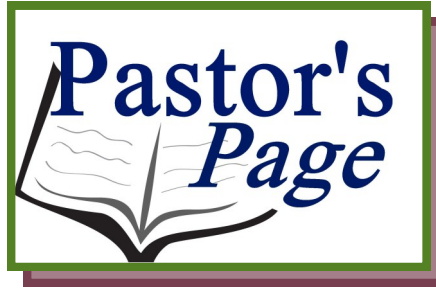




"Jesus" Credit ~ Alma



Hello beloved church community.

Blessings to you this Easter.

I hope this picture from our daughter Alma helps share something of that spirit of resurrection that's at the heart of our faith of Christ.

I'm missing you all. And I'm missing doing church in the same place together. Many of you have shared with me feeling the same.

Yet it is uplifting to see the strength & spirit of our connections at work. Our worship team has adapted creatively to continue sharing the beauty of sacred song, word, image, and prayer. Our community has developed ways to stay in touch via a phone tree and electronic means, so we can be connected and aware of each other's needs. Our community lunch leaders have worked hard to keep that essential program going in a way that is safe for all. Our Trustees have been attentive and responsive to all the decisions needed to be made about the building, finances, employment. We're getting through this together, thank God.

We can arrange grocery and medicine runs for those who shouldn't risk it. Please let us know if we can help you.

"Distance socializing" rather than "Social distancing" - that's how Bart Preecs has reframed what we're learning to do. Our distance is in fact an act of care, in preventing the spread of this deadly pandemic. Yet it is painful to be apart when there is such grief and distress at the escalating loss of life.

It is for times such as these that our faith has been forged.

This Highlights newsletter includes a compilation of the texts for the worship services we've done online these last weeks of Lent.

Peace,

Pastor Nathaniel

p.s. If you are still able to give toward your pledge to the church or make other financial contributions, please do. That will help us weather the storm. Of course, these are tough economic times for many, so don't feel pressure if it's not smart for you to give at this time - take care of yourselves for God's sake.

You may mail contributions to

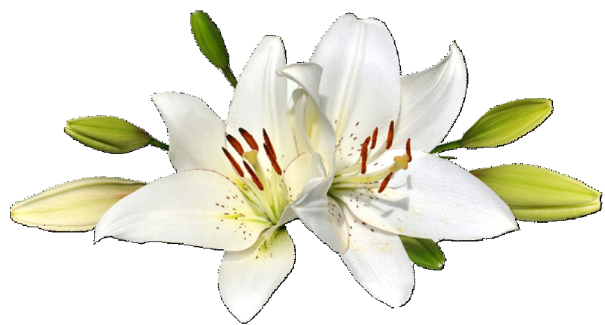
73 S. Palouse St.

Walla Walla, WA 99362

Or give online through our secure portal: <https://bit.ly/34c2r8M>

Thank you





*First Congregational
Church
Highlights Newsletter
April 2020*





Moderator's Missive

Hello Everyone,

This month has been one of the most difficult months on record.

How is that for stating the obvious? Weeks ago, before phrases like *social distancing* and *shelter in place* had any meaning for our children, I had not Undertaken any meaningful sacrifices for Lent. Little did I know that having direct, physical contact with critical members of my community would be one of the things that I would be giving up for Holy Week, and beyond!

I trust this message finds you healthy and with hope. I am deriving a strong symbolic boost from the myriad signs of spring bursting forth around us these days. Even while our human geography dictates that we must stay apart to help discourage the spread of this pandemic, we can perhaps take heart from the natural world's rebirth in anew season of growth and regeneration. This life is perhaps Creation's most powerful reminder that "this too shall pass."

I hope you are finding meaning in your life even despite this profound lull. We miss you. I know some of you are planting vegetables, many continue to teach and learn, and others are taking more and longer walks. I also want to recognize those of you who are serving on the front lines of our valley's health services in response to the coronavirus. We are all with you in spirit. Thank you, and be safe.

The church is in good hands. Our leadership is acting decisively, wisely, and compassionately. We are hopeful that the decisions made will allow us to remain relevant, and to snap back to growth and vitality once we are allowed to resume our faith and fellowship face-to-face in the weeks to come. One of the ways you can help with this is to offer encouragement whenever possible. By simply participating in the revised format of "doing church" - whether through e-worship services, Sunday morning prayer groups, submitting pledges and offerings as able, or simply calling a member of our church community to check-in. These acts all bring continuity as well as encouragement to the people keeping our church going at this most interesting time.

Let me close with Pastor Nathaniel's regular reminder that our separateness from one another at present is really a 'big picture' reminder of how we are truly connected. We show compassion toward every member of society by practicing cautious, careful interaction so as to help minimize the spread of harm to loved ones and strangers alike. How great it will be when we can once again greet one another with a hug!

