

Sunday, March 1, 2026 – Second Sunday of Lent

Welcome & Announcements

Creation Connection Refugees come to our land, fleeing flooding of their homelands, horrific wars and prejudices, and seeking freedom, as every single one of our families did. God created ONE creation, which we have been given to care for, one and all! Caring for the earth includes not just the lands and the animals, but especially our brothers and sisters, no matter their faith, ethnicity or place of origin. We are all created in God's image, and God loves us all equally.

Lighting of the Christ Candle

L: Christ is the Light of the World, the source of illumination, hope and salvation which God had blessed into the world. Jesus' luminosity shines in and with us each and every day. Today as we relight the Christ candle, we do so to honour and remember that this light of love was given for us and will never be extinguished.

ALL: Jesus illuminates our lives, our hearts and our way. Let us be true to the pathway which He sets out for us. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination Heavenly Parent, we come to you. With thanks we come to you, for, again and again, you have helped us. Again and again, you have let your light shine on us so that we could be glad and know that our lives are in your hands. Protect us on this earth and protect all who abide here, inspiring our hearts and our very essence with Your Spirit and Jesus's illumination. Amen.

Gathering Hymn To Abraham and Sarah, VU # 634

To Abraham and Sarah
The call of God was clear:
"Go forth and I will show you
A country rich and fair.
You need not fear the journey
For I have pledged my word,
That you shall be my people
And I will be your God."

From Abraham and Sarah
Arose a pilgrim race,
Dependent for their journey
On God's abundant grace;
And in their heart was written
By God this saving word:
"that you shall be my people
And I will be your God."

We of this generation
On whom God's hand is laid,
Can journey to the future
Secure and unafraid,
Rejoicing in God's goodness
And trusting in this word:
"that you shall be my people
And I will be your God."

Call to Worship

L: Today the journey begins. Are you ready?

P: There is so much I still have to do. I am not sure I'll ever be ready.

L: Let go of those things that chain you to despair.

P: Lord, help me look and see the ways in which I have abandoned you.

L: Come, let us worship and feel the power of freedom in God.

P: Open our hearts today to receive your freeing love, O Lord. Amen.

Ministry of Music Jesus Walked That Lonesome Valley

Hymn I Have Called You By Your Name, MVU # 161

I have called you by your name, you are mine; I have gifted you and ask you now to shine. I will not abandon you; all my promises are true. You are gifted, called, and chosen; you are mine.	I will help you learn my name as you go; Read it written in my people, help them grow. Pour the water in my name, speak the word your soul can claim, Offer Jesus' body given long ago.	I know you will need my touch as you go; Feel it pulsing in creation's ebb and flow. Like the woman reaching out, choosing faith in spite of doubt, Hold the hem of Jesus' robe, then let it go.	I have given you a name, it is mine; I have given you my Spirit as a sign. With my wonder in your soul, make my wounded children whole; Go and tell my precious people they are mine.
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Children's Ministry "Firebird"

The Lord's Prayer *spoken*
Children leave for Sunday School

Offering Invitation & Prayer Every time we give our offerings, as we do this morning, we experience transformation. God takes what we offer and turns our gifts inside out to show what's possible in a simple act of generosity. God, transform our gifts, and those given through PAR and online, into acts of justice and blessing for the world you have called us to serve. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

Genesis 12: 1-4a

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

Hymn *Unto the Hills (Psalm 121)*, VU # 842

<p>Unto the hills around do I lift up my longing eyes: O whence for me shall my salvation come, from whence arise? From God the Lord doth come my certain aid, from God the Lord who heaven and earth hath made.</p>	<p>God will not suffer that thy foot be moved; safe shalt thou be. No careless slumber shall those eyelids close who keepeth thee. The One who sleepeth not, who slumbereth ne'er shall guard thee, Israel, with most holy care.</p>	<p>Jehovah is indeed thy keeper true; thy changeless shade; Jehovah thy defence on thy right hand, thine own true aid. And thee, no sun by day shall ever smite; no moon shall harm thee in the silent night.</p>	<p>From every evil shall God keep thy soul, from every sin: Jehovah shall preserve thy going out, thy coming in. Above thee watching, God, whom we adore, Shall keep thee henceforth, yea for evermore.</p>
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John 3: 1-17

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things, and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven - the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Message: Beloved of God

In our reading from the book of Genesis today God tells Abraham that he has been chosen to become a great leader of his people. "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Abraham is a direct descendant of Noah, who God had chosen to renew the human race after the flood. Now Abraham is called upon to be a blessing to all peoples. Abraham's descendant Jacob in turn becomes the father to the men who will initiate the twelve tribes of Israel. Christians have chosen to include the Torah, or the initial books of what we call the Old Testament as a crucial part of our faith narrative and family, and we know from previous discussions that Jesus is a descendant of King David. I am going to posit that Abraham is indeed the direct ancestor for all of known humanity, as he is central figure in the stories of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Each religion views his role slightly differently, but for these believers Abraham is our source.

Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish Council, which typically disapproves of Jesus and his perceived threat to their power and faith structure. He comes at night, out of fear for being discovered, but also symbolically, in that all who come to Jesus come from the darkness of their lives, into the light of Jesus' person, a duality of Holy Spirit, Son of God, the Trinity. This is the view which we have been taking for several weeks now, that Jesus has come to earth to be among us, and to inspire us to grow closer to God, to repent and to live our lives of being distanced from God, especially now, during Lent.

Nicodemus and others have been astounded and deeply moved by Jesus' message and miracles: "we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." Jesus' miraculous ability to heal, to feed people from almost nothing, and so on illustrate abilities which go far beyond our reality, and Jesus concurs with their understanding.

Nicodemus is told "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." Nicodemus, representing all of us, I think, believes in Jesus' divinity and wants to follow him, but Jesus confuses him to telling him Truths which he is not yet capable of or ready to understand. This lack of comprehension is also a feature of the disciples, as this truth is simply too large and outside of any frame of reference which they might have. Jesus teaches them over and over again, as He tells us over and over again, that we must be reborn.

In this season of Lent we seek repentance and hope during these forty days of fasting and penance, preparing ourselves to witness once again Jesus' journey to the cross. As we celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion next week, and as we approach Golgotha and Easter Sunday's events, we are actively preparing ourselves to be born once again symbolically, through

our words and actions, called to be actively watching and listening witnesses. The blessings given to Abraham and all of our forebears resonate through our hearts and minds, as we, perhaps timidly and doubtfully, take our steps as sojourners on the pathway to the cross. Prepare to be changed, to be reborn, to consider yourself and your relationship with God and to pledge to fully immerse yourself in the waters and light of which Christ speaks. It's a bit like the first time that you step into the water at your favourite beach, river or pool in the spring - we are hesitant, perhaps a little afraid, and trying to avoid getting cold, but once you have entered the water, it becomes warmer to your senses, even though the water, not you, is being changed, and your awareness and perceptions refreshed. Then, having immersed yourself into the waters of God's love and truth, you feel lovingly embraced by the water, buoyed up by the liquid, perhaps inspired to try a new approach while you swim this season, with Jesus' message resonating through your being.

Amen

Prayers of and for the People Loving Creator God, we come into Your presence today with contrite hearts, remorseful and repentant. We have come into Your church this day with heavy hearts and tears in our eyes, for the senseless violence and ill-will evidenced by the school shootings of recent weeks and years, with hearts in need of healing and of being welcomed into a community of faithful believers who join You in mourning the evil that humans do. We offer up our prayers today for comfort, healing and the soothing balm of Your presence, and apologies, transformation and shame in those who enact such harms upon others.

We yearn for the coming of spring, for an end to the frozen landscape which has surrounded and frozen our world for so very long. We anticipate the thaw of our physical world, while fervently praying in a thaw for international relations, rifts in our community, and peace within our families and homes.

Behold, Christ will make all things new, and while Christ's love cannot change the past, it certainly can guide us all to healing, hope, and happiness, as hearts and minds cast aside their perversions and move ahead into a future filled with hope rather than fear and resignation.

Inspire our leaders to truly lead us into civilized, growth-oriented progress, and silence the voices of division and discord.

Lord, we pray for those in our midst and abroad who suffer illnesses, those who have or are suffering loss, and those who need others' assistance in order to survive and to thrive.

Christ has indeed called us by our names. Make us willing servants who will bravely and consciously work toward His kingdom here on earth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Parting Hymn Great is Thy Faithfulness, VU # 288

Great is thy faithfulness, God our Creation, there is no shadow of turning with thee; thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not; as thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.	Refrain Great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness, morning by morning new mercies I see; all I have needed thy hand hath provided; great is thy faithfulness, Ever to me.	Summer and winter and springtime and harvest, sun, moon and stars in their courses above, join with all nature in manifold witness to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love. Refrain	Pardon for sin and a peace that endures, thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide. Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow: Wondrous the portion Thy blessings provide. Refrain
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Commissioning & Benediction We are called, as was Abraham, to be a blessing to the world. Inspired by what we have heard today, let us deeply understand Nicodemus learning that God does indeed "so love the world" that His son made the ultimate sacrifice for us. Go forth this day, and in the days to come, Christ's hands and feet, his beating heart in this hurting world.

Sung Benediction God Be with You 'Til We Meet Again, VU # 422

God be with you 'til we meet again, Loving counsels guide, uphold you, With a shepherd's care enfold you. God be with you 'til we meet again.	Refrain 'Til we meet, 'til we meet, 'Til we meet at Jesus' feet, 'Til we meet, 'til we meet, God be with you 'til we meet again.	God be with you 'til we meet again, When life's perils thick confound you, Put unfailing arms around you, God be with you 'til we meet again Refrain
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Choral Amen