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APRIL 2021  
VOLUME 34.4

# The Messenger

*St. John's United Church of Christ*



## Message from the Pastor

John 20:16 – *Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!”*

My friends,

In this brief time marking the apparent end of Jesus' life and ministry, mother Mary went from the agony of grief to the ecstasy of joy. In this first week of April and for the duration of the month (perhaps even further) I want to suggest to all who read this missive that you may experience these extremes of emotion, as well. We have endured over a year of distress that no one of us could have imagined. Now, some relief has emerged; yet we must mind our own emergence.

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I hope to Zoom-gather with you all for our Maundy Thursday observance and again on Easter Sunday. Our friends at First Congregational Christian Church in Chesterfield Township have invited us to join them in their parking lot for a self-guided Good Friday observation of the Stations of the Cross. All of these as well as your prayers and reflection during this holy week will provide you with practice for this life of faith to which we have been called. May it also provide you with preparation for the world-wide emergence from these pandemic times.

Yours in peace and hope,  
Pastor Tom



José Clemente Orozco, *The White House*

Imaging the Word Volume 3, United Church Press, Cleveland, Ohio  
José Clemente Orozco, *The White House*

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# April Devotional

*Now the green blade rises from the buried grain;  
Wheat that in dark earth for many days has lain;  
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:  
Love is come again like wheat that rises green*

*When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,  
Christ's warm touch can call us back to life again,  
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:  
Love is come again like wheat that rises green.*

*Now the Green Blade Rises, verses 1 & 4 words by John M. C. Crum – 1928*

I have been thinking a lot about these words from one of my favorite Easter hymns. Spring is trying its hardest to rise from the dregs of Winter, just as Jesus rose from the dead on Easter. This year Easter has even more meaning for me than usual.

We have been enduring a long dark year of Pandemic. Most of us have not been able to be with friends and family members for way too long. Some of us have lost loved ones. Some of us have developed health issues. Some are struggling to pay the bills because of job losses. As a nation we have been struggling with political and social turmoil. To quote Shakespeare, it has been “the winter of our discontent”.

In the middle of all this, there has still been evidence of God’s presence in everyday miracles like beautiful sunsets, birds visiting feeders, or the kindness of neighbors who take time to help each other out, while wearing masks and social distancing. Even during a pandemic, the evidence of God’s love has been all around us, but we have not always been able to see it, because of our burdens.

Spring is a time of rebirth. This year that seems especially true, as more and more people are getting vaccinated against COVID-19, and can start resuming activities, like hugging friends and family members. It feels like we are rising from the grave of lockdown, loneliness, fear and despair.

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# April Devotional

This rebirth will not happen all at once. There will be many struggles ahead. We are likely to be impatient for things to get back to normal, but for many it will not be a return to the old normal. Some things will have changed for worse, some for better.

Love can help us work towards and accept whatever our new normal turns out to be.