Love and care to you all,

J. R.



"Notes from the Underground"

One month—and a whole other world ago—Courtney Van Slyke and I set out to the PeaceJam Northwest Environmental Summit in Eugene, OR with Kellen and Turner Van Slyke, Fern Farnam, Bel Dalan, Jane Bader, Theo Gryler, Myles Anderson-Pira, Oliver Rickard, and Libby Drabek.

And what an amazing adventure it was! The long hours on the road found us: deep in discussions of morality, personality, and current events; bonding over childhood stories and music; singing and laughing, and groaning over bad jokes and the inevitable bouquet of tired, unwashed bodies on the way home.

And oh, the sights and delights we encountered! Dinner at Whole Foods, the gorgeous campus of the University of Oregon, bubble tea, kombucha and Starbucks at the Student Center, art installations and full-blown spring, the UO's zero-waste recycling program, hula hoops, other like-minded (but not like-looking) youth from around the Northwest.

And our lovely accommodations at First Congregational Church of Eugene! Foosball and pool and air hockey, oh my. Beautiful quilts adorning the walls, gracious hosts, snacks galore, photos of youth and family trips lining the halls. And a piano in the chapel, which Bel put to good and frequent use for our listening pleasure.

And the keynote speaker - Wow! Kiran Oommen is one of the plaintiffs in Juliana vs. The United States. In this landmark case, youth from around the country filed their constitutional climate lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon in 2015. Their complaint asserts that, through the government's affirmative actions - i.e. subsidies to the fossil fuel industry - that cause climate change, it has violated the youngest generation's constitutional rights to life, liberty, and property, as well as failed to protect essential public trust resources. The case is still winding its way through motions and petitions, etc..., but the *courts have determined that the youth have standing*, now they're just wrangling over which branch of government can instate proper recourse.

Leading by example - Faith into Action! Did I mention Kiran is one of our own? When asked what inspired Kiran to become an activist, and what sustains them in their fight, they answered: being raised in a family and community that is very intentional about values. And



"Notes from the Underground" continued

Kiran's home community is one and same church whose floors we were sleeping on! Having peer and near-peer mentors is such a powerful gift to give our youth. While adults and elders can of course share their wisdom, younger generations can speak their own language. I am so grateful to the University of Oregon students who facilitated the entire event, and led our youth in small "family groups." I am so grateful for you parents who value these experiences and have entrusted us to shepherd your children into the wider world together. And I am so very grateful for the support of our entire congregation, without whose spiritual and material resources none of this would be possible!

I very much look forward to the time you (and I!) can see these young people in person once again, and they can share with you in their own words the impact this trip had on them. In the meantime, we are meeting Monday through Friday via Zoom, for silly games, sharing stories and photos and music, jokes and pets and magic tricks, provocative videos, our worries, our beliefs, and our hopes....

~Margaret

509-386-0398





The “Birds and the Bees” Plant Sale



Order plants for your home garden that provide habitat and forage for the birds and the bees and other beneficial insects. Proceeds from this plant sale will support future Our Whole Lives (OWL) programming offered by the 1st Congregational Church. Help us continue delivering high-quality, comprehensive, values-based sexuality education to our community through middle school, high school, and adult classes.

Place your orders by emailing which plants you would like, and how many of each to emily@welcometablefarm.com by **April 14th, 8 pm**. Please include "Birds and the Bees" in the subject line and also include the delivery address. Payment invoicing will be online (pay by check or PayPal). Plants will be delivered to your doorstep on April 17-18th. Please share this doubly beneficial plant sale opportunity with all your gardening friends.

One Gallon Pots: \$12



Coral Honeysuckle



Coneflower/Echinacea



Seedless Dwarf Butterfly Bush



Red Chiffon Coreopsis



Blue Marvel Salvia



Goldenrod



Fuchsia Aster



Lavender Scabiosa



Bee's Jubilee Clematis



Red Yarrow



Silver Posie Thyme



Hummingbird Mint/Hyssop



Yellow Yarrow



Cranesbill Geranium



Purple Aster



Monkshood



Yellow Coreopsis

4" Pots: \$6



Mixed Color Columbines



Creeping Italian Oregano



Catmint



Red Bee Balm



Purple Bee Balm



Rocky Mountain Penstemon



Blue Spear Lavender



Spanish Lavender



Bronze Fennel
Black Swallowtail Butterflies
love it!

4" Pots: \$6



Blue Salvia



Creeping Italian Oregano



Catmint



Mixed Color Columbinas



Purple Bee Balm



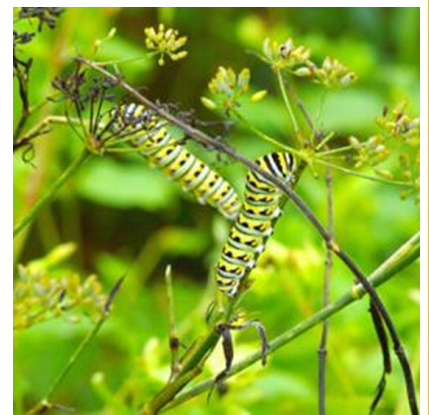
Rocky Mountain Penstemon



Red Bee Balm



Spanish Lavender



Bronze Fennel



Blue Spear Lavender

Black Swallowtail Butterflies
love it!

