

# Glebe-St. James United Church

**Fifth Sunday in Lent**

**March 22, 2026**

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## Gathered by God

### Preparing Our Hearts for Worship

#### Welcome

Elizabeth Elton

In the name of the Holy Mystery,  
who is Wholly Love,  
we welcome you to Creator's House.

#### Thanks be to God!

Good morning and welcome, everyone, to our worship service at Glebe-St. James United Church in downtown Ottawa on Sunday, March 15th.

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I have been attending Glebe-St. James for \_\_\_\_ years. I continue to worship here because \_\_\_\_\_.

We're so glad you're here today. Whether you're a first-time guest or a longtime member, whether you are joining us in person or online, we hope you feel at home. This is a place of faith, love, and community. Glebe-St. James is an Affirming Community of Faith in the United Church of Canada We are committed to creating a safe and inclusive environment where people of all ages, backgrounds, and identities feel loved and supported. Thank you for being here.

Friends, note who is seated near you, introduce yourself and invite them to join us for a time of fellowship in Fraser Hall after the service. We also encourage everyone to wear a name tag – they are available at the entrances to the church. Our newer members have told us how important it is to feel welcome to get to know each other by name.

If you are new to Glebe-St. James and want more information, just fill out one of the green cards that are available near the entrances, place it on the offering plate or give it to one of the greeters and they will pass it into the office.

Today's worship service bulletin can be found on the GSJ website, along with a link to this week's announcements and a "donate" button to make your offering. If you are here in person, you can share your offering in the service, either in the collection plate, by e-transfer or through our website – the QR code, found on the back of the pews, will take you to the website.

## **Announcements**

This is a busy community, and lots is going on. I will just highlight a few announcements, but you will find a more complete list on our website and scrolling on the screens here in the sanctuary before and after our service.

**Queer Places** – Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 6 pm in the Lounge

**Men and Friends** will gather for their monthly potluck on March 25<sup>th</sup>.  
Dinner starts at 6 pm.

**Grocery cards in support of Refugee Housing (OMRA)** – April order goes in on March 30<sup>th</sup>. Have questions, please speak with Donna-Fay.

And now, let's acknowledge the land on which our sanctuary stands.

## **Land Acknowledgement**

Wendy Bergeron

Each Sunday, prior to our worship service, we formally recognize that all spaces in which we gather—whether for worship, work, or recreation—are situated on unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe peoples. As part of Glebe-St. James' ongoing mission, we are committed to furthering our understanding of reconciliation and developing relationships with Indigenous Peoples founded on mutual respect and awareness. The practice of delivering a land acknowledgement serves as an invitation to deepen our knowledge of Indigenous cultures and worldviews.

Two Sundays ago, Pam talked about the role of women in Indigenous culture. I was curious to learn more and came across this additional information to share with you.

Did you know that, across Canada, Indigenous women are leading one of the fastest-growing movements in entrepreneurship? Indigenous women are launching businesses at twice the rate of non-Indigenous women and Indigenous entrepreneurship is growing five times faster than the national average.

These businesses are often more than economic ventures – they are expressions of culture, rooted in community and carry generations of knowledge forward.

Let's continue to encourage Indigenous entrepreneurs such as those who joined us from the Assembly of Seven Generations in our last Great Glebe Garage Sale and our Fall Bazaar.

**Lighting of Christ Candle** Still My Soul

TLUS 108

**Still my soul, calm my roaming mind.  
Give me peace, may my heart unwind.  
Let me stay, your beloved guest.  
Take my fear, make my worry rest.**

**What I hold, let me give to you.  
Aid my strength when my storms drive through.  
When my thoughts won't let me go,  
I'll sing to you: oh, still my soul.**

### **Call to Worship**

Welcome to the weary and the worn.  
**Welcome to the wiggly and the eager.**  
Welcome to the skeptical and the seeking.  
**Welcome to the early risers and those still trying to wake up.**  
Welcome to the rule-followers and the rule breakers,  
**Welcome to those hungry for justice and those desperate for mercy.**  
Welcome to the sinners and the saints.  
**This is God's house.**  
You can make yourself at home here.  
**Let us worship our just, merciful, and faithful God.**

### **Opening Prayer**

*Refrain:*

**Grateful for the life you give us,  
thankful for your Holy Son,  
joyful in your Spirit flowing over all,  
O God of Love.**

**Grateful for the Bread of Heaven,  
thankful for your Holy Word,  
joyful in your mercy flowing,  
we will praise you.**

- 1. You are more than we imagine,  
Ancient, Holy, Living Lord\*.  
Even when we doubt your presence  
you are faithful to your Word.**
- 2. May our lives proclaim your justice,  
may our voices sing your praise.  
May our hands work in your service  
to the glory of your name.**

**Call to Healing**

Jesus once said to a crowd, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.”