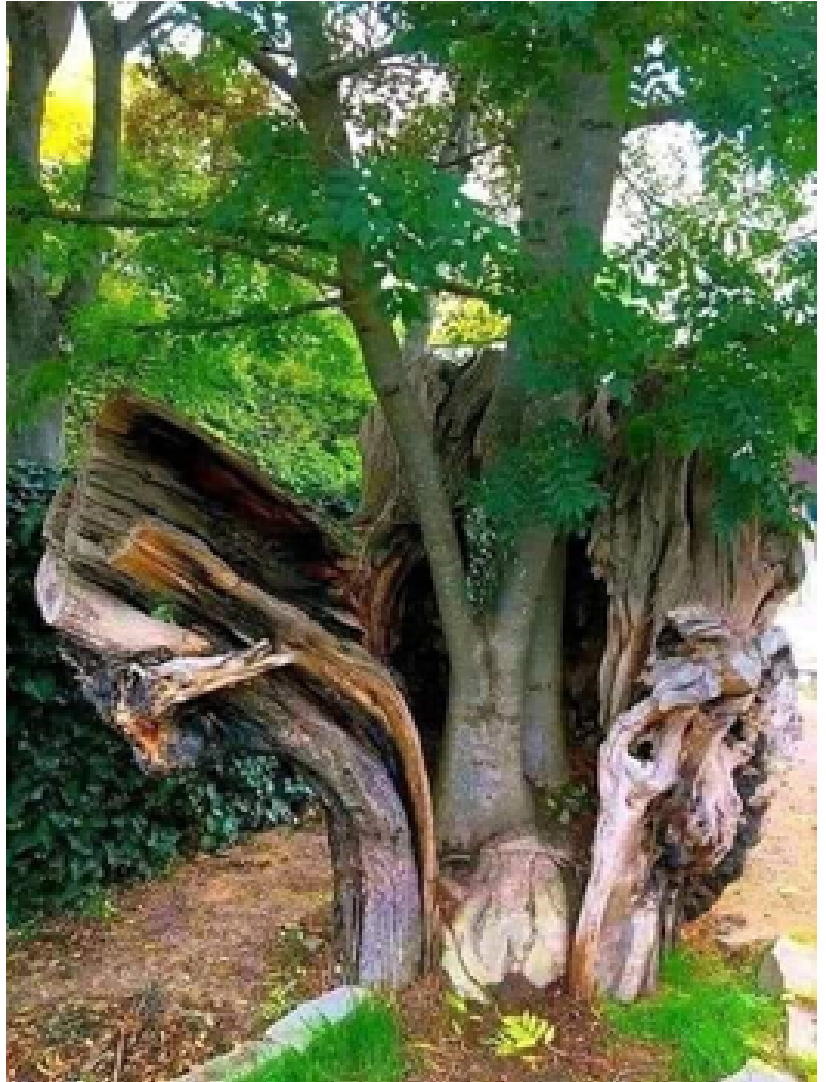
May we remember that as the hymn says: "Christ's warm touch can call us back again".

Kathy Freise

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# From the Desk of the Council President

When I saw this image I immediately had to share it. It speaks volumes to me, especially this time of the year. It is the time of RESURRECTION – of the earth here in the Northern Hemisphere, and of course for us Christians it is the season of a “high holy day”, the resurrection of Jesus. Nature is full of symbols of resurrection, of making new, of growing from the dead and bringing forth a new life. We Christians believe in the renewal of life, of the spiritual rebirth of our soul. As we look forward to the end of the tunnel of the pandemic, I believe we are seeing a renewal here at St. John’s and across the world, new growth springing forth into the new opportunity to rebuild ourselves and our community.



Birth is hard and messy; bringing forth new life takes hard work. Just think how hard this tree had to work to be reborn!

We Christians believe that GOD is still speaking, still making a new thing. And we here at St. John’s are here to be part of that new thing in our resurrected community. Praise be to GOD!

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# Guest Preacher:

## April 2021

### **Sunday, April 25th 2021 - The Rev. Erin Burnette**

Erin is a recently ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. She grew up in the foothills of Tennessee and moved to Richmond in 1999, where she started seminary. Upon completion of the Master of Divinity and Master of Social Work degrees, she worked in nonprofit community-based programs, till discovering hospice chaplaincy as her vocation. She lives in Richmond with her wife, Georgianne, and their cats, Bowie and Lottie. Erin enjoys kayaking, traveling, listening to music, a good book and a meal. She credits St. John's UCC for helping her not only keep the faith, but to continue growing in this faith.



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# April Mission of the Month:

## CARITAS

*Mission Statement: CARITAS helps our most vulnerable neighbors break the cycles of homelessness and addiction to reclaim their dignity.*

It's appropriate that CARITAS is our mission of the month surrounding Easter. Just as spring is here and Nature once again shows us magnificent resurrection all around, CARITAS helps in the resurrection of the homeless and addicted to bring them back to fullness of health and community.

Just as those Jesus healed were asked to return to the temple to be blessed so they could re-enter society, so CARITAS brings a vehicle of wholeness to those it serves.

Most of us know of CARITAS for its "low barrier shelter" program, which welcomes those men and women into an emergency shelter who can often find no help elsewhere. For years St. John's served as an intake location for those in need, especially during the winter months. We have often broken bread with our guests as they waited for transportation to the shelter, especially on Maundy Thursday.

