



*"The Lent that Never Ended" Christ Church Sanctuary, 2020.*

# **Christ Church** UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Rev. Dan Stark, Pastor  
Organist and Pianist, Matt Lawrenz  
Nancy Charles, Song Leader

[www.uccmke.org](http://www.uccmke.org)  
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March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021

This weekend we observe the fourth Sunday of Lent and we focus on the famous Gospel passage from John about God's wondrous love. During this season, we are reminded that, again and again, suffering and brokenness find us, and we need God's love and grace. The story of the Cross plays itself out again and again in our world, but again and again, God breaks the cycle and offers us a new way forward.

In our gospel lesson from John, after inviting Nicodemus to be born anew, Jesus tells him that "God so loved the world that God sent God's only beloved child to restore it." When we read John 3:16, we remember Jesus tells us that love is where God begins and ends. This love is the ultimate gift that we do nothing to deserve. Again and again, love is our Lenten and life refrain. Before we act, think, or believe – can love be our *first* go-to just like it is for God? *Again and Again, God loves first.*

*\*Please recite the PURPLE words aloud.*

**Prelude**

*Prelude on SOUTHWELL*

Carlson

**Words of Welcome**

**Opening Song**

*I Will Sing of My Redeemer*

**Refrain: Sing, O sing of my Redeemer, with his blood he purchased me, on the cross he sealed my pardon, paid the debt, and made me free.**

- 1. I will sing of my Redeemer and his wondrous love to me; on the cruel cross he suffered from the curse to set me free. Refrain.**
- 2. I will tell the wondrous story how, my lost estate to save, in his boundless love and mercy he the ransom freely gave. Refrain.**
- 3. I will sing of my Redeemer and his heavenly love for me; he from death to life hath brought me, Son of God, with him to be. Refrain.**

**Call to Worship**

Sarah Are

One: Before we were born,

**All: Before we took our first breath,**

One: Before the week started,

**All: Before the year started,**

One: Before we said, "I love you,"

**All: Before we said, "I'm sorry,"**

One: Before we figured out who we really are,

**All: Before we figured out who we want to be,**

One: Before it all –

**All: God loved us.**

One: Unconditionally and freely,

**All: Fully and honestly –**

One: God loved us.

**All: Again and again, this is where our story begins.**

One: Let us worship God!

### **Opening Prayer**

*God of the here and now –  
We have heard the words,  
“For God so loved the world  
That he gave his only son,”  
Time and time again.  
We have read them on billboards,  
Heard them in worship,  
And seen them on signs.  
And yet we know,  
There is a difference between*

*Hearing those words  
In passing  
And truly, deeply listening.  
We long to listen, God.  
We long to hear your truth.  
We long to know your love.  
Open our hearts and minds.  
We are listening.  
Amen.*

### **Kyrie Eleison**

#### **Old Testament**

[Numbers 21:3-7](#)

The book of Numbers describes the travels and fortunes of the people of Israel during their wilderness wandering period. In this story, the people grumbled despite God’s provision, so God sends poisonous snakes to bite them. Moses erects a bronze serpent pole and instructs anyone who is bitten to look upon the pole and live. Jesus draws from this imagery in his description of the Son of Man on the cross.

<sup>3</sup>The LORD listened to the voice of Israel, and handed over the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their towns; so the place was called Hormah.

<sup>4</sup>From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. <sup>5</sup>The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” <sup>6</sup>Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. <sup>7</sup>The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

#### **Lenten Poem**

If you hold a newborn in your arms,  
All at once you will understand  
The crook of your elbow  
And the cup of your palm  
As never before –  
Ordinary curves of the body  
Transformed into a resting space.

#### **Hold**

You were designed for love.  
And if you’re lucky enough  
To hold a newborn in your arms,  
And that newborn curls  
Its tiny fingers around yours,  
Making your hands look  
Like the hands of a giant –

**Sarah Are**

Then time might stand still,  
And those around you might point and  
say,  
“Look! That little one is holding you  
back.”

And in that moment,  
If you pay attention,

You will catch a glimpse  
Of the circle that love was meant to be.  
God is love,  
Our resting place.  
With small hands,  
We hold back.

## **New Testament**

[John 3:14-21](#)

John 3:16 is the most recognizable verse in the New Testament. Jesus gives context for his crucifixion and saving of the world by recalling Moses in the desert.

After inviting Nicodemus to be born anew, Jesus tells him that God loved the world so much that God sent God’s only Beloved to restore and save it. Jesus speaks about his life, death, and resurrection.

