
MARCH 2021
VOLUME 34.3

The Messenger

St. John's United Church of Christ



Message from the Pastor

The photo image on the next page is taken from a study resource I often use for worship preparation, Imaging the Word. The three volumes of this resource provide a broad range of selections from the arts and literature, as well as thoughtful reflections by theologians and philosophers from across the ages.

It is also lectionary based, which means that it is presented as a church calendar, using labels and terms with which we are familiar as a people of faith.

The page where this image is found is labeled “Lent 5”; it includes an acknowledgement of the artist Charles White and the title he applied to his work: The Prophet #1. There is also an anonymous observation offered which says, “The rose is often used as a symbol of perfection, and thus of God. This prophet’s gaze upon the rose seems to suggest a life centered around the holy.”

I have come to understand that centering on the holy, even if only for a moment, often yields surprising insight and a sense of peace. Prophetic voices render these in the form of wisdom, which is knowledge from the depths of their being and beyond. Wisdom penetrates all complication and mystery, yet its yield may still elude us. Even still, we are all blessed with a “special gift”, as the theologian Fred Craddock put it: “the law written on the heart... the capacity to be faithful and obedient.”

The scriptural reference for these pages in Imaging the Word is Jeremiah 31:33 – *“I will put my law within them, and I will write on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”* May I suggest that during this holy season you seek to gaze upon perfection? I pray you will find, even if only for a moment, the perfect capacity to be faithful and obedient in the love of God, written on your heart.

Bless the day!
Pastor Tom



Imaging the Word Volume 3, United Church Press, Cleveland, Ohio – Charles White, The Prophet #1, Heritage Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

March Devotional

Romans 5:3-4

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Hang in there. Don't give up. You can do it and you will get through it. Tomorrow will be better. You are strong and splendid and you will persevere.

I said all this while cheering on the beautiful magnolia tree in our front yard during the ice storm on Valentine's Day. The branches were heavy with ice and they were breaking, one after the other. We shook branches we could reach, knocking the ice off the lower branches and managed to shore up one of the higher branches with a rope to try to keep it from being pulled down.

As I was trying to soothe the stressed magnolia tree, I realized I hadn't run through this mantra for a while and I needed it as much as the tree. I've been running on autopilot in so many ways, just trying to get through "it."

A person close to me is struggling in a way that may jeopardize their life, their liberty, their health, their future. Helplessly watching someone I love spiraling down wraps my heart in an icy chill and I realize I'm spiraling too, into panic and reaction, worry and blame, solution and guilt. I want to figure a way to knock the ice off their limbs, gently shake them free from the things weighing them down and tie up the burdens to hold until they can carry them on their own.

As hard as I worked, I could not keep the magnolia tree from losing so many branches. As hard as I try, I cannot save my person from their struggles. All I can do is trust God to carry us all through this. And we will get through this, whatever it will be. Once spring arrives, I will see new vigor in the tree, new growth where the heavy branches are no longer in the way. I know my person will get through their burdens and struggles. Where they end may not be the place I wish for, but I know God is with them and with me and we will persevere, and we will have hope.

Elisabeth Burnette

Message from the Council President

We were all disappointed with the recent defacing of the banners we display at church. These banners proclaim our faith and the actions we are called to as outlined in Matthew 25: 35-40 –

35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Over and over again with our missions and outreach, we affirm our belief in caring for the poor, rejecting racism, fighting for the powerless, forgiving often, embracing diversity, sharing earthly and spiritual resources, protecting the environment, and loving God. These banners tell everyone where St. John's stands on these important ideals and how we choose to live our lives.

Every Sunday we say "No matter who you are, what you have done, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here" and our banners are an outward expression of our belief.

The banners can be defaced, or torn down, but we will not cease replacing them and showing the world who we are.

That is our commitment to our faith and our community. We will not be silenced. We will not be cowed. We will not give up.

There's an old song I remember singing when I was a child

**Just like a tree that's standing by the water side
We shall not be moved.**

Here at St. John's, when it comes to our commitment to peace, justice and equality, **we shall not be moved!**

Dreama Terrill

Guest Preacher:

March 2021

On Sunday, March 21, 2021 we are delighted to welcome back The Rev. Dr. Valerie Carter Smith as our guest preacher and worship leader. She is the Executive Director of the Women's Missionary Union of Virginia. She received her Masters of Divinity Degree at Virginia Union and her Doctorate in Ministry from the Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond. Valerie always inspires us with a powerful, purpose-filled message and we are grateful for her care and support of the St. John's community.

March Mission of the Month: One Great Hour of Sharing

The “One Great Hour of Sharing” offering has been scheduled by the UCC for March 14th, but the Mission Committee has decided to collect for the whole month and make it our Mission of the Month, because the work the UCC is doing with this offering is so important, especially in the era of pandemic.

A MESSAGE FROM THE UCC ASSOCIATE GENERAL MINISTER FOR WIDER CHURCH MINISTRIES:

The theme for the 2021 One Great Hour of Sharing (“OGHS”) offering is “Let Love Flow.”

When you share your gifts to OGHS, you Let Love Flow. Your generosity ensures that, even in the midst of uncertainty, the transforming power of love will continue to change the lives of those who are most vulnerable among us.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare structural inequities that contribute to increased poverty and injustice. On full display is the plight of the working poor who have lost jobs, are on the brink of homelessness, and are waiting for hours in long lines at food pantries.

Deadly wildfires, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and wars have left people homeless, families grieving loss of loved ones and entire communities awaiting assistance for long term disaster recovery.

Refugees and asylum seekers are left in limbo, languishing at borders waiting for welcome. Many have been displaced by economic conditions, war and climate change. Among the millions of refugees are families looking for safe places that they can call home.

