:30 every Sunday. Please sign up in the Gathering Room or on the SignUpGenius link:



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

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT

Stay connected! There are many new events in our future! 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/>

Confronting Whiteness discussion/debrief for Cohorts 1 and 2 Today

Please join us following worship from 12:30-2pm in the Conference Room. We will continue our conversation about your experience with this process and this material.

Sojourners Class, Sundays at 9:45am

The Sojourners continue its review of *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for our Own* by Eddie S. Gaude, Jr. We hope that you will join us, and preparation is not essential. We gather Sundays at 9:45am in the Conference Room, or via Zoom

Crafter's circle meets Mondays at 1:30pm

Bring a craft, learn a craft. Join us in the Gathering Room. All are welcome!

2024 UCC Creation Care Art Contest

Calling all kids! Join the UCC Vote for Climate Hope Art Contest. Children and Youth under age 18 are invited to draw, paint, or color about the world and the environment in which they want to live. The winners will have their art printed on thousands of voter pledge cards to be collected by UCC members and sent to Congress. See JoAnn

Jellison for a worksheet, due in by April 16th. We'd love to have your artistic interpretation!

<https://www.ucc.org/vote-for-climate-hope-campaign/>

Charlotte's 2024 AIDS Walk, May 18

Holy Covenant will once again participate with a team of donors/walkers at Truist Field uptown. AIDS WALK Charlotte 2024 continues to be the largest HIV fundraising event in the Carolinas and for \$35 or more, you will receive a 2024 T-Shirt to wear with pride that you are helping others in need. You may donate as a walker for the shirt or just as a donor to support this important need. Last year our church family raised \$545 in support of this important ministry and were one of only five churches to participate. We hope you can join us this year. Questions? Please let Debbie Davis know at Debbiekdavisnc@gmail.com.

[AIDS WALK Charlotte 2024 - Holy Covenant United Church of Christ \(onecause.com\)](https://onecause.com)

PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER

Members

Mel Andersen, Linda Carver, Kevin Decker, Kevin & Jeff Edwards-Knight, Linn Finger, Tom & Kathy Habel, Jim Humphrey, Sharon Landis, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Alice Phelan & Sally Young, Isabelle Reedy Powell, Jerry Rhyne, Ed & Beth Sharp, Cynthia & Tommy Simpson, Shakti Subramanian, Anita Taylor

Friends & Family Members

The family and friends of Steve Campbell (Ed Vickery)
Melissa Brown, Craig Chrismon (Melissa Noll), Deby Gumpfer (Dawn Simmons), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Darin Jellison (Jo Ann Jellison), Judah L. Jones & Bill Englebreth, Matty & Simone McKinnon (Joy Decker), Roxanne & Moose Meyer (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Suzie & John Robinson (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Michelle Sharp (Beth & Ed Sharp), Joyce Ward (Ed Vickery), Janet Wakefield (Linda Burby), John Zastrow (Barb Schneller)

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

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki, MDiv, MBA, Senior Pastor
RevChris@holycovenantucc.org, 314-402-8167

Jon Weddell, MDiv, MSW, Minister of Music

Dawn Simmons, BSBF, Executive Assistant

Mailing address: PO Box 481285, Charlotte NC 28269

3501 West W.T. Harris Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28269-8510

www.holycovenantucc.org 704-599-9810