

Community United Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Affiliated with the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



The Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 19, 2023:

11:00 AM

The Fourth Sunday of Lent

We are now in the Season of Lent. It is a six-week span in the church year when Christians contemplate the life and ministry of Jesus Christ—whose path ultimately led to death on a Cross. Within these six weeks, Christians are invited to fast and pray for 40 days—calling to mind Christ's 40 days in the desert, in which he wrestled with temptations of power. From the desert, Christ would come forth showing that the power of God is love. That love was put on ultimate display when Christ turned his own condemnation and death into forgiveness and new life.



Today's Readings:

Ephesians 5:8-14

Psalm 23

John 9:1-41



Theme:

Overcoming our Blindness

Pastoral Team:

Rev. Dr. Rich McCarty, Senior Pastor

Pastor Joy Johnson, Associate Minister

Whoever you are, and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here!

Welcome, Announcements, and Prayer Requests

Centering Music

Invocation

One: Grace, mercy, and peace be with you, from God our Creator, Christ our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit our eternal Advocate and Friend.

All: And also with you.

One: Holy and loving God, like a shepherd, you lead us along the path of love—and into pastures of peace. You invite us to open the eyes of our hearts to see you clearly.

All: In this hour of worship, help us to understand that spiritual vision is not reliant on our eyes—but is something revealed by wisdom, especially through Christ our Lord. Amen!

* Opening Hymn “Open the Eyes of My Heart” #656

*Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, open the eyes of my heart,
I want to see you, I want to see you.*

*Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, open the eyes of my heart,
I want to see you, I want to see you.*

To see you high and lifted up—shining in the light of your glory;
Pour out your power and love as we sing, “Holy, holy, holy.”

*Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, open the eyes of my heart,
I want to see you, I want to see you.*

*Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, open the eyes of my heart,
I want to see you, I want to see you.*

To see you high and lifted up—shining in the light of your glory;
Pour out your power and love as we sing, “Holy, holy, holy.”

*Holy, holy, holy—holy, holy, holy! Holy, holy, holy—I want to see you.
Holy, holy, holy—holy, holy, holy! Holy, holy, holy—I want to see you.*

***Opening Prayer**

***Sign of Peace**

One: The peace of Christ be with all of you.

All: And also with you.

One: Let us share with one another a sign of peace.

(You may choose to shake hands, hug, or simply acknowledge one another without physical touch based on your comfort and/or health needs.)

Confession

One: Holy and loving God, we seek to be intentional about our relationship with you. We get some things right, we get other things wrong, and sometimes we simply feel lost. So, as beloved sheep of your pasture, we come with confidence to gently face our errors. *We pray:* For those ways, small and big, in which we have missed the mark of justice, kindness, and humble faith.

All: Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.

One: For the grace we need to recover from spiritual harm, and the will to escape from religious traditions of shame and guilt.

All: Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

One: For all that troubles our hearts, and for all that we struggle to make right.

All: Loving God, move your Spirit within us. Assure us, once more, of your unconditional grace—we are forgiven! Remind us of your promise: that you are with us always, and that we are never alone. Amen.

Lenten Meditation & Candles

Song of Reflection

“Jesus Remember Me” #285

(Sing Three Times)

Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.

First Reading

The Apostle Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians 5:8-14

[F]or once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light, ⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, ¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Responsorial

Psalm 23

One: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. God makes me lie down in green pastures; the LORD leads me beside still waters. God restores my soul.

All: God leads me in right paths for the sake of God’s name. 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.

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

All: 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. Amen!

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place;
I can feel his mighty power and his grace.
I can hear the brush of angels' wings, I see glory on each face;
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.



***Gospel**

John 9:1-41

As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷ saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.” ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Other [Pharisees] said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And [the Pharisees] were divided [about Jesus]. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸ [Some of the people there] did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰ His

parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind,²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.”²² His parents said this because they were afraid of [certain religious leaders who had] already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.²³ Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.”²⁵ He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?”²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”³⁰ The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”³⁴ They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.³⁹ Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.”⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?”⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

One: This is the Gospel of Christ for the people of God.

All: Come Holy Spirit! Thanks be to God!

Message

Overcoming our Blindness

Pastor Rich



Musical Reflection

“God Help the Outcasts”

Leah Johnson

COMMUNION LITURGY

Pastor: People of God, come to the table! Christ promised that as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we not only remember him, but we commune with him by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

All: This is a table of grace. There is room around it for every soul that was, and is, and is to come. We come to the table as a people who are learning the way of Christ. We confess that we are not always right. But we share this faith: that those who trust in Christ Jesus will grow in the assurance of God's eternal love.

Pastor: And so, here at this table we take bread and cup and ask the Holy Spirit to make it for us: communion with Christ, who gave his life as the bread of heaven and as the cup of eternal life.

All: Here at this table we remember that Christ gave his entire life as an outpouring of God's love—a love that will, one day, renew all things. Amen.

Pastor: People of God, come to the table!

Communion Music

Cheryl Strecker

Pastoral Prayer & Lord's Prayer

One: The Lord be with you.

All: ***And also with you.***

One: *Let us pray:* For the prayer requests that have come to us today, whether joys or sorrows...*[prayer requests are presented]*...Holy and loving God, in your wisdom, meet all of these needs in the perfect way of your grace.

All: God hear our prayer!

One: That you, O God, would increase our spiritual vision through eyes of faith.

All: God hear our prayer!

One: For the physical limitations each of us have. May church and society work together to create a more accessible and equitable world.

All: God hear our prayer!

One: For all that we hold in the silence of our hearts, we come to you in the confidence of quiet, O God, and lift our petitions privately to you. *(Silent prayer)*... Almighty God, Sovereign of Heaven, shower your blessings upon all people! Move the mountains in our lives, or help to move us so that we might be fully at peace. This we pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray...

