

4 Lent – March 14, 2021

Dear Zion Congregants,

In our “joyful chaos” following last Sunday’s Zoom service, Jack Henke shared the wonderful ongoing collaboration he enjoys with Julia Krauss, a German native and relative of Zion’s first pastor, Andrew Wetzel. Julia and Jack have exchanged materials that each have subsequently used in their respective publications about Pastor Wetzel and Zion. The examples Jack shared from Julia’s publications, including images of Pastor Wetzel, his spouse, Elizabeth, and the original Zion church on the corner of Fay and Cooper Streets, were a treat for all of us to view! Looking at the map of those congregations here in the Mohawk Valley to which Pastor Wetzel walked (*due to lack of a horse*) and ministered every other week gave me a great appreciation for his commitment to service and his multiple congregations. I think Pastor Wetzel might have originated the idea of 10,000 steps per day!

Announcements and updates:

~~This Sunday we continue with our remote worship practice~~, offering the service via Zoom, livestreamed on Facebook, or by using the printed Service of the Word, which you will find later in this mailing. To join this Sunday’s service via Zoom, same log-in info as last week:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84354840714?pwd=TDJGTkwvSTBER2lNb1o1Qzd6WGxDdz09Meeting> ID: 843-5484 0714, Password: 022654. Or by PHONE, +16465588656, 84354840714#, 1#, 022654# US (New York). If you would prefer to view the service via livestream on our YouTube channel, you can do so by visiting our page at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWzOtbCe2z7-bIPvxp62IA>.

~~Upcoming in-person worship services:~~ The church council, at the recommendation of our Task Force, has approved **in-person worship services for Palm Sunday (March 28th), Easter Sunday (April 4th), and April 25th**. (All of this assumes a continued low Oneida County infection rate, which has been the case for the past 5-6 weeks and which we anticipate will continue.) No reservations are needed, although we do ask any congregants that will be bringing guests or extended family to please arrive 15 minutes early in order to allow time for socially distant seating for others. (Family members do not need to be socially distant.) As a reminder, the service begins at 10:00. We ask everyone to arrive early in order to move through the health safety check (temperature check and health questions) without a back-up at the entrance.

~~Everyone attending the services will need to wear a face covering.~~ (We will provide if needed.) **We will be offering communion at these services**, with the elements available at the entrance to the sanctuary for you to pick up on your way to your seat. The elements will be consecrated from the altar by Rev. Jen and we will commune from our seats. Although we will not be singing yet, we will quietly be reciting professed prayer (e.g.— The Apostles Creed, The Lord’s Prayer) together at this service. The nursery will not yet be open.

~~We will need four volunteers to staff each of the services:~~ two greeters at the front door to welcome congregants and take temperatures/record health information, along with two ushers. Please call the office to let Sara know if you are willing to staff one of these services.

~~The church council met for the monthly meeting on March 8th.~~ We are pleased to report that **Laurel McCurdy volunteered and was approved to serve as council co-president for the 2021 year**. Thank you, Laurel, for your continued generous service to our Zion congregation! Council also reviewed the wonderful work on a new church logo undertaken by John Blackburn, Suzee Rowland, and Sara Silva. We will share the new logo once the final version is approved. Council also discussed in-person worship services after Easter and the financial challenges Zion may face in the coming years.

-Zion will continue our tradition of providing **Easter food baskets** to families in need. If you would like to request a food basket for yourself or for another family, please call Sara at the office.

-**Volunteers are needed to join Zion's Disabilities Ministry**, a relatively new initiative with the goal of making Zion a welcoming and accessible place for persons with disabilities to find a church home. Please contact Dan Rodahan (rodahan2@yahoo.com) if you are interested in contributing to this important new ministry at Zion.

-Along with all those included in last Sunday's Prayers of intercession, we also ask you to **remember Jeannette and Kjell Wygant, Patsy's daughter and son-in-law, who continue to deal with COVID symptoms.**

-Pastor Anita and the Our Saviour congregation continue to welcome Zion members to attend the Wednesday Evening Lenten Worship series. The next service is March 17th at 7:00. Sara will send the Zoom link before the event.