<sup>14</sup> And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. <sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

**Sermon**

**Again and Again, God Loves First**

**Rev. Dan Stark**

**Song of Response**

*Amazing Love*

**Refrain: Amazing love, O what sacrifice, the Son of God, given for me.  
my debt he pays and my death he dies, that I might live, that I might live.**

- 1. My Lord, what love is this that pays so dearly; that I, the guilty one may go free? Refrain.**
- 2. And so they watched him die, despised, rejected; but O the blood he shed flowed for me. Refrain.**
- 3. And now this love of Christ shall flow like rivers; come, wash your guilt away live again. Refrain.**

## Call to Confession

*No, David!*

Story by David Shannon

Family of faith, if we were to place ourselves in this story, we would be David.

We mess up and make mistakes all the time. However, if we are like David, then God would be the mother in this story – constantly saying to us, “Yes, I still love you. I will always love you.” So let us pray to the God of love, trusting that God loved us first.

## Prayer of Confession

One: God of love,

We forget the beginning of the story –

That we were made from love, to be love, to give love.

Instead of rooting our narrative in the goodness refrain of creation,

We skip ahead and find our worth at the fall,

With Cain and Abel, lost in the wilderness.

We forget that first there was you, and you are love.

We forget that out of that love you created us.

We forget that from the very first day, you loved first.

We forget because a love like that doesn't make sense to us.

Forgive our low self-esteem.

Forgive our resistance to love ourselves.

Forgive our hesitation to trust that even we could be made good.

And forgive our tendency to pass that doubt on – from generation to generation.

Write a new beginning for us that roots our confidence in your unrelenting love.

With hope we pray, again and again. Amen.

## Words of Forgiveness

One: Family of faith, no matter what we do, where we go, or what we tell ourselves – God is love, and God is loving us.

**All: Again and again, we are claimed, held, forgiven, and cared for. In the name of the Lover, the Beloved, and Love itself – thanks be to God. Amen!**

## Prayers of the People

*Hear Our Prayers, O God...*

**For health & healing:** *God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.* Ps. 147:3

We pray for:

~Ken and Susie K. for a good outcome for his tests when he sees the doctor on March 17th...hope all will be negative and he can move forward with the prostate cancer.

~Laura Pethke and her family as they remember and miss her husband Todd at this time of his 1 year anniversary of passing.

~ Kim O as she receives chemotherapy treatments.

~Tom, brother-in-law of Doris and Paul who has ALS and pneumonia and has been placed in hospice care.

~Ian, husband of Molly as he receives treatments of chemotherapy every 2 weeks for 2 months for stage 2 Hodgkin's lymphoma. Prayers also for Molly and their daughters during this difficult process. They are encouraged as this type of cancer has a 90% + success rate and that overall Ian's side effects are mild.

~Emily, friend of Andy O. sees a specialist on March 19th. Hopefully, that visit we help her plot out next steps. Thanks for the prayers as she seems to be doing better.

~Continued prayers Bob, cousin of Barb W, who has COVID. He is no longer sedated and finally is off the ventilator. He has a tremendous amount of healing and therapy ahead.

~Melissa F as she suffered a miscarriage at the end of last year and is greatly struggling with the loss. She is asking for prayers of peace and comfort, as she is dealing with feelings of depression.

~Deb, cousin of Barb W. (Bob's sister). Deb passed away last week. Please pray for comfort and peace for her family during this tender time.

~Judy, niece of Ken K as she is on chemo for breast cancer.

~Ken's sister who was moved to a nursing home and has a serious chronic infection and dementia.

~Susie K's Aunt Evelyn who is in hospice and Aunt Eleanore who had a stroke and is in home hospice, also for her daughters and granddaughters who are taking care of her.

~Dan, friend of Molly as he and his young family navigate his illness.

~Johnny, friend of the Ken and Sue who has COVID and other health problems.

~Bob K as he receives chemo drug treatments.

~Joe and Laurie, son in law and daughter of Jackie S. Prayers for continued healing for wounds as he goes to wound care.

~Nick, nephew of Nancy & Brad who has started using heroin again.  
Prayers for the whole family.

~Dawn & Brad D, daughter in-law and son of Laurel as she manages diabetes and dialysis 4 times per week and he recently broke his arm.

~Tracy, daughter of Nancy K, who is at home with Nancy awaiting liver and kidney transplants. She is doing well.

~Continued prayers for Julene F's nephew, who is struggling with mental health issues.

~Kelley, friend of Nancy Cas she receives radiation treatment for breast cancer.

~Bernee, friend of Nancy K who has end-stage lung cancer and is in a nursing home in hospice.

## Prayer Song

*O Lord, Hear My Prayer*

1. O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer: when I call answer me.  
O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer, come and listen to me.
2. The Lord is my song, the Lord is my praise: all my hope comes from God.  
The Lord is my song, the Lord is my praise: God, the well-spring of life.