But CARITAS is much, much more than "just" a homeless shelter. Just last year, St. John's joined with a number of other Richmond-area organizations to help CARITAS build and furnish 1- and 2-bedroom apartments for those in recovery classes.

Here are some additional statistics from 2020 about CARITAS that you might not know:

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# April Mission of the Month: Caritas

CARITAS provided 80,720 client-nights in a safe, clean, supportive environment last year.

The Workforce program boasts a return to employment within 30 days of graduation.

Through the CARITAS Furniture Bank, last year 784 families were helped to acquire needed furniture for their homes once they were no longer homeless.

The Healing Place taught 1,144 recovery classes last year, helping hundreds overcome addiction and return to full community involvement.

Whew! That's a lot of resurrection, isn't it?

St. John's has been a long-time supporter of CARITAS. During April, the month of springtime's resurrection of the earth, and Easter, the resurrection of Jesus, please be generous in our support of CARITAS, which is giving so many needy in the Richmond area a chance at resurrection too.





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# April Announcements

## **Holy Week Observances**

Holy Week began for St. John's with a beautiful Palm/Passion Sunday service that included a scripted dramatic reading of the Passion story from the Gospel of Mark. Some 25 people were involved in the service, including musicians David Craig, Helena DeLigt, Amber DePass, Kathy Freise, Bud Higgins, Rob Osborn, Anita Sharpenstein, Tony Sharpenstein and David Townsend; readers Richard Bighinatti, The Rev. Erin Burnette, The Rev. Lindsey Franklin, Johanna, Kristina and Matthew Gilbert, Jeff Jacobs, Daniel Martin, Jeff Michel, Billy Poarch, Scott Siefert and Dreama Terrill; Liturgist Betsy Bighinatti; and Audio/Video Technicians Richard Bighinatti and Bud Higgins. Special thanks go to Director of Music Shirley Townsend for serving as accompanist and directing the musical selections, Zoom Host/Tech Support Ace Daniel Martin, who coordinated all of the muting and un-muting of participants, and to Worship Coordinator The Rev. Beverly Lindsey, who prepared the liturgy and served as Worship Leader for the service.

Holy Week observances continue on April 1st with a Maundy Thursday service by Zoom with communion led by Pastor Tom at 6:30 PM. On Good Friday, April 2nd, we have been invited to join First Congregational Christian UCC at 4310 Courthouse Road in Chesterfield for an outdoor Stations of the Cross, which will be available during daylight hours (approximately 7 AM until 7 PM). And then we will celebrate the Resurrection with an Easter Sunday service with communion, by Zoom on April 4th at 10:00 AM. We hope you will be able to join us for any and all of these observances.

Join our Maundy Thursday and Easter services by Zoom:

<https://zoom.us/j/95417014423>

Password: 629507

Dial in by telephone: +1 (312) 626-6799

Meeting ID: 954 1701 4423

Password: 629507

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# April Announcements

## **Wednesday Night Bible Study Fellowship**

All are invited to attend our Wednesday Night Bible Study from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Zoom. Join other members of our beloved community to study the Word. All are invited and affirmed. It is hard to get out and be with others in this time of pandemic and this is a great way to get with others in a time of study and fellowship. You will be welcomed.

We are using the Kerygma Study Guide: The Book of Revelation: Visions for the Church in Crisis. Kerygma says, "Studying Revelation in context clarifies its message to an early church facing severe crisis. Its relevance for today is not in prophetic visions, but in its affirmation of victory and hope."

We would love to have you in our group. If you have any questions on the study, please contact Scott Siefert at (804) 350-0826, or email him at [sesiefert@gmail.com](mailto:sesiefert@gmail.com). We will be putting in a group order on the guides to save on shipping. Please contact Scott or Jeff Jacobs if you would like to place your order.

Join Zoom Meeting

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83862586668?  
pwd=eUxGQjIrcCtsbzVteHc2RHhYTjFJdz09#success](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83862586668?pwd=eUxGQjIrcCtsbzVteHc2RHhYTjFJdz09#success)

Meeting ID: 838 6258 6668

Passcode: 003903

One tap mobile

+13017158592,,83862586668#,,,,,0#,,003903# US (Germantown)

+13126266799,,83862586668#,,,,,0#,,003903# US (Chicago)

Dial by your location

+1 301 715 8592 US (Germantown)

We welcome anyone dialing in on the phone who wants to be recognized to introduce themselves since we can only see phone numbers on the screen.