Friends, none of us are without failings,  
None of us get it right all the time.  
None of us can get by without God’s grace.

In the Prayer for Healing, we acknowledge this truth.  
We put down our stones  
and we turn to God for forgiveness.

Join me in this act of transformation.  
Let us pray:

## **Prayer for Healing**

**Holy God,  
We love to live our lives by the rules.  
We love clear answers.  
We love right and wrong.  
We love swift justice.  
We love to pick up stones,  
but you show us another way.  
You welcome shades of gray and nuanced conversation.  
You prioritize mercy over legality.  
You prioritize people over tradition.  
You prioritize love over everything.  
Forgive us for losing sight of what only matters.  
Forgive us for clinging tighter to laws than to each other or to you.  
Forgive us. Soften our hearts.  
Root us in mercy, justice, and love.  
With hope for a better tomorrow, we pray. Amen.**

## **Assurance of God's Love**

Church family,  
Jesus saw a crowd ready to throw stones and invited them to choose another way.  
Jesus offered them grace, mercy, and compassion,  
and the same can be said for us.  
So hear and believe the good news of the gospel.

## **Sign of Peace**

Friends, the peace of Christ be with you!  
**And also with you.**

## **Hymn Put Peace into Each Other's Hands**

MV 173

**1. Put peace into each other's hands  
and like a treasure hold it,  
protect it like a candle flame,  
with tenderness enfold it.**

- 5. Reach out in friendship,  
stay with faith in touch with those around you.  
Put peace into each other's hands;  
the Peace that sought and found you.**

## **Listening for Wisdom**

### **Theme Conversation**

Good morning, friends!

I brought something with me today.

(Show the stones.)

What do these look like?

Let kids respond: *Rocks! Stones!*

That's right—stones.

Now, I need your help. Let's pretend for a moment that these stones are not just rocks... but they are *mean thoughts* or *hurtful words*.

Can you think of something that might feel like a "stone"?

(Invite a few responses: calling someone a name, leaving someone out, blaming someone, etc.)

Yes... those things can hurt, can't they? Sometimes even more than a real rock.

In our Bible story today, there were people holding real stones. They were very angry at a woman and wanted to hurt her.

But do you know what Jesus did?

He didn't shout.

He didn't throw anything back.

Instead, he said something very important:

"Let anyone who has never made a mistake throw the first stone."

Hmm...

Let me ask you something:

Have *you* ever made a mistake?

(Encourage hands.)

Me too.

So if we've all made mistakes... should we be throwing stones at each other?

(Shake head, invite kids to respond: "No!")

Instead, Jesus shows us a better way.

He shows us **mercy**.

Mercy is a big word, but it means something simple:

It means being kind and forgiving—even when someone has messed up.

Let's try something together.

Everyone take an imaginary stone in your hand.

Hold it tight.

Now think of a time someone made a mistake... maybe even a time you felt upset with them.

Now—slowly—open your hand...

and *drop the stone*.

(Gesture dropping it.)

When we drop our stones, we make room for kindness.

We make room for forgiveness.

We make room for love.

Jesus didn't want people to hurt each other.

He wanted people to help each other start again.

And that's what he wants for us, too.

So this week, if you feel like picking up a "stone"—maybe to say something mean, or to stay angry—remember what Jesus said.

And try to...

(drop hand again)

**let it go.**

Let's pray:

**Dear God,**

**Thank you for loving us, even when we make mistakes.**

**Help us to be kind, to forgive, and to drop our stones.**

**Teach us to show mercy, just like Jesus.**

**Amen.**

Alright—who wants to help me put these stones away so no one gets hurt?

