



**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 FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT + MARCH 10, 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

Before we were born,
Before we took our first breath,
Before the week started,
Before the year started.
Before we said, "I love you," Before we said, "I'm sorry,"
Before we figured out who we really are,
Before we figured out who we want to be, One: Before it all—
God loved us.
Unconditionally and freely,
Fully and honestly—
God loved us.
Again and again, this is where our story begins.
Let us worship God!

Welcome and Greeting

Hymn

What Wondrous Love is This

CH200

Prayer of Confession

**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.

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

**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!**

Song of Praise

Glory to the Creator

James Buccini

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

Prayer for Illumination

God of the here and now—
We have heard the words,
“For God so loved the world that God gave the 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.

Hebrew Scripture

Numbers 21:4-9

Though God provides food and water for the Israelites in the wilderness, they whine and grumble. They forget about the salvation they experienced in the exodus. God punishes them for their sin, but when they repent God also provides a means of healing: a bronze serpent lifted up on a pole.

⁴From Mount Hor [the Israelites] set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. ⁵The 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.” ⁶Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷The 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. ⁸And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look

at it and live.”⁹ So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Psalm

Psalm 107

CH755

Gospel

John 3:14-21

[Jesus said:]¹⁴ “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ “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.

¹⁷ “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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ 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.”

Poetry Prayer

Hold

Sarah Speed

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.
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—
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.

Reflection

Rev. Joseph Blotz

Affirmation of Faith

**We believe God is love— Unconditional, constant love.
We believe this love exists for all, choosing each and every one of us,
day after day, again and again and again.**

We believe that God's love is like a river. Rivers cannot help but flow toward the sea; God's love cannot help but move toward us. We are swimming in it. We believe that God loved first.

We believe that God breathed life into dust. We believe that God said, "This is good," And because we believe that God loved first, We strive to build lives that reflect God's love. May we begin again here. Amen.

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

You sent your Son that the world might be saved through him. Inspire the witness of the church throughout the world. Empower missionaries, Bible translators, and ministries of service in your name.

From east to west your steadfast love is shown. Nourish seas and deserts, wilderness areas and cities. Give water to thirsty lands; nurture spring growth that feeds hungry creatures; bless farmers as they prepare for the growing season.

You sustained your people in the wilderness. Give courage to all who lead in times of crisis and scarce resources. Prosper the work of those who aid victims of famine and drought. Bring peace in places where scarce resources cause violence.

Your mercy endures forever. Deliver all who cry to you, especially those who are hungry or without homes. Give life in places where death seems triumphant; give healing to those who are sick and comfort to those who mourn.

By grace we have been saved. Fill this congregation to overflowing with that grace, that we show mercy to others. Nourish any in our midst who are hungry, especially children, and bless our ministries of feeding and shelter. Give us patience and courage when the way seems long.

Your Son was lifted up that whoever believes might have eternal life. We praise you for all who have died in Christ. Bring us with all the saints into the fullness of your promises.

*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.**

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 blessings flow; Praise God all creatures 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*Love Divine All Loves Excelling*

CH517

Benediction and Postlude**The Week Ahead...**

Sunday, March 10	10:15am Worship and Worship Circle 3pm Take Note Concert to Benefit the First Church Roof Fund
Monday March 11	10am First Church leads Worship at St Joseph Living Center
Tuesday March 12	5:30pm Governing Board 7pm Adult Faith Formation on Zoom
Wednesday, March 13	1pm Book Group in Fellowship Hall
Thursday, March 14	12:15pm Contemplative Communion 7pm Choir Rehearsal in Fellowship Hall
Saturday, March 16	9am Take Note Workshop in Fellowship Hall 3pm Special Olympics in Fellowship Hall
Sunday, March 17	10:15am Worship and Worship Circle