



*Photo by Microsoft Image Creator*

**“To follow Jesus in the season of Lent is to walk with those who have been denied their dignity and fight for a justice that restores all people to the fullness of God’s image.”  
– James Cone**

**“The path of justice is not about avoiding suffering, but about walking through it with a clear vision of the new world we are being called to build, where the oppressed are set free.”  
– Delores S. Williams**

**“The gospel of liberation invites us to recognize God’s grace in the struggle, for every step toward justice is a step closer to God’s kingdom on earth.”  
– Marta Benavides**

Founded in 1916, we are an Open & Affirming (LGBTQ+), anti-racist, and justice seeking church that is part of the greater United Church of Christ.

**HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
**FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT**

**March 9, 2025, 10:55 am**

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

Prelude "Beneath the Cross of Jesus" arr. L. Larson

Welcome and Announcements Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

One: May the peace of Christ be with you.

Many: **And also with you.**

Chiming of the Hour

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 Ed Vickery

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

One: Jesus entered the wilderness, full of the Holy Spirit, wandering, waiting, resisting the voices that sought to sway him.

Many: **We, too, find ourselves in places of wilderness, seeking what is true, longing for what is just.**

One: In the places of despair, in the face of power that tempts and distorts, Jesus showed us another way.

Many: **In this season of Lent, we turn our hearts to the One who strengthens us. We seek the Spirit who sustains us.**

One: When the world tells us to seek power without justice, choose comfort over courage, or put ourselves above our neighbors.

Many: **We remember Jesus, who chose truth over deceit, love over control, and justice over gain or riches.**

One: Come, let us worship the God who walks with us, even in the wilderness.

Many: **We come, ready to follow Love's call.**

\* Hymn 190

“Beneath the Cross of Jesus”

ST. CHRISTOPHER

Beneath the cross of Jesus, I gladly take my stand,  
The shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land;  
A home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way,  
From the burning of the noontide heat, and the burden of the day.

Upon the cross of Jesus within my mind I see  
The very dying form of One who suffered there for me;  
And from my grieving heart with tears two wonders I confess—  
The wonders of Christ’s glorious love and my unworthiness.

I take, O cross, your shadow for my abiding place;  
I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of Christ’s face;  
Content to let the world go by, to know no gain or loss,  
My sinful self my only shame, my glory all the cross.

Daily Affirmation

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Ourselves: This Lent I let go of what I don’t need and choose a new and exciting path.

Neighbor: This Lent you let go of what you don’t need and choose a new and exciting path.

World: This Lent we let go of what we don’t need and choose a new and exciting path.

Song of Preparation

“Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive”

DETROIT

“Forgive our sins as we forgive,” you taught us, Lord, to pray,  
But you alone can grant us grace to live the words we say.

Prayer for Transformation (*unison*)

Ed Vickery

Merciful One, we confess that we are tempted by the false promises of power, control, and certainty. Too often, we find ourselves choosing what is easy over what is just, what is comfortable over what is right, and what will satisfy instead of the needs of our neighbors. Forgive us God, and lead us in the way of love, so that we might act from your truth and embody your grace. Amen.

Song of Transformation

“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

Like us Jesus knew the weight of struggle. He walked through the wilderness, faced temptation, and endured moments when it simply would have been easier to give up and quit. Yet he showed us that God's grace is always greater. No failure, no wandering, or no doubt can ever separate us from the love of God. In God, we are held, we are forgiven, and we are free to begin again. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Song of Response

"Return to God"

M. Haugen

**Return to God with all your heart, the source of grace and mercy.  
Come seek the tender faithfulness of God.**

Stories for All People

Lee Parrish

Song of Preparation

"I Want Jesus to Walk with Me"

SOJOURNER

**I want Jesus to walk with me. (2x)  
All along my pilgrim journey,  
Oh I want Jesus to walk with me.**

Responsive Litany

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

**One:** In the wilderness of our lives, we face many temptations: temptations to believe we are unworthy, to let the voices of others define us, to grow angry, vengeful, or full of hate.

**Many:** **But God calls us beloved and leads us in the way of love.**

**One:** We are tempted to take shortcuts instead of offering our best, to neglect our well-being because it takes effort, to numb our pain in ways that do not heal.