All: "Our Father, 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 as we forgive our debtors—and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory forever." Amen.

Offering

Our offerings are first and foremost what we give to the world through justice, kindness, and mercy—and these we can do every day. Our offerings can also take the form of financial contributions to the church to support our ministries.

**If you are not in the sanctuary, online donations can be made at:
www.communityunited.church**

Or, if you prefer to mail in a check, that can be addressed to the church at:
1011 West 38th Street – Erie, PA 16508

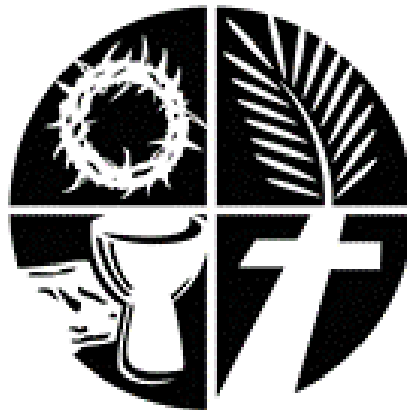
Ministry of Music and Time for Contemplation

Cheryl Strecker

Your offerings make this inclusive ministry possible. Thank you! Because of you, our church reaches through and beyond Erie: providing worship, community, and service. As you can give generously, it is well received.

*Lenten Congregational Response #576

*Make me a servant, humble and meek.
Lord, let me lift up those who are weak!
And may the prayer of my heart always be:
Make me a servant! Make me a servant!
Make me a servant today!*



*Responsive Prayer of Thanksgiving:

One: Holy and loving God, as you have offered yourself to us, we now offer our lives in your service.

All: With our gifts of time, or talent, or treasure, we give back to you! Together, we choose to serve as the body of Christ—and with you, O God, to bring healing to the world. Amen!

*Departing Prayer

One: Holy and loving God, you look beneath our outward appearance and you see your image in each of us.

All: Spirit of God, banish the blindness that prevents us from recognizing the way of love. May we see the world through your eyes, and with the compassion of Jesus Christ who redeems us. Amen!

*Blessing

*Closing Hymn “Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness” #93

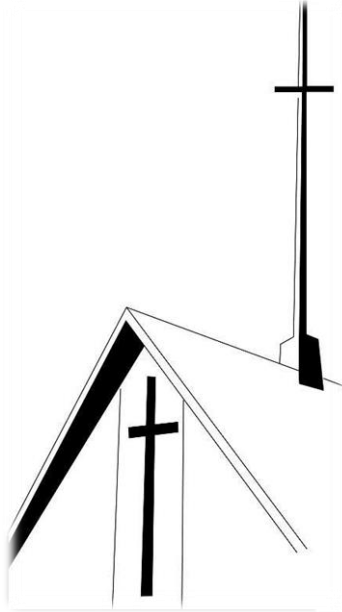
Praise the One who breaks the darkness with a liberating light.
Praise the One who frees the prisoners, turning blindness into sight.
Praise the One who preached the gospel, healing every dread disease,
Calming storms and feeding thousands with the very bread of peace.

Praise the One who blessed the children with a strong yet gentle word.
Praise the One who drove out demons with a piercing two-edged sword.
Praise the One who brings cool water to the desert’s burning sand.
From this well comes living water quenching thirst in every land.

Praise the one true love incarnate: Christ, who suffered in our place.
Jesus died and rose for many that we may know God by grace.
Let us sing for joy and gladness, seeing what our God has done.
Praise the one redeeming glory; praise the One who makes us one.



**Thank you for worshipping with us this morning at
Community United Church!**



Next Sunday:

11:00 AM

Readings:

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 130

John 11:1-45

**The Fifth Sunday of Lent:
Coming Back to Life**

***Need to contact us for prayer, conversation, or to connect
with a small group or church ministry?***

1011 West 38th Street – Erie, PA 16508

(814) – 864 – 4429

www.communityunited.church



Community United Church

THE ALTAR FLOWERS THIS MORNING ARE GIVEN TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN MEMORY OF HER FATHER, FROM GINNIE BURGER

This week:

- **Today: Service Sunday:** 12:15 PM, Prepare lunches for neighbors in need
- **Monday, March 20:** Officers Meeting of Church Council – 6:30 PM

Special Announcements:

- **Midweek Evening Bible Study:** Wednesday, March 29
- **New Members and Baptism Sunday:** April 16 (Please talk to Pastors Rich & Joy if you would like to be a formal member or associate member, and/or be baptized.)
- **Church Rally Day:** Sunday, April 23 (before and after the worship service).



WE REMEMBER THOSE IN OUR ARMED FORCES:

Jacob Snyder (Army), Nick Duncan (Army), Samantha McHenry (Army),
Chris Duncan (Marines), Matt Duncan (Army), Tyler Anderson (Army National Guard), Shelby Wescott
(Army), Mathew Anderson (Army)
and DJ Miaczynski (Marines)

PRAYERS FOR:

Anna Silvia, Kevin Bennett and family and friends, Rod and Dew Johnson, Harry Lamb, Sue Scheiwer,
Diane Walker, George Churley,
Robin Adams, Ralph Kester, John M., Todd Carrier, Teddy Long, Jimmyo, Sandy Gool, Tammy McIntyre,
Laura Stone, Jared and Priscilla Hall, Ron Celeski,
Sally Cubetus, and Annette Minich.

Council Members:

Debbie Anderson (President), Bob Martin (VP), Dina Johnson (Secretary), Janice Skelly, Mike Pruzinsky, April Knapp, Patti Rogers, Carol Rodgers, and Angel Hall