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# April Announcements

## **Fellowship Lunches to Resume**

With the return of warmer weather, let's resume our outdoor Fellowship Lunch/Picnic events on Tuesday, April 27th, at noon. If you have any suggestions for a good picnic area, please contact Jeff Jacobs at [jwjacobs9@gmail.com](mailto:jwjacobs9@gmail.com) or (202) 361-9887.

## **Pastoral Care**

We are fortunate to have The Rev. Tom Gerstenlauer with us to provide spiritual support and pastoral care to our congregation. He can be reached at [revtrgerst@gmail.com](mailto:revtrgerst@gmail.com) or (413) 378-0828. As you know, Pastor Tom is serving as our Interim Pastor on a three-quarters time basis, and this month will be unavailable from April 19-25. During that time, please contact the church office at (804) 358-9291 with any pastoral care emergencies.

## **Sunday Protest Vigils**

St. John's UCC is demonstrating our support of peace, justice and the Black Lives Matter movement. We will meet on Sundays at 4:00 p.m. on the steps of the church. Bring a friend and a sign. We will also have signs available for those who need them. We are wearing our masks and observing social distancing as we stand in solidarity on the front steps of the church. Contact Lindsey Franklin at [lfrankli@gmail.com](mailto:lfrankli@gmail.com) or (978) 877-7132. We look forward to seeing you whenever you are able to attend.

## **Do you need food, or know someone who does?**

As the pandemic continues, and people may be quarantined or feel unsafe going to the store, some of us may need help in maintaining food security, or know others who do. As you know, we are blessed with many terrific cooks at St. John's, and many have offered to provide meals to those who may need assistance. If you are having trouble getting to the store, would like to have some freshly-made food delivered, or know someone in need, please contact Jeff Jacobs at [jwjacobs9@gmail.com](mailto:jwjacobs9@gmail.com) or (202) 361-9887. Likewise, if you are able to be "on-call" to respond to a need for food, and have not already let Jeff know, please contact him to know of your availability.

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# April 2021 Calendar

Thursday, April 1st, 6:30 p.m. - Maundy Thursday service with communion, by Zoom

Friday, April 2nd, 7 a.m. - 7 p.m. - Outdoor Good Friday Stations of the Cross, First Congregational UCC, 4310 Courthouse Road, Chesterfield, VA

## **Sunday, April 4th, 10:00 a.m. - Easter Worship Service by Zoom**

Sunday, April 4th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil in front of St. John's

Wednesday, April 7th, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, April 7th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, April 8th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom meeting

## **Sunday, April 11th, 10:00 a.m. - Worship Service by Zoom**

Sunday, April 11th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil in front of St. John's

Monday, April 12th at 6:30 PM — Church Council Meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, April 14th, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, April 14th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, April 15th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom meeting

## **Sunday, April 18th, 10:00 a.m. - Worship Service by Zoom**

Sunday, April 18th at 11:15 a.m. - Missions & Outreach and Congregational Life and Care Committee Meetings by Zoom

Sunday, April 18th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil in front of St. John's

Wednesday, April 21st, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, April 21st, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, April 22nd, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom meeting

## **Sunday, April 25th, 10:00 a.m. - Worship Service by Zoom**

Sunday, April 25th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil in front of St. John's

Monday, April 26th at 6:30 p.m. - Church Council Meeting by Zoom

Tuesday, April 27th, 12:00 Noon, Outdoor Fellowship Lunch/Picnic, location TBD

Wednesday, April 28th, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, April 28th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, April 29th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom meeting

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# April Birthdays

April 2nd - Dale Totty

April 20th - Charlotte Ford

April 23rd - Hudah Anderson

April 30th - Betsy Bighinatti



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## **St. John's United Church of Christ**

St. John's United Church of Christ is a diverse community forming a united congregation, seeking to grow our faith, share it with others, and serve God's people wherever the need is present. We are living God's love and all are invited!!!

### **An Open and Affirming Congregation**

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