**Many:** **But God calls us to lives of wholeness, offering grace and strength for the journey.**

**One:** We are tempted to turn away from the suffering of others, to stay silent in the face of injustice, to believe that change is beyond our reach.

**Many:** **But God calls us to be truth-tellers, justice-seekers, and bearers of hope.**

**One:** We grow weary of broken systems, governments that fail the vulnerable, policies that deepen oppression, wars that steal lives and futures.

**Many:** **But God calls us to persist in peace, to demand justice, and to work for a world made new.**

**One:** We see the ongoing sin of racism, the rising tide of hatred against LGBTQ+ people, and the fear that fuels division and violence.

**Many:** But God calls us to be a people of radical love, to stand with the marginalized, and to embody Christ's welcome for all.

**One:** When temptation presses in, when the world feels too much to bear.

**Many:** God is with us, strengthening us, guiding us, and calling us to faithfulness.

**One:** Let us turn toward God's ways, trusting that even in the wilderness, grace sustains us.

**Many:** Amen.

Song of Prayer

"God Weeps"  
*Ed Vickery, soloist*

DELGADO

Lord's Prayer (*unison*)

**Our Parent, who is among us, blessed be your Creation. May your reign be a reality here on earth. May we become more interested in building your kingdom here and now than in waiting for it to come down from above. Let us share our bread with those who hunger. Let us learn to forgive as well as to receive forgiveness. Help us through the time of temptation, delivering us from all evil. For ours are the eternal blessings that you pour upon the earth. Amen.**

Prayer for Illumination "Take, O Take Me as I Am"

J. L. Bell

**Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be;  
Set your seal upon my heart and live in me.**

Modern Lesson

Jeffrey Edwards-Knight

*Our modern lesson for today comes from Rev. Dr. Miguel De la Torre, who is an author, professor, theologian, and liberation ethicist. Among his writings he says...*

"The devil's greatest trick is convincing us that justice can come without sacrifice, that liberation can be won without risk. But Jesus resists the easy path, choosing instead the wilderness way, the way of solidarity, of struggle, of trusting in the unseen promise of God's reign. To follow Christ is to embrace this path, no matter how uncertain, because it is the only path that leads to true life."

**One:** May we hear what the Spirit is saying to the people.

**Many:** Open our ears, our hearts, our minds.

\*Gospel Lesson

Luke 4:1-13 (CEB)

Ed Vickery

*Please take a comfortable posture that supports your reading and worshiping. Our Scripture Lesson for today comes the Gospel of Luke 4:1-13, where Jesus is tempted in the wilderness...*

Jesus returned from the Jordan River full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. There he was tempted for forty days by the devil. He ate nothing during those days and afterward Jesus was starving. The devil said to him, "Since you are God's Son, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

Jesus replied, "It's written, People won't live only by bread."

Next the devil led him to a high place and showed him in a single instant all the kingdoms of the world. The devil said, "I will give you this whole domain and the glory of all these kingdoms. It's been entrusted to me and I can give it to anyone I want. Therefore, if you will worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered, "It's written, You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him."

The devil brought him into Jerusalem and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, "Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down from here; for it's written: He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you and they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone."

Jesus answered, "It's been said, Don't test the Lord your God." After finishing every temptation, the devil departed from him until the next opportunity.

**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

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

"Wrestling with Temptation"

Invitation to Generosity

Ed Vickery

In the wilderness, Jesus was tempted to hold tightly to power and security, but instead he chose the way of trust and generosity. Today may we be invited to do the same, to resist the myth of scarcity and live into the promise of God's abundance. Through our gifts, may we participate in God's work of justice, love, and liberation. And now share with open hands and open hearts.

\* 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*)

Ed Vickery

*Please join me in a prayer of dedication for the gifts we have received...*

Holy and Gracious God, you have given us all that we need, more than bread alone, but the real sustenance of love, justice, and community. Bless the gifts we bring today, that they may be bread for the hungry, shelter for the vulnerable, and hope for those longing for liberation. May our giving reflect Christ's own generosity, as we seek to follow his way. 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 con-tend, 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.

\* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

\* Benediction Response 581

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

"Lead Me to Calvary"

arr. L. Shackley

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*The liturgy for today's service was written by Rev. Christopher Czarnecki.  
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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, Laura Hankins, Jo Ann Jellison

Ushers: Shakti Subramanian Greeters:

Refreshments: Bold & Beautiful Covenant Group

**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/>

**CHECK OUT OUR ONLINE CALENDAR AT [www.holycovenantucc.org/events/](http://www.holycovenantucc.org/events/)**

**SEE THE E-NEWSLETTER FOR ABUNDANT LIFE WEBINAR SERIES BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE NORTH CAROLINA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

**BAGGED LUNCH BUILD, \*MOVED TO MARCH 30\***

No experience needed! We are making 100 bagged lunches for the Giles Center on March 30, and again on April 27. This center is affiliated with A Roof Above and provides overnight shelter (and bags lunches) for homeless men. Stay after the worship service and join us!



## **SOJOURNERS CLASS BEGINS NEW STUDY, MARCH 9**

Sunday, March 9, we began a book study of *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem* by Marcus Borg and John Crossan. Amazon has only an "acceptable" paperback plus hardback copy. Another good source is [thriftbooks.com](http://thriftbooks.com) where you will find "good: and "very good" paperback copies as well as less expensive hardback copies. Hope you can join us either in person or via Zoom—no preparation necessary.

## **SING FOR THE CURE CONCERT, MARCH 29, 7:30PM, CPCC**

This will be a very special, life affirming concert, on March 29, 7:30 at CPCC Halton Theater. Several choruses and choirs will be part of the large 90 member chorus, including 3 HCUCC choir members. See the newsletter for live links and discount code. Proceeds of this concert will benefit local organizations that provide critical financial assistance to individuals and families who are battling breast cancer. Thanks, *Tina Dickens, Meg Houlihan and D Evans, HCUCC members / Women's Chorus of Charlotte*

### **PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER**

If you wish to add someone to the list, please send a note to [prayers@holycovenantucc.org](mailto:prayers@holycovenantucc.org).

### **Members**

Mel & Christine Andersen, Linda Carver, Liz Colton, Kevin Decker, Laura Hankins, Jim & Faye Humphrey, Sharon Landis, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Isabelle Reedy Powell, Beth Sharp, Anita Taylor, Darline Warren

### **Friends & Family Members**

Beth, Michael & Julian Bliss (Robert Shepherd), Melissa Brown, Reva Dixon, Kim Dixon VanFleet (Diane Neese), Jeanne Hord (Diane Neese), Pam McGill & Pam Culp (Melissa Noll), Deby Gumper (Dawn Simmons), Cindy Hedrick (Barb Schneller), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Charles Jernigan (Lee Parrish), Dave Johnson, Richard Lease (Barb Schneller), Earl & Susie Morgan (Ed Vickery), Larry & Karen Roark (Ed Vickery), Michelle Sharp (Beth Sharp), Janet Wakefield (Linda Burby), Brian Weddell (Jon Weddell), Kim Wiggs-Gamblin, Scott Whitley (Jay Whitley), John Zastrow (Barb Schneller)

## *Season of Lent: March 5 through April 17*

Lenten Devotionals

“YOUNG VOICES: STEPPING OUT OF THE WILDERNESS”

This 47-day devotion walks you through Lent and concludes with the good news of Easter Sunday. All entries were written by UCC youth and young adults between the ages of 12 and 35.

See these daily devotions on our Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/HCUCC.Church>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/61370940062>

We will have a limited number of printed copies available.

### Sojourners Class

Book study of *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem*  
by Marcus Borg and John Crossan.

We gather In-person or via Zoom:

Meeting ID: 895 6175 8099 Passcode: 986788

April 6

On the 5th Sunday in Lent, join us for “Mix-it-up” Sunday,  
with a Spring Brunch Potluck following worship.

Pastries, Muffins, Casseroles and Salads

April 13

Palm & Passion Sunday:

Let’s celebrate our Confirmands together!

April 20

Easter Worship 10:55am

Bring fresh flowers for the cross

April 27

Celebrate Earth Sunday with the Creation Justice Team

### 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**

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