-Palm Sunday, March 28th: Bob and Bonnie Loomis will again this year donate palms for distribution to members of Zion's congregation. A braided palm cross will be mailed to each Zion family and palms will also be available at the entrance to the sanctuary for those attending the in-person Palm Sunday service. The palms are given to the glory of God and as a thanks to Kristen Burson and Mark Thompson for their service as congregation co-presidents this past year. We appreciate Bonnie and Bob's generosity in helping to make our Palm Sunday celebration special, yet again!

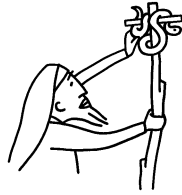
The gospel reading from this past Sunday was taken from John 2: 13-22. In the reading, John answers the question, "Where do we find God?" John reminds us that God is found not only in the temple or on the mountain top, but, even more importantly, Jesus is God dwelling and living amongst us, including in our own physical bodies. In our week ahead, let us look for the presence of our loving God dwelling in those around us and within ourselves. The closing blessing to the service are words for us to remember: *You are what God made you to be: created in Christ Jesus for good works, chosen as holy and beloved, freed to serve your neighbor. God bless you that you may be a blessing, in the name of the holy and life-giving Trinity.* Let us use these gifts to carry out good works to serve our neighbors, both near and far.

Peace and good health,
Mark Thompson, church council co-president.



Zion is **discontinuing** the use of our PO Box. It is no longer necessary to send correspondence to PO Box 822. Going forward, please send any mailings to our wonderful address of:
630 French Road, New Hartford, NY 13413. *Thank you!!*

4 Lent



SERVICE OF THE WORD
GATHERING

WELCOME

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the Holy Trinity, one God, the keeper of the covenant, the source of steadfast love, our rock and our redeemer. **Amen.** God hears us when we cry, and draws us close in Jesus Christ. Let us return to the one who is full of compassion.

Fountain of living water,

Pour out your mercy over us. Our sin is heavy, and we long to be free. Rebuild what we have ruined and mend what we have torn. Wash us in your cleansing flood. Make us alive in the Spirit to follow in the way of Jesus, as healers and restorers of the world you so love. Amen.

Beloved, God's word never fails. The promise rests on grace: by the saving love of Jesus Christ, the wisdom and power of God, your sins are forgiven, and God remembers them no more. Journey in the way of Jesus. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn: *Beneath the Cross of Jesus vs. 1 & 3* *Hymn #338 -Kelli Watson*

Vs. 1 Beneath the cross of Jesus I long to take my stand; the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land, a home within a wilderness, a rest upon the way, from the burning of the noontide heat and burdens of the day.

Vs. 3 I take, O cross, your shadow for my abiding place; I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face; content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss, my sinful self my only shame, my glory all, the cross.

Prayer of the Day

O God, rich in mercy, by the humiliation of your Son you lifted up this fallen world and rescued us from the hopelessness of death. Lead us into your light, that all our deeds may reflect your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Numbers 21:4-9

Second Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

Gospel: John 3:14-21

Sermon: *The Great However* *-Pastor Janet Hoover*

Paul's letters don't make for easy reading. They are complex and wander through dense jungles of theological concepts. He is uncompromising in his viewpoints. Disconcertingly honest. And at the same time, as in today's passage from Ephesians, his words breathe into us with good news. Paul begins this passage by taking a realistic look at our lives...the brokenness, the failures of the past...and he sets that against the hope of the present and the joy of the future. To fully appreciate the good news, we need to take a good long look at the elephant in the room...sin. Sin is more than saying bad words. It is more than those unhealthy habits we battle. Sin is the darkness that chokes our joy, the voice that takes away our dreams. Sin is living a life cut off from God. Ron James says: *Sin is a power that breeds chaos, that tears down and destroys. Sin writes its name across the landscape through senseless violence and manipulation of others, through systemic exploitation and personal vindictiveness.* Sin is sometimes thinking too highly of ourselves, and sometimes thinking too little. Sin is all around, for it is whatever in us that prevents God's will from being done. And when sin holds us captive, hope and joy and peace shrivel up and die. However, Paul trumpets. However, human sin is no match for the mercy of God's grace. We are saved from sin's tentacles not by our own efforts, but by the grace of God which is ours by faith. Sin is powerful, but grace and faith are more powerful still. Listen to Paul's words again—this time as Eugene Peterson translates them:

It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it—all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, God embraced us. God took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. God did this—with no help from us. God picked us up and set us down in highest heaven with Jesus. Now God has us where God wants us—with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us. All we have to do is trust God enough to let God do it. It's all God's gift from start to finish. We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing. God makes us and God saves us. We are created to join in God's work—work we need to be doing.

The world is a mess, Paul says. We are a mess, living lives shaped by selfishness and fear. However, Paul declares, God pours courage and strength, love and joy and peace into our hearts, not as a reward for right behavior or orthodox belief, rather simply as a gift from God's wide, rich, immeasurable love. That's grace. We deserve God's anger. However—in spite of everything, God loves us, makes us alive, raises us up, seats us with Christ. That's what it means to be saved. We are hostage to fear and can't do anything about it. However, God can. From that fountain of saving grace, we can begin living the lives we were created to live—lives of compassion and sharing, of courage and deep joy. Did you notice the order here—sin, grace, salvation, lives of service. First God comes to us in love and, despite our sin and failing, God breathes into us strength and grace. We are forgiven, made new, loved. Then, filled with love we live lives of obedient discipleship. Not because we are afraid God will get us if we don't, but because God's love is so great we can't imagine living any other way. Saved by grace through faith. Wonderful words of promise and hope, yet so hard for us to really accept. We want to be loved—we hunger for love. We know an emptiness deep inside and we want to fill it. All this talk about being loved just as we are, about being claimed by God and valued by God seems like just so many words. Rather than accepting the fact that we are loved—with all our flaws and quirks—we try to prove it...to ourselves and to others, to fill the emptiness deep inside with—something, anything. Sometimes we look for this fulfillment through our accomplishments. We believe that if we are best in something, then we are loveable. And if not best, at least we don't want to be worst. We expect promotions and awards and titles to make us happy, but there is always going to be someone better than we are, some accomplishment that eludes us. Sometimes we look for this fulfillment through the affirmation and respect of others. We work hard to impress and please. Our driving force is to do what will make the most people happy. And yet, there are always those who disagree with us, who ignore us. As we attempt to find our happiness—our meaning and purpose—through these things or through possessions or knowledge or power, we become enmeshed in anxiety. Our bodies and our spirits tire. We begin to treat others as a means to an end—the end being our happiness. God may be part of our lives, but far down the priority list. The emptiness inside us grows, and we wrestle with doubt and despair, anxiety and guilt. And the rumors begin. The rumor that below the words of love Scripture proclaims, God is really just waiting to catch us doing something wrong. The rumor that God only loves those who have never made a mistake. The rumor that God loves us only when we do lovable things. All these rumors drive us deeper into our search for love, which increases our sense of despair and shame, which leads to more rumors, which drives us to look harder for love. We are caught in a cycle of sin and death, a cycle which leads us into the depths of darkness. Oh, we may look good on the outside. We smile and pretend that all is well, while inside we weep with loneliness and disappointment. How can we find what we long for? How can we fill our lives with joy and meaning? How can we break the cycle that holds us captive? What can we do? We can do nothing. **HOWEVER.** However, God reaches down into the cellars of emptiness and loneliness, heartache and insecurity, and lifts us—not just back onto solid ground, but lifts us to stand next to Jesus. God acts to save us from ourselves, not when we have finally reached a point when we deserve it, but now—even as we stumble and stagger in the darkness, even as we do the things, we know we shouldn't do, even as our words and actions threaten to spin us away from God. God reaches out to bring us close. And we discover that the emptiness inside us is a God-shaped hole, filled only by God's grace. Just as a baby doesn't have to worry about being smart enough, or pretty enough, or accomplished enough, or good enough to be loved—so we are to trust that the God who created us, who knows us through and through, loves us as we are. Through Christ, the darkness of hopelessness and desperate need which seemed so overpowering is revealed to be only a backdrop against which the love and grace of God shines brightly. Sin is powerful. But God is more powerful still. Grace is ours as we trust that even in the darkest of situations, God is with us. By grace you have been saved through faith. It has happened. Believe it. Believe it...that isn't always easy.