All-Church Camp Retreat at N-SID-SEN

Friday, September 25th through Sunday, September 27th

Keep these images in mind for an opportunity to come together again. Our prayers are that the worst will be over and we may come together to celebrate our life together as a community of faith!

For information email Judy Gibbs at: judysue2018@gmail.com



Operation Face Mask Walla Walla

I (Carol Lee) am coordinating the project "Operation Face Mask Walla Walla Walla Walla". This project is one of many thousands under way throughout the United States. Because of the stunning shortage of PPEs (Personal Protection Equipment), we are making our own masks for agencies/caregivers, etc. in Walla Walla.

We have had requests for well over 2000 masks from: the Walla Walla Fire Department, the VA hospital, numerous nursing/retirement homes, several medical facilities, the WA State Patrol, the penitentiary, and more.

I have assembled kits for over 500 masks. Sue Gillespie & crew has probably sewn that many! That girl is an energizer bunny! We definitely need more people to help us sew or make monetary donations, which will enable us to buy more materials. If you know your way around a sewing machine, please consider joining us, free kits can be picked up at Sew & Vac, 900 West Rose St. 509-529-7755

Masks are just one more thing in our arsenal to battle the virus. Stay healthy....Stay home! And, remember....masks are cool!



Wednesday Community Lunch Warriors

The county Health Department has arranged for all of the churches that have been serving community lunches to take their grab 'n go sack lunches to the Christian Aid Center to distribute for now. Serving from one location is better for public health.

Our volunteers are using an abundance of caution as they prepare the lunches; practicing social distancing, sanitizing, washing hand, and a lot of glove changing.

Wednesday, April 8th

Chicken salad sandwich
Bag of chips & fruit
Cookie or brownie
Juice

Wednesday, April 15th

Bologna sandwich with lettuce, cheese, and cucumber dill chips
Chips or crackers
Boiled egg & salt
Cookie or brownie
Fruit & juice

Many, many thanks to each one of you! You have done what it takes and have never faltered.

Phone Tree

Stay Connected With Each Other

Want to call others in our church community? Want to receive calls?

Becky Kirtley and Jan Eyestone have worked with Pastor Nathaniel and our Church Council to set up people to call each other. If you want to call or receive calls, give us a call!

Becky at 509-301-0583

Or

Contact the Office at 525-8753 {leave a message} or office@fcchurch.net

Or

Pastor Nathaniel at 608-469-1406 or pastornathanielmahlberg@gmail.com

WORSHIP SERVICES

– **online videos and call-in video-conference meetings**

Contact Pastor Nathaniel with any questions! You don't need a computer to participate in some of our offerings.

EVERY SUNDAY

10:00 am - Video of the worship service will be available on our [YouTube channel](#):
<https://bit.ly/39M7pLa>

11:00 am – Prayer and Fellowship meeting

With computer, smartphone, or tablet

Go to this link: <https://zoom.us/j/638358688>

You may be asked for this password: 589720

With landline or cell phone

Dial [\(253\) 215-8782](tel:(253)215-8782)

You may be asked for the meeting ID: 638 358 688
& the password: 586720

The connecting info does not change Sunday to Sunday

HOLY WEEK



WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Beloved Church Community,

I pray this finds you well enough, considering, this is the lentiest of Lents.

Please let me know if it *doesn't* find you well.

Our Christian Faith was born in a time of crisis and uncertainty. The ancient story cycle of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection has carried people through countless catastrophes, with a sense of God's presence enough to keep their hearts strong and open.

I hope you can join our church community from your home as we journey through Holy Week.

There will be special music offerings by Brenden Koch, Parke Thomas, Audrey Renaud, and others from our choir & music team.



Sunday, April 5th

10:00 am Video of the worship service will be available on **First Congregational Church Walla Walla YouTube** channel. There will be a musical children's message.