**Peace for the children, peace peace.  
Peace for the children we pray.  
Following the path of One of peace,  
we work for healing, we work for peace;  
peace for the children today.  
Peace in the soul, peace, peace.  
Peace in the soul we pray.  
Following the path of One of peace,  
peace for the children today.**

**Introducing ...** Odawa Native Friendship Centre

Margo Williams  
GSJ CCSAC representative

**Prayer for Insight**

Holy One,  
when you speak, we don't want to miss it.  
When you bend down and write in the dirt,  
when you move through the trees,  
when you wake with the dawn,  
when you tug on your heart,  
or whisper into our dreams,  
we don't want to miss it.  
So today we pray, clear out the cobwebs in our ears.  
Quiet the steady stream of thoughts marching through our minds.  
Open up space in our hearts so that we can receive your word for us today.  
With hope we pray.  
Amen.

**Gospel** John 8:2-11

Ruth Burnett-Cole

Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and, making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women.

Now what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

This is wisdom from the gospel of John.

## **Gift of Music**

**Gospel**     Matthew 23:23

Ruth Burnett-Cole

Jesus, in a rare moment of frustration said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.”

This is wisdom from the gospel of Matthew.

## **Reflection**

Rev. Dr. Teresa Burnett-Cole

Good grief—Jesus talks about mercy *a lot*.  
So much so that it almost becomes uncomfortable.

He tells his disciples to forgive not just once, not just seven times, but seventy-seven times. He blesses the merciful. And even as he is dying—betrayed, abandoned, nailed to a cross—he prays: “*Father, forgive them.*”

At some point, we might wonder: why does he keep going on about this?  
Maybe because mercy is the thing we resist the most.

In today’s Gospel from John, mercy takes on flesh.  
A woman is dragged into public view—accused, exposed, surrounded.  
The charge is adultery, but the details are... missing.

No husband.  
No witnesses.  
No story.  
Only accusation.  
And that absence raises questions.  
Was she truly caught in wrongdoing—or caught in something more complicated?  
Was she coerced? Threatened? Trapped?  
Why is she alone in this accusation?  
But perhaps the deeper truth is this:  
this story is not really about her.  
It is about Jesus.

The scribes and Pharisees are not seeking justice—they are setting a trap.  
If Jesus says, “Stone her,” he risks violating the law’s requirements for due process—  
and perhaps even Roman law, which forbade such executions.  
If he says, “Let her go,” he can be accused of disregarding the law altogether.  
Either way, they hope to catch him.  
So the woman stands there—not just as a person, but as a prop in a test.  
And Jesus refuses to play along.

He bends down.  
He writes in the dust.  
He slows everything down.  
And then he says:  
“Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.”  
One by one, they leave.  
Not because the law has changed.  
But because something deeper has been revealed.  
Truth.  
Humility.  
Mercy.

Now, it would be easy to turn this into a simple moral lesson:  
“Don’t judge others.”  
But Jesus is doing something far more radical.  
He is exposing how easily we confuse *rightness* with *righteousness*.

In Matthew's Gospel, he says:

"You tithe mint, dill, and cumin—and neglect the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith."

You can follow every rule—and still miss the heart of God.

You can be correct—and still be cruel.

And here's where it gets uncomfortable.

Because mercy—real mercy—is not tidy.

It is not logical.

It is not fair.

It is not efficient.

Mercy is, in many ways, *brutal*.

Mercy is what we beg for when we have made a mess of things.

When we have said the thing we cannot unsay.

Broken the relationship we thought would last.

Failed as parents, partners, friends.

Mercy is what we ask for when we are staring at the ruins of who we thought we were.

And sometimes, mercy feels... undeserved.

Maybe that's how the crowd saw this woman.

Maybe they saw her as the cause of a broken home.

A symbol of betrayal.

A wound they could not forgive.

And so they reach for stones.

Because stones feel like control.

Like justice.

Like closure.

But Jesus offers something else.

"Neither do I condemn you."

And then—

"Go, and sin no more."

This is not indulgence.

This is transformation.

Jesus does not deny that something is broken.  
But he refuses to let brokenness be the final word.  
He offers her a future.  
A life beyond this moment.

And here's the truth we don't always want to hear:  
Mercy doesn't make sense.  
It doesn't balance the scales.  
It doesn't restore what was lost.  
It doesn't make us look strong or successful.  
But mercy is what makes us God's own.