## Call to Offering

UCC Worship Ways (adapted)

Consider the steadfast love of God in every breath you breathe. May that steadfast love inspire you to give generously, so that we may live into God's Reign of peace and compassion through the offerings of our own church. Please give as you are able.

[www.uccmke.org/donate](http://www.uccmke.org/donate)

## Prayer of Dedication

UCC Worship Ways (adapted)

O Generous One, we give thanks to you  
for your steadfast love endures forever.  
May these gifts be used to feed the hunger and satisfy the thirst  
Of all those you love throughout your creation. Amen.

## Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise God all creatures here below  
Praise God above ye heavenly host, Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.  
A-men.

## Closing Song

*We Walk By Faith*

1. We walk by faith, and not by sight;  
no gracious words we hear  
from one who spoke as none e'er spoke,  
but we believe him near.
2. We may not touch his hands and side,  
nor follow where he trod,  
yet in his promise we rejoice,  
and cry, "My Lord and God!"
3. Help then, O Lord, our unbelief,  
and may our faith abound  
to call on you when you are near,  
and seek where you are found:
4. That when our life of faith is done,  
in realms of clearer light  
we may behold you as you are  
in full and endless sight.

## Lenten Charge

*As you leave this space,  
May your mouth speak of God's goodness.  
May your arms hold those in need.  
May your feet walk toward justice.  
May your heart trust its worth.  
May your soul dance in God's grace.  
And may this be your rhythm –  
Again and again and again,  
Until God's promised day.  
In the name of the Lover, the Beloved, and Love itself,  
Go with courage, go with heart, go in peace.  
Amen.*

## Postlude

*Voluntary on SLANE*

Willan

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Some Prayers and Liturgies by UCC Worship Ways

Some prayers and liturgies by Sarah Are | A Sanctified Art LLC | [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org).

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## Happy Birthday to these wonderful people!

Benjamin Pfeifer March 14

Sandra Blackwood March 15

Gloria Konkell March 16

Gloria Henke March 17

Jackson Stezala March 17

Samuel Rondorf March 18

Robert Engstrom March 20

Brooke Goedel March 20

Nathan Scheske March 21

## **Thanks**

~Thanks to Dan V. and his staff for all of their hard work to restore the Pine room from the water damage last year. The Pine room is beautiful again and looks as if nothing ever happened.

~Prayers of thanksgiving. Jack, our niece's husband, is getting much stronger. A bone marrow transplant is in his near future. Thank you for your prayers.

Thanks be to God. Dick & Joan Gaeth.

~We accept with gratitude and appreciation a memorial donation from Kathleen Schroeder in memory of her mom, Ann Schroeder's birthday.

~We accept with gratitude and appreciation a memorial donation in memory of Howard Fritsch from the Gaeths and Freitags.

## **Announcements**

### **Position Opportunity**

The Pastor/Parrish/Personnel Committee would like to thank Debbie Behling for her many years of service to Christ Church as Office Administrator and as church president, council member, committee member and friend. Debbie will be retiring in June. This leaves an enormous void to fill.

The Pastor/Parrish/Personnel Committee is actively seeking someone to fill the position of Church Secretary. If you know anyone who may be interested in this position; or if you have an interest, you may check out the job description and learn how to apply at the following link:

<https://www.jobsthathelp.com/job/christ-church-office-secretary/>

If you have questions regarding the position, you may submit them to the committee via email at: [pprc@uccmke.org](mailto:pprc@uccmke.org) or contact a committee member. The committee members are Dean Kothrade, Randene Wick and Dick Gaeth. You may also contact Pastor Dan. Submitted by Dick Gaeth

### **DI SOS donations needed**

Please help by donating the following for our Friday night meal distribution:

\*Prewrapped plastic knife, fork and napkin (please tie or tape shut)

\*Fruit Breakfast/granola Bars (any flavors)

### **Volunteers Needed**

Friday night volunteers for SOS DI meal distribution at Christ Church.

It would be helpful if we could get 2 more sets of Building Reps so that volunteers will repeat about every 6-8 weeks. Just 1.5 hours on a Friday evening starting at 4:45pm.

Please contact Jim Wick for information and/or to sign up. Thanks.

## **BVCC Food Pantry Donation Requests**

URGENT!! Toiletries: Small packs of Toilet Paper & Paper Food: Pasta & Sauce

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If you should need to contact Pastor Stark, please email [pastor@uccmke.org](mailto:pastor@uccmke.org).  
Christ Church UCC, 915 East Oklahoma Ave, Milwaukee, WI, 53207.

We are currently worshipping online-only.

You can make your offering to Christ Church at [www.uccmke.org/donate](http://www.uccmke.org/donate) or by mailing a check to Christ Church, 915 East Oklahoma Ave, Milwaukee, WI, 53207