Sermon: "Facing Down the Monstrous: The Love Supreme, Spacious & Strong"

11:00 am Communion and Prayer via zoom videoconferencing. BYO own juice & bread

With computer, smartphone, or tablet

Go to this link: <https://zoom.us/j/638358688>

You may be asked for a password: 586720

With landline or cell phone

Dial (253) 215-8782

You may asked for the meeting ID: 638 358 688 and the password: 586720



MAUNDY THURSDAY

Thursday, April 9th

7:00 pm-7:30 pm Commemoration of the Last Supper via zoom videoconferencing

With computer, smartphone, or tablet

Go to this link: <https://zoom.us/j/324535068>

You may be asked for a password: 145829

With landline or cell phone

Dial (253) 215-8782

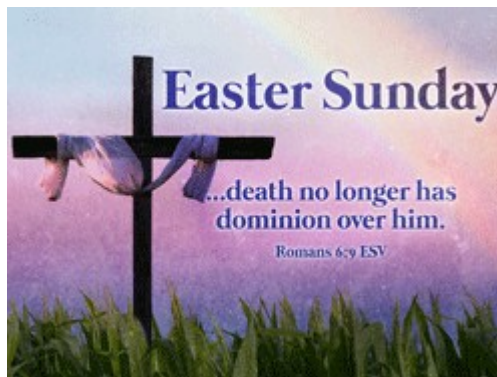
You may be asked for the meeting ID: 324 535 068 and the password: 145829



GOOD FRIDAY

Friday, April 10th

I will burn our Lenten prayers in our walking labyrinth and post the video on our **First Congregational Church Walla Walla YouTube** channel.



Sunday, April 12th

10:00 am Video of the worship service will be available on our **First Congregational Church YouTube** Channel.

11:00 am Prayer meeting via Zoom videoconferencing.

The connection information doesn't change, it's the same as in the other posts.

Worship Services

March 15th through April 5th



March 15, 2020

“What You Seek is Seeking You”

WELCOME

Good morning everyone.

And welcome to worship at First Congregational Church of Walla Walla, WA

This Sacred time, this sacred space, this sacred way of being together

Where it is because of who you are and where you are on life's journey that You are welcome here, by the grace and graciousness of our God.

I give thanks to God for another day, another opportunity to breath and to be, amidst all the beauties and challenges of this life, another opportunity to discover what it means to be

Christian together, and to do Christian community together in a way that responds to the needs and the crisis of our time while staying rooted in the deep and abiding Source of our spiritual vitality and resilience.

We may have more physical distance between us these days, as we respond to protect our community from the spread of this serious pandemic. But that practice of distance is actually an expression of our togetherness, our connection and care for each other.

So this morning as we gather for worship in this new way I invite you to pause and to feel that togetherness across the physical distance.

We talk about the Body of Christ being a collective body joined through the Spirit.

So I invite us all to settle ourselves in a prayerful way

To take some deep breaths and feel settled in our body

However we've been feeling, whatever the buzz of thoughts building up charge,

To just let that ground out, discharge, drop away as we breath and allow ourselves to simply settle as we are, our bodies, as beings

Let ourselves settle into the deeper vastness of our beings

Knowing we are embraced by

The Eternal Spirit in which we live and move and have our being

We are embraced by the Living God, Who creates us, and sustains us, and redeems us all

The great embrace of the Body of Christ

In that embrace I invite us to allow our hearts to open

And reach out and gather our neighbors into that embrace

To expand that embrace and gather all who are worshipping with us

In this community of faith and beyond

Folks from our family, our town, and across the plains and over the mountains and across the seas

All gathered into the great embrace of the Living God incarnate through Christ.

Amen

SERMON “What You Seek Is Seeking You”

It seems auspicious our theme for this Lent is the wilderness, the wilderness experiences in the lives of our spirit. We certainly are in wild times. As it happens, we've been exploring different types of wilderness stories and images from scripture, and different aspects of what that can mean for us.

This morning, the wilderness we will consider is the wildness of our soul's desire for God.

In your heart of hearts, in the pith of your soul, what is the yearning that has drawn you to seek the Divine?

If we're honest, there's a wildness to that yearning, that desire for God.

One thing that can keep us distant from God, I think, is a fear or a discomfort with just how wild and undomesticated our yearning for God really is. It's at the pith of our being, and it can feel much more animal than intellectual.

"Love God with all your mind, body, soul, heart, being. And Love your neighbor as yourself."

That's a reckless and radical challenge that Jesus gives us.

And our tradition as a matter of fact is full of wild images for the love between God and humanity.

The scripture reading for this morning is from the Song of Songs, a book of poetry in the Hebrew Scriptures. It's a love song, which makes it a unique book in the Bible. It's also unique because it doesn't mention God in any way, under any of the many names for God. And yet it is suffused with the Divine:

READING FROM THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES Song of Solomon 2:8-14

The voice of my beloved!

*Look, he comes,
leaping upon the mountains,
bounding over the hills.*

*My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young stag.*

*Look, there he stands
behind our wall,
gazing in at the windows,
looking through the lattice.*

My beloved speaks and says to me:

*"Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;*

*for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.*

*The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtledove
is heard in our land.*

*The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.*

*Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.*

*O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
in the covert of the cliff,*

*let me see your face,
let me hear your voice;*

*for your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely."*

Aren't these wild and wonderful images for yearning and love?

The Song of Songs is really celebrating that the sacred can be present in our passion.

