



**First Church of Christ in Mansfield
(Congregational) United Church of Christ**

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All the Members, Ministers

Rev. Joseph Blotz, Pastor + Erik Haeger, Organist

Olivia Russell, Worship Circle Coordinator

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT + FEBRUARY 18, 2024

Welcome to Our Guests!

*We're delighted you have joined us for worship; the members are the ministers of this church...
if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask us!*

Chimes and Prelude

Call to Worship

God meets us in the night-

Before the sun rises, before the wound heals, before there are answers, before there is closure.

God meets us in the light—

Where joy is effervescent, where laughter is contagious, where flowers bloom from cracks in the sidewalk, and where people gather around the table.

God meets us at the threshold—

At the edge of the water, at the beginning of the wilderness, at the start of something new, on the edge of faith.

And if God meets us in all those places,

then surely God meets us in between- Staying with us through the wilderness.

We are not alone.

God is all around.

Let us worship the God of the here and now.

Welcome and Greeting

Hymn

Lord Who Throughout These Forty Days

CH180

Prayer of Confession

Again and again, God meets us where we are. God's love knows no bounds, which is hard for us to understand and easy for us to forget. Therefore, in confession we remember together that we are not alone. And in a unified voice, we once again ask for God's grace in that holy reminder. Family of faith, please pray with me.

God who meets us where we are— There is nowhere we can go that you are not.

You were with Jesus at his baptism. You were with him in the wilderness, And even in between, you were there, Saying aloud, "This is my beloved."

We know that you are with us too- In the good, the bad, and everything in between- But so often we act like we are alone.

Instead of coming to you with our hurt, we hold it in or cast it onto others. Instead of coming to you with our joy, we credit ourselves and offer you nothing.

How can we long for a deeper relationship with you while living like you are nowhere to be found?

Forgive our self-centered ways. Remind us that in every breath, in every step, you are here.

You are the God who meets us where we are.

Before and behind, above and below, within and around. Amen.

Family of faith, if you hear nothing else today, hear this: God is here. God sees you. God knows you. God meets you at the edge of every new beginning, And God calls you beloved.

We are washed by the water. We are called beloved. Thanks be to God for a love like that.

Song of Praise

Glory to the Creator

James Buccini

Glo - ry to the Cre - a - tor, the Christ, the Spi - rit: One; as it
was in the be - gin - ing, is now and ev - er shall be.
be, world with out end. A - men.

Prayer for Illumination

Holy God, if I am honest, faith often feels like water in my hands.

No matter how hard I try to hold onto it, some of it always slips through— Like droplets of truth running down my wrists, back toward my heart.

This human inability to hold onto you leaves me thirsty for more.

So as we prepare to read scripture,

I pray that once again, you would meet us here.

Meet us in our hope and our heartache.

Meet us in our fear and our joy,

Meet us in our cupped hands and clenched fists.

And even if the water keeps running,

And we do not have a sky-parting moment of clarity,

Or a tangible sense that you are near;

Even if we do not hear the words, "This is my beloved," Ringing in our ears,

We will trust that you are near,

Always and forever meeting us here,

Running toward our hearts.

Gratefully we pray,

Amen.

Hebrew Scripture

Genesis 9:8-17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh, and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

Psalm

Psalm 25: To You O Lord

Marty Haugen

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Gospel

Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Poetry Prayer

Remember When?

Sarah Speed

God never begins letters with the words,
"I hope this finds you well,"
For those words imply distance.
Instead, God begins God's letters to you with the words,
"Remember when?"
Beloved child,
Remember when we dipped our toes into the water?
Remember when we dove right in?
Remember when the ice cream dripped down our hands
And the cicadas sang their song,
And the seasons changed,
And the days were long?
Remember when we fell in love and the world was new?
Remember when our heart was broken?
Remember the tears?
Remember the long nights?

Remember when we laughed again and the sound surprised us?
 Remember when we marched in the street?
 Remember when we cast our vote?
 Remember when we believed in hope?
 Remember when?
 I do.
 That's what God's letters say.
 So on this day, and every day to come,
 Remember: God is meeting you.
 If you look back, you might remember when.

Reflection

Affirmation of Faith

**We believe in a God who is everywhere and right here,
 bigger than the sky and in the smallest details,
 All at once and in every moment.**

**We believe that God meets us where we are- in heartbreak and high hopes, around
 crowded tables and in quiet homes, in joy and in suffering, in loneliness and in
 connection, in sanctuaries and in living rooms, in marches and in waiting rooms.**

**We believe that nothing we do or leave undone Can distance us from God's love.
 God is forever drawing us close and pulling us in. Again and again, God meets us
 where we are and invites us into wholeness.**

Thanks be to God for a love like that.

Call to Prayer

O Lord Hear My Prayer

Taize

O Lord, hear my prayer. O Lord, hear my prayer. When I call, an - swer me. O
 Lord, hear my prayer. O Lord, hear my prayer. Come and li - sten to me.

Prayers of the People and the Prayer of Jesus

In Jesus your realm has come near to us in every place and time. Give your church throughout the world a spirit of humility and repentance; teach us to trust always in the good news of your salvation.

You have made a covenant of mercy with every living creature. Protect all the earth's creatures from destruction. Empower the work of biologists, conservationists, and science educators

All your paths are steadfast love and faithfulness. Direct the words and actions of leaders in our community and throughout the world, that they may maintain justice for the lowly.

Even in the wilderness you are with us. Walk alongside migrants and refugees crossing dangerous lands. Tend to those whose lives feel desolate. Give healing and strength to all who

In the covenant of baptism, you claim us as beloved children. Nurture us in our baptismal identity and teach us to live within it for the sake of others. Strengthen this congregation's ministries of care and concern

In baptism you join us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We praise you for all those who have died trusting in your faithfulness. Bring us with them to the fullness of your reign.

Please pray the Prayer of Jesus in whatever language is most comfortable for you.

The following are offered as examples...

**Our Father/Mother/Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts/sins/trespasses,
as we forgive our debtors/those who sin/trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

Musical Offering

Come Holy Spirit Heavenly Dove

CH248

*Offerings may be placed in the collection boxes at the entrances to our worship space,
mailed to: First Church of Christ in Mansfield UCC. Box 36. Mansfield Center, CT 06250,
or given online at www.myfcc.info*

Doxology

Praise God from whom all bless - ings flow; Praise God all crea - tures here be low; Praise
5 God for all that love has done: Cre - a - tor, Christ and Spi - rit, One. A - men!

Prayer of Dedication

God of the wilderness, we give these offerings in gratitude, rejoicing in the abundance of your gifts to us. We give these offerings in faith, trusting that you will provide for our needs. We give these offerings in hope, knowing you can use them to spread your love in this world. And with these offerings, we give ourselves; may we live with generous hearts, with open hands. Amen

Hymn

Forty Days and Forty Nights

CH179

Benediction and Postlude

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.