The story is told of a man preparing to walk a tightrope which was stretched over the roaring depths of Niagara Falls. To add to the excitement and drama, he intended to push a wheelbarrow in front of him all the way across. Naturally, a crowd

gathered to watch this death-defying stunt. Skeptics in the crowd jeered at the man, yelling that he would never make it across. Others, genuinely concerned for his safety, pleaded with him to change his mind. From among the crowd, one man emerged. He approached the tightrope walker and said, "I believe in you, friend. I know you can make it safely across." The aerialist replied, "Do you really mean that?" "Absolutely," said the other man, "I have faith in you." "That's great," said the first man. "Hop in the wheelbarrow and let's go." Faith is saying God is love, God is steadfast, God can be trusted, and really meaning it. Faith is putting ourselves entirely in God's hands, believing with everything in us that God will not fail us. And grace is God keeping the promise. Grace is God's gift—it is already ours. All we have to do is hop in the wheelbarrow and go. Friends, God loves you. Lay down your struggle to be worthy and acceptable. Lay down your efforts to earn the approval of others. Lay down your guilt and shame and relax into the heart of God. Let God's grace envelop you, ease your tiredness, calm your anxiety, release you from the grip of sin and doubt. For by grace, you have been saved through faith, and this is not your doing. It is the gift of God. All praise and thanks be to God. Amen and amen.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

ANTHEM Abide With Me by William Henry Monk, arr. by Timothy R. Matthews -Kelli Watson

Prayers of Intercession

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

From east to west your steadfast love is shown. Nourish seas and deserts, wilderness areas and cities. Give water to thirsty lands; nurture spring growth that feeds hungry creatures; bless farmers as they prepare for the growing season. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Your mercy endures forever. Deliver all who cry to you, especially those who are hungry or without homes. Give life in places where death seems triumphant; give healing to those who are sick and comfort to those who mourn. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

By grace we have been saved. Fill this congregation to overflowing with that grace, that we show mercy to others. Nourish any in our midst who are hungry, especially children, and bless our ministries of feeding and shelter. Give us patience and courage when the way seems long. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Listen to the cries of your people waiting patiently for your healing hand and comforting Spirit, especially those who suffer with chronic pain and all cancer patients, Pr. Mary Etta, Gail, Doris, comfort for Patsy, Claudia, Bill & Rusty, Don & Wanda, Rosemary, Jeanette & Kjell and family, Rani and family, Kelly, Claudia & Fran, Edie Marie, Ed and family, prayers for Michael Gilleece and family, Your Neighbors clients, Theresa, and our country, that the light of Christ may shine upon them with hope. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Thanksgiving at the Table

Holy, mighty, and merciful Lord, heaven and earth are full of your glory. In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son, who reached out to heal the sick and suffering, who preached good news to the poor, and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all. In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me. Remembering, therefore, his death, resurrection, and ascension, we await his coming in glory. Pour out upon us the Spirit of your love, O Lord, and unite the wills of all who share this heavenly food, the body and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all glory and honor, now and forever. **Amen.**

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn: *Amazing Grace vs. 1 & 5* Hymn #779 -Kelli Watson

Vs. 1 Amazing grace! How sweet the sound-that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.

Vs. 5 When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun.