The Song of Songs is often read as giving voice to the passionate nature of humanity's yearning for God, and God's yearning for humanity. Passions which can have a wildness to them, and which can lead us into the wilderness in search of God.

I'm curious about the ways you have searched for God, searched for the divine.

And how have you been led to seek after God and God's Realm?

Often times this is through a passion for goodness, or truth, or beauty, passion for justice, or for love and compassion,

Passions that lead us beyond ourselves to seek after something of the transcendent, something of the eternal.

What has that experience been like for you?

I spoke once with someone who is a master tracker, he tracks wildlife.

He shared the story of one time being hired by the parks service to track a mountain lion in Colorado (I forget the circumstances). He sets out into the mountains. He's reading signs to lead to this mountain lion.

Tracks, scat, breaks in the vegetation, smells, even bird calls are all giving him information so he can follow the Ariadne's thread left by the cougar.

After a few days of this out seeking in the wilderness, he realizes that all this time the mountain lion had been tracking him. He thought he had been tracking the mountain lion, but it was the other way around, she was watching.

It was shortly after I heard this story that I realized this was what was happening in my search for God. All this time I thought I had been out hunting and tracking down the Divine, but all this time it was God who was hunting *me* down. Such a humbling experience, an experience of surrender.

And it is not an uncommon realization.

The great Sufi master Jelaluddin Rumi wrote:

"What You Seek Is Seeking You"

Jesus taught:

"Seek ye first the Realm of God"

This is why he taught:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice"

The New Testament Letter of James says,

"Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you."

The Koran says,

"Take one step towards God and God will take two steps towards you."

Our yearning for God itself, is a way the Divine whispers in our souls.

So, when we follow that yearning, and allow it to be as wild as it is, allow it to lead us outside of what is safe and comfortable, out into the wilderness where we risk becoming lost, we just may receive our truest homecoming.

READING FROM MODERN WISDOM "Lost" by David Wagoner

*Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.*

For our time of prayer,
I invite us to pray the 23rd Psalm
And to pray it while lifting up all those people we are praying for at this time, those we know and those we don't know, in particular let's pray for those who have been ill, and those who have been caring for the ill. But I invite us to call into our hearts all that we wish to pray, and lift into the Light of God's mercy:
You, O Holy God, are our shepherd. We will never be in need.
You let us rest in fields of green grass.
You lead us to streams of peaceful water,
You refresh our souls.
You are true to your name, and you lead us along the right paths.
Ye though we may walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
we fear no evil.
For you are with us, and your shepherd's rod comforts me.
You prepare a table before us, in the presence of our enemies.
You anoint our head with oil.
our cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall pursue us all the days of my life
And we shall dwell in the home
of the Lord forever.
Amen

BENEDICTION

Deep peace of the running wave to you
Deep peace of the flowing air to you
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you
Deep of the shining stars to you

March 22nd, 2020
“Gifts of the Wilderness” Sermon by Lee Coleman

WELCOME

Hello & Welcome

I'm Pastor Nathaniel. It's a blessing you've joined us, wherever you may happen to be, to be together as one in worship at First Congregational Church of Walla Walla

It is because of who you are and where you are on life's journey and the ways that God is uniquely at work in you and through you, it is because of these gifts you bring with your presence that you are welcome here.

I am grateful for another day

And the opportunities and challenges it brings to discover how God is at work helping to lead us through these wilderness times. We seem to be in uncharted territory together these days, in responding to this pandemic, and in practicing social distance to prevent the spread of the virus, to protect ourselves and our community – which I urge you all to take very seriously.

Uncharted territory, with its challenges: how do we decide the best way to go? Are we prepared? Have we packed enough? Will there be enough mana along the way? Whose leadership and guidance is wise, and whose is foolish? How can we be sure we bring everyone through? How do we grieve for those who are lost along the way? What's the heart of our faith that we *will* get through, and in a way where we are transformed for the good? How is God at work in this?

Our wisdom tradition has been forged by wilderness experiences of many generations. There are deep spiritual resources in the Bible and in our tradition for how to pass through wilderness times in a way that is faithful and openhearted and smart and tough and grounded in the great reality of God.

Wilderness has been our theme this period of Lent taking us from Ash Wednesday to Easter. And our sermon message today will be from someone with a lot of experience living in the wilderness and training people in the wilderness, the dear and indomitable Lee Coleman.

Thank you, Lee, for being here to share your wisdom and experience. You are such a gift to our community of faith.

So let us be in a sacred way together.

Let us open our hearts to the presence of all who are gathered with us in their homes, let us open our hearts to the presence of the Holy Spirit, so we may worship God.