In the midst of these despairing moments, the United Church of Christ is able to offer hope as we stand in solidarity and mutuality with communities suffering and in need. Through Wider Church Ministries, the United Church of Christ fulfills its commitment to respond to a variety of global and local concerns by providing advocacy, sustainable development resources, long term disaster recovery support, and assistance for refugee and asylum seekers, working in collaboration with our partners locally and globally.

Sandra, a Congolese refugee, was welcomed and resettled in 2018. She is one of more than a dozen refugee women using skills she learned in RefugeeOne's Sewing Studio to make face masks as a way of giving back to the place she now calls home.

RefugeeOne is one of the partners engaged in refugee and sustainable development programs supported by your generous donations to One Great Hour of Sharing. With your gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing, we are able to be present for the long term in disaster recovery, as we partner with churches and organizations around the world to walk with families as they rebuild their homes and lives.

Thank you for your gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing, as together we build a just world for all.

With Gratitude and Hope,

Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson AGM, Wider Church Ministries and Co-Executive Global Ministries



Wednesday Bible Study

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 our 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. 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.

March Announcements

Holy Week Happens

Our Holy Week observance at St. John's will begin on March 28th with a Palm/Passion Sunday service that invites us to journey with Jesus through the week beginning with his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and leading us to his crucifixion. The service will include a scripted dramatic reading of the Passion story from the Gospel of Mark. If you would like to have a part in this Passion narrative, please contact Beverly Lindsey at revbevlinlindsey@gmail.com or (804) 275-7165.

Pastor Tom Gerstenlauer is imagining a special Zoom observance of Maundy Thursday for this year. Stay tuned in and turned on to further information about our Holy Week journey together.

Finance Update

End-of-year statements for 2020 donations to St. John's have been mailed; please contact Jeff Jacobs at jwjacobs9@gmail.com or (202) 361-9887 if you haven't received yours, or if you see any discrepancies between your records and the statement. Thank you very much to those who have pledged for 2021, and especially to those who have so generously increased their pledges over last year's. Please remember that pledging helps us know what resources to budget for church ministries, outreach and activities, so if you haven't yet pledged please contact Jeff Jacobs for a pledge card or to discuss your pledging intentions. We will be following up with those who pledged in previous years but from whom we have not yet heard.

Reclaim Our Vote

Last fall many of us wrote and addressed postcards for the "Reclaim Our Vote" initiative, a non-partisan project to encourage people to register to vote and provide information on how to do so. A follow-on effort, in advance of the Virginia primary elections in May, is now underway. If you would like to help, or would like more information, please contact Kathy Freise, at kfreise@gmail.com or (804) 512-8559.

March Announcements

Congregational Life and Care

This month you will see that the tree in the chancel of the church sanctuary has been beautifully decorated in honor of St. Patrick's Day. We thank David Craig and Betsy and Richard Bighinatti for the festive decorations. Please plan to wear green on Sunday, March 14th, and bring Irish soda bread, scones, or other appropriate snacks to enjoy during our after-worship fellowship time. We will also celebrate March birthdays on that day. On Palm Sunday, March 28th, we encourage everyone to bring doughnuts for our post-worship fellowship time. Even though we can't observe the traditional donkey procession, we'd like to continue the multi-year tradition, started by Scott Siefert, of sharing doughnuts on Palm Sunday.

The Flying Squirrels have announced the kick-off of their 2021 season with a home opener on May 4th. Once we have more details on the season schedule, health and safety restrictions, and any special "Faith Nights", we will plan to organize a St. John's outing to the Diamond for sometime this summer. Watch for more information.

In Sympathy

We extend our condolences to the family and friends of Dr. Özden Alganoğlu, Deniz Michel's mother, who passed away this past weekend at the age of 81. Deniz, her only offspring, was with her in Turkey, as were friends and family, in her final days, while Jeff remained in touch from Richmond. Özden, a retired medical doctor and widow in Kadıköy, Istanbul, Turkey, is now at peace after suffering with cancer for about twenty years. May she know the blessing of God's eternal rest. In lieu of flowers, the family has suggested that gifts in Özden's memory can be made to the charity Doctors Without Borders.

March 2020 Calendar

Wednesday, March 3rd, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, March 3rd, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, March 4th, 8:30 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom meeting

Sunday, March 7th, 10:00 a.m. - Worship by Zoom with Communion

Sunday, March 7th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil in front of St. John's

Monday, March 8th, 6:30 p.m. - Church Council Zoom meeting

Wednesday, March 10th, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, March 10th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, March 11th, 8:30 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom meeting

Sunday, March 14th, 10:00 a.m. - Zoom worship, with March birthday and St. Patrick's Day celebrations after worship

Sunday, March 14th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil in front of St. John's

Wednesday, March 17th, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, March 17th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, March 18th, 8:30 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom meeting

Sunday, March 21st, 10:00 a.m. - Zoom worship, with Rev. Dr. Valerie Carter guest preacher; with Congregational Life & Care and Mission & Outreach Committee Zoom meetings after worship

Sunday, March 21st, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil in front of St. John's

Wednesday, March 24th, 2 p.m. - Worship and Music Committee meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, March 24th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, March 25th, 8:30 a.m. - Renovations Committee Zoom meeting

Sunday, March 28th, 10:00 a.m. - Zoom worship, with Palm Sunday doughnut celebration after worship

Sunday, March 28th, 4:00 p.m. - Anti-racism Vigil in front of St. John's

March Birthdays

March 1 - Teresa Jolles

March 2 - David Townsend

March 4 - Rick Cook

March 8 - Beverly Lindsey

March 16 - Scott Siefert

March 31 - Johanna Gilbert



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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