Blessing

You are what God made you to be: created in Christ Jesus for good works, chosen as holy and beloved, freed to serve your neighbor. God bless you that you may be a blessing, in the name of the holy and life-giving Trinity.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Share the good news. **Thanks be to God.**

Thank you for being with us today!



Friendly reminder to set your clocks ahead On March 14th at 2 AM!

Faithful Learning And Teaching Together (FLATT)

Below are *three new offerings* for the Easter season. Each one offers a way to live into being Resurrection people. The descriptions for these courses are included below.

1. My Neighbor is Muslim: Exploring the Muslim Faith

8 Weeks, Tuesdays at 4:00PM-5:00PM (April 6, 13, 20, 27 May 4, 11, 18, 25), class is limited to 15 people.

Led by Barbara Cox | SIGN UP here: <https://forms.gle/QyHPUcamiEomyKpa6>

About the course: Barbara will lead an 8-week study exploring the Muslim faith. The course will use a guide that was written by a group of interfaith clergy and is published by Lutheran Social Services Minnesota. This resource helps people to understand some of the similarities and distinctions among Abrahamic faiths, focusing on Islam. Dr. Gurbuz-Kuchuksari will attend the class on 4/27 as a guest so that participants may ask questions to clarify any information in the study, and as time permits, ask broader questions about Islam or interfaith relations.

Required: The study used in this session may be downloaded at no cost from www.lss.mn.org

2. Art and Spirituality: Visual Journaling and Conversation with In My Grandmother's House: Black Women, Faith, and the Stories We Inherit

5 Weeks (choose one, either Thursday OR Friday), classes are limited to 15 people.

Led by Pastor Lori Kochanski | SIGN UP here: <https://forms.gle/QyHPUcamiEomyKpa6>

Thursday Evenings, 7:00-8:15PM April 22, 29 May 13, 20, 27 (NO SESSION ON MAY 6)

Friday Mornings, 9:30-10:15AM April 23, 30 May 14, 21, 28 (NO SESSION ON MAY 7)

About the Book: "What if the most steadfast faith you'll ever encounter comes from a Black grandmother? In the pages of *In My Grandmother's House*, Pierce builds an everyday womanist theology rooted in liberating scriptures, experiences in the Black church, and truths from Black women's lives. Pierce tells stories that center the experiences of those living on the underside of history, teasing out the tensions of race, spirituality, trauma, freedom, resistance, and memory. A grandmother's theology carries wisdom strong enough for future generations. The Divine has been showing up at the kitchen tables of Black women for a long time.

About the Course: This course invites you to intentionally practice artful journaling as a way to reflect on the book *In My Grandmother's House: Black Women, Faith, and the Stories We Inherit* by the Rev. Dr. Yolanda Pierce. We will work individually through the week and then share our work within the group in order to have conversation with others. The course requires an intentional commitment to read and reflect. In between sessions each person will prayerfully read the book and artfully reflect on the content. You may use a variety of mediums for reflection...drawing, collage with found images, words or a combination of all of these as you receive the book. **Required:** purchase a copy of the book: *In My Grandmother's House: Black Women, Faith, and the Stories We Inherit*, Rev. Dr. Yolanda Pierce.

3. Growing Young: Helping Congregations Authentically Engage Young People

4 Weeks, Thursdays at 7PM on May 6, 13, 20 and 27, class is limited to 50 people.

Led by Abby Mandris, Nick Stroczkowski, Megan Wolling | SIGN UP here: <https://forms.gle/QyHPUcamiEomyKpa6>

This course will introduce participants to the growing young initiative and lead people through the six essential strategies to help young people discover and love your church. This is not a quick fix approach to filling your congregation with young people. This is a culture change process that can lead to deeper and more meaningful relationships within your entire congregation and larger community. This course is based on the research conducted by the Fuller Youth Institute with over 250 innovative churches engaging 15- to 29-year-olds that are growing-spiritually, emotionally, missionally, and numerically. **Required:** You will need to *buy the book* *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* by Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin - available from the retailer of your choice or here or [shop here](#)