PRAYER OF PREPARATION

Leader: Friends, let us prepare ourselves to be in a sacred way

All: Holy God, we find ourselves in wild and troubled times

Leader: Anxious, unsettled, uncertain

All: Help us to be still and to know

Leader: You are God

All: In You we all live and move and have our being

Leader: In You we have our strength, our vision, our wisdom

All: Amen

SCRIPTURE Psalm 23 The Divine Shepherd

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

SERMON

As a kid, my mountain top experiences, the ones that began to shape my young life, were almost all out of doors. I hiked and rode and explored as far as my mother's tether would reach. As I grew older, those experiences continued to shape my life. I found in the stillness of the woods and its community of creatures strength and serenity and spirituality. As the years passed, I gained outdoor experience of many kinds as a participant and as a leader. More and more I wanted to lead young people to the wilderness I loved.

So ... 63 years ago I led my first groups of high school girls on canoe trips deep into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Through the next 63 years, I have introduced well over 2000 young people and hundreds of adults to that Minnesota wilderness. By founding a non-profit, all volunteer venture and building a rustic wilderness base on a lake in the woods we have changed and strengthened countless lives., and given kids a spiritual touchstone that they can draw on throughout their lives.

I was fortunate to know Sigurd Olson, author of many books and a national advocate for preserving wilderness. Sig believed that everyone has a basic need to connect with the earth to give life meaning. Without that connection, he or she may be without a rudder. A teacher, writer, guide and explorer, Sig had his own special "listening point" and writes "**Everyone has a listening point somewhere. It does not have to be in the north or close to the wilderness, but some place of quiet where the universe can be contemplated with awe.**" There is a rock on the shore of Cedar Lake..... and I can close my eyes at any time and any place and transport myself to that rock, gaze out at the lake, and feel the silence and beauty of the world. It is a blessing and a prayer to have a **listening point.**

My four children grew up at our wilderness camp. They fed the chickadees by hand, called the squirrels by name, slept under the stars, hiked and canoed on their own, and before entering kindergarten swam the quarter mile across our lake. The love of the land and all its creatures is with them still.

Each summer, for many years, a young girl named Natalie came to camp. Our wilderness was her favorite place on earth. She would kayak around a bend and sing beautiful hymns that echoed through the air. She felt a deep spiritual connection with the land and the lake which she shared with her friends. Ten years ago, a winter car accident claimed Natalie's life. In those dark days we helped to set up a memorial fund, and for ten years have sponsored a camp for young people, free of charge, in her memory. We built a memorial ring deep in the woods that is a meditation center for us all. To date, we have sponsored over 250 young people at our Natalie Camps to help pass on her loving, giving spirit.

Over the years, we have sponsored canoe trips for teens, adults and families, for young people from the inner city of Chicago, a few trips for the blind and handicapped, and several groups of young Hispanic girls from our YWCA Mariposa program. One young man, as he battled a mental illness, clung to his camp memories and wood burned a beautiful plaque that he kept in his room during his recovery. He gave it to me as he headed to college, saying the memories were now etched in his soul. A young girl came to camp for many years and when aged out became a leader. She discovered through that leadership experience that she wanted to be a teacher, and now her inner city students share her love for wilderness. One important gift we give each kid or adult who comes to our camp is days without technology.

Each summer we take groups of kids to work at Will Steger's Wilderness Center, a few miles from our base. Will, arguably the leading Arctic and Antarctic explorer of our time, has been a good friend and role model of mine for many decades. On his land we clear brush, haul logs, move rocks and do any hard labor he has in mind. Will works summers with the Minneapolis Summit Academy and brings young men who have been incarcerated to his land. They learn to be carpenters, stone masons, and woodsmen and after a summer at the Wilderness Center have skills, hope, vision and desire for a good life out of prison.

Wilderness has been my touchstone and place of the spirit throughout my life. I want to share with you a poem I wrote to describe the **Gifts of Wilderness**.

As I move through life, deep in my heart
I sense my essential need for wilderness.
Knowing that there are wild, untouched places
Far or near,
To which I can retreat in body or in spirit
Is blessing beyond words
And the keeper of a healthy soul.
The gifts of wilderness are simple
Yet unspeakably profound,
Health-giving and soul stretching
Solitude

Humbleness and perspective
Connection and harmony with a living community
Understanding of timeless evolution
Respect for all living things
Vision of a world at peace
The joy of wonder and awe
Hope for brotherhood among all people
Freedom from contrived necessities
Strengthening through adversity
Sufficiency in simplicity
Stillness and peace
Healing
May you continue to be blessed by wilderness
Each day of your life.

PRAYER based on Psalm 46

*O God, you are our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
And so, we do not fear, though the earth should change,
though there may be fire and flood and virus
Through it we know, O God, that your Holy Spirit is like a river
whose streams make glad the city of God.
We know you are in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved,
You are in the hearts and the minds and the voices of our neighbors
You are in the hearts and the minds and the voices of the healers and the helpers who are hard at work
And yet God, we know you are far beyond all this,
the Great Source and Destination of all life
You are our help when the morning dawns.
So the nations may be in an uproar, the kingdoms may totter.
But through all that, beyond all that, we look up into the clear sky,
And we hear your voice, sounding an echo in our souls:
"Be still, and know"
So we are still and know that You are God Amen*

March 29nd, 2020

“The Global Body, One Body: The Body of Christ”

READING FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT Colossians 3:10-15

Put on the new self, being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. Here, there is not Greek nor Jew, circumcision and un-circumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, slave, free: but Christ is all things and all in Christ. As the chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on compassion, goodness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing up one another and, if there are complaints, forgiving each other. Above all, add to these things love, which is a bond of maturity. Let the peace of Christ settle in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful

READING FROM MODERN WISDOM

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., from “The Letter From the Birmingham Jail”

“In a real sense all life is inter-related. All [people] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be... This is the inter-related structure of reality.”

SERMON “The Global Body, One Body: The Body of Christ

These days we cannot escape the fact that all of humanity is so deeply connected. Our wellness, our health is shared across the globe.

My wellness and the wellness of my family and of my church family and of my friends here and across the nation and the globe, all depends on the wellness of all of our neighbors, their wisdom in practicing good hygiene and safe distancing, the wellness of all our neighbors depends on the wellness of their neighbors’ neighbors, and their neighbors’ neighbors’ neighbors’ and so forth webbing out across the globe.

“All [people] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality,” as Dr. King wrote in his letter “tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.”

This certainly is very clear these days.

This virus is causing us to become aware of all the touch-points of interconnection between all people.

And because of the world-wide-web, we have an even more heightened awareness of our interconnection, we can share and hear stories and information, and images, and medical insights and directives, across the globe.

All of humanity is like an enormous body that’s going through a collective immune response as we try to defend ourselves against this global threat. Our front-line medical workers are like our white blood cells, God bless them, fully mobilized. And in our following the intelligence and wisdom of isolating ourselves physically and reducing our touch points to prevent the spread of the virus, we are each acting like cells in a collective body going into an immune response.

And like when our individual bodies get feverish when we fight off a virus, our collective body, global humanity, is under an enormous amount of stress right now.

And I think we all are feeling this in one way or another, if we're at all aware. That may be making us touchy and reactive, or fearful, or in denial, or obsessively anxious.

So I want to just name and be real about the unease we're all going through. We can choose to respond to that in a helpful way.

One thing that I think is especially important to name and to honor is the grief of all this, the enormous grief that comes because of the tremendous and escalating loss of life,

You know, and the pain of folks who are bereaved but not able to gather to grieve together and to pray and to bury their dearly departed.

This collective grief is a gateway to the meaning of Christ in our midst. This has *everything* to do with Jesus.

Our care and concern for the collective body of humanity, our awareness and care of all the social tissues that connect us as one body with all of humanity, is actually us participating in the Christ-hood which Jesus embodied and ushered into the world.

The Body of Christ itself is a global Body.

This whole journey we're in the middle of in the sacred calendar of the Church, the journey from Ash Wednesday – when we are marked with a sign of our mortality – through the purifying wilderness of Lent toward Holy Week and through the Crucifixion into the Easter Resurrection and beyond to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after the Resurrection into the collective community of Jesus followers ...

this is a journey that reveals how God's incarnation through Christ, is a healing and redeeming embrace of *all* of humanity in the flesh.

The Body of Christ, crucified and risen, is a global body.

"Christ is all things and all in Christ" as we heard in Colossians

Christ is an all-embracing transcendent presence that extends beyond all borders and divisions.

Through Christ, God takes on all human suffering, and through Christ, God moves through all the joys and the struggles of human care and solidarity and healing.

So, whenever we feel overwhelmed with concern, care, and grief, know it is not ours to bear alone – not only are we in this together, but we are in this with Christ, who has shown us the power of life beyond the forces of death.

So, may we rally for the sake of life, and rally in the way that Jesus calls us to:

In a way that lifts up the least of these, in a way that champions the most vulnerable, whether it's because of infirmity or poverty.

It is only as one that we will rise.

For all these reasons, may we let the peace of Christ settle in our hearts, to which indeed we are called in one body.

Amen.

PALM SUNDAY April 5, 2020

“Facing Down the Monstrous: Jesus’ Love Supreme, Spacious & Strong”

Communion was an 11:00 am Zoom Meeting.

PRELUDE *A Hosanna*

PALM SUNDAY PROCESSION Alma Vi and Rachel – *We are Marching in the Light of God.*

WELCOME Annie Charnley Eveland

We welcome you in peace.

May you enter this place knowing God has made you
good and worthy of love.

May you feel safe to bring your light and your love and
your messiness. Use them to bless our sacred gathering.

May you in turn be blessed here in the presence of the
Holy One our God

STATEMENT OF IDENTITY Annie Charnley Eveland

We are a congregation of diverse Christian believers
empowered by love and guided by the Holy Spirit.

It is our mission to enable personal Spiritual growth,
collective outreach to the community and stewardship
of God’s creation. We are an open and affirming
church. Because of who you and where you are on life’s
journey, you are welcome here.

SONG Brendon Koch

PRAYER OF PREPARATION Eric Wiessner & Izzy Sherwood

Leader: Please join preparing our hearts to be in a worshipful way.

Leader: As we hold ourselves before the Holy

All: May we be mindful of all that constricts our souls

Leader: Fear, Anger, Anxiety

All: Guilt, Shame, Self-absorption, Boredom.

Leader: O Holy One, help us release these shackles

All: Even in the face of death, even in the face of what is monstrous

Leader: Help us go in the way of Jesus’ good heart

All: A heart open in the spaciousness of the Love Supreme. Amen

FIRST READING J.R Van Slyke & Courtney Kress Van Slyke

Gospel of Matthew 5:38-45

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Abba in heaven; for God makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

SUNG PSALM INTERLUDE

SECOND READING J.R Van Slyke & Courtney Kress Van Slyke

Gospel of Luke 19:29-42, 45-48

When Jesus had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” They said, “The Lord needs it.” Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,

“Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and he said, “It is written,

‘My house shall be a house of prayer’;
but you have made it a den of robbers.”

Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.

SUNG PSALM INTERLUDE

SERMON “In the Face of the Monstrous, Jesus’ Love Supreme, Spacious and Strong”

It’s just astonishing how Lent has coincided with this virus is really hitting us here. A colleague of mine I went to seminary with who is a pastor in Brooklyn has said “This is the Lentest Lent I’ve ever Lented.” And it’s only getting more so.

I don’t think most of us expected to be giving up quite this much for Lent.

It’s like we’ve all taken monastic vows.

This can be an opportunity to draw closer our souls and our God. A time to know what’s most important in our lives and to really keep our focus on that, and to let go of what we discover isn’t as important, to simplify.

But there are many who are now facing true impoverishment and hunger. And isolation can really bring suffering. All of which good people are trying to help and ease. But there’s a rawness to what’s going on.

The heart of what makes this such a Lenten journey is that we are confronted with our own mortality. Confronted with just how vulnerable we can be as creatures of this earth, and even as a human species.

And even more than that: this is a Lenten journey in which we are all confronted with the Monstrous.

This virus is a monstrous force.

It stalks and spreads with stealth. And when it flares and roars it robs people of their breath and deals death on such a scale that it overwhelms the places that it hits hardest.

It’s a massive horrific inhuman monster.

Not only inhuman but it may not even be a living thing.

I mean, biologists argue about whether viruses are technically alive.

This is the stuff of the Monstrous.

Covid is like an invisible swarm of vampires or zombies.

Okay, we’re in a nerdy side bar here. Bear with me:

Viruses can’t produce energy for themselves or even reproduce themselves. They are total parasites - parasites at the genetic level. They’re just shreds of DNA or RNA that can’t actually generate what it needs. In order to live and reproduce they have to hijack another organisms’ cellular dynamo of life. And in the process, they kill those living cells and sometimes the entire organism, the animal, the human being. And then to keep going they need to spread from one host to the other, so they hijack the social connections between us, the life-giving fabric of our lives together.

My point here – and trust me, we’ll get to Jesus – my point here is that this virus for us is an experience of the Monstrous.

A life-denying, death-dealing force run rampant.

In the face of such a force, we must claim the Love Supreme.

Our model here, our savior here, is Jesus.

The last week of Jesus’ life is this ultimate story about facing down the Monstrous with a heart full and strong with love:

The heart of Christ just on fire with God’s Love Supreme.

What Jesus faced was a form of the Monstrous that is very human, all-too-human. He confronted the powers of crucifixion, the evil that can run rampant in humanity, the fear, the hatred, the greed, the selfishness that can snowball and lead communities to exploit people, and scapegoat, and crucify.

I’m sorry to say that those evil forces are on display these days in this crisis. For the most part

people are being awesome and really rallying around each other. But some people are responding to the monstrous by becoming monstrous.

There definitely is viciousness, selfishness, neglect, profiteering, at the highest levels. It's those with the least power who stand the most to suffer.

Jesus faced down those forces with a heart of love, a heart of strength, a heart of mercy, a heart of truth. He embodied the true and divine antidote to evil, at the point in his life when he was the most vulnerably human.

As long as we cleave to that heart of Christ, as long as we open ourselves to God's Love Supreme, we will have the courage and compassion to sow the seeds of resurrection in the midst of these troubles.

It is for times like this that our faith has been forged.

Thanks be to God.

SUNG PSALM INTERLUDE

THIRD READING Annie Charnley Eveland

Gospel of Luke 23:1-25, 32-34

Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man." But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place."

When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him."

Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!" (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him." But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished...

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Abba God, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."