Because God's justice is not like ours.  
We think of justice as punishment.  
As payback.  
As making things even.  
But God's justice looks like joy.  
It looks like the lost sheep coming home.  
The lost coin being found.  
A life restored where there should have been only endings.  
God's justice is not retribution.  
It is *restoration*.  
It is goodness multiplying in the face of harm.  
Life rising up where death seemed certain.

And so mercy becomes a kind of holy defiance.  
A refusal to believe that the worst thing is the last thing.  
A stubborn hope that there is always more to the story.  
More than the mistake.  
More than the wound.  
More than the shame.

The woman stands in that space.  
Between what has been—and what could be.  
And Jesus meets her there.  
Not with condemnation.  
But with possibility.

And what about us?  
Because we are in this story too.  
Sometimes we are the ones holding stones—  
certain of our rightness, quick to judge.  
Sometimes we are the ones in the dust—  
ashamed, exposed, afraid there is no way forward.  
And sometimes—we are called to be like Christ.  
To step into that space between accusation and mercy.  
To refuse the easy path of judgment.  
To choose the harder, riskier path of grace.

Because mercy *is* hard.  
It asks us to release control.  
To let go of our need to be right.  
To trust that God is still at work—even in the mess.

But this is where Lent leads us.  
Toward the cross.  
Toward the place where mercy looks like failure.  
Where forgiveness looks like foolishness.  
Where love refuses to give up—even when it costs everything.

And so we hear again those words:  
“Neither do I condemn you.”  
“Go... and sin no more.”  
And perhaps we might hear one more word beneath them:  
“Live.”

Live beyond your worst moment.  
Live beyond your shame.  
Live beyond your certainty about others.  
Live as people shaped by mercy.

Because the receiving and the extending of mercy—  
in the most unlikely, undeserved, and difficult places—  
is how we know  
that God is still at work in this world. Amen.

# Responding in Thanksgiving

**Hymn** There's A Wideness in God's Mercy

VU 271

- 1 There's a wideness in God's mercy  
like the wideness of the sea;  
there's a kindness in God's justice  
which is more than liberty.**
  
- 2 There is no place where earth's sorrows  
are more felt than up in heaven;  
there is no place where earth's failings  
have such gracious judgement given.**
  
- 3 There is plentiful redemption  
in the blood that Christ has shed;  
there is joy for all the members  
in the sorrows of the Head.**
  
- 4 Troubled souls, why will you scatter  
like a crowd of frightened sheep?  
Foolish hearts, why will you wander  
from a love so true and deep?**
  
- 5 For the love of God is broader  
than the measures of the mind,  
and the heart of the Eternal  
is most wonderfully kind.**

**Invitation to Give**

**Offering Hymn** Grant Us, God, the Grace of Giving

VU 540

**Grant us, God, the grace of giving,  
with a spirit large and free,  
that ourselves and all our living  
we may offer faithfully.**

## Offering Prayer

On my own  
what I have to give  
doesn't amount to much  
in the light of all you have given to me  
and in the face of so much need.  
But together as a congregation,  
what we offer you here in love  
becomes more,  
not simply added together,  
but somehow multiplied in its usefulness.  
We ask you to bless our gifts  
and with the addition of your blessing,  
just as it was with the loaves and fish,  
there is enough for all.  
Amen

**Prayers of the People** In the presence of your Holy Silence

TLUS 71

In the presence of your Holy Silence, silence, silence,  
We remember most deeply who we are. Humming...

## Prayer of Jesus

**Our Mother and 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 trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

# Sent by the Spirit

Hymn I Danced in the Morning

VU 352

**1 I danced in the morning when the world was begun,  
and I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,  
and I came from heaven and I danced on the earth;  
at Bethlehem I had my birth.**

**Dance, then, wherever you may be;  
I am the Lord of the dance, said he,  
and I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,  
and I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.**

**2 I danced for the scribe and the pharisee,  
but they would not dance and they would not follow me;  
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John;  
they came with me and the dance went on. R**

**3 I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame;  
the holy people said it was a shame;  
they whipped and they stripped and they hung me high,  
and left me there on a cross to die. R**

**4 I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;  
it's hard to dance with the devil on your back;  
they buried my body and they thought I'd gone,  
but I am the dance and I still go on. R**

**5 They cut me down and I leap up high;  
I am the life that will never, never die;  
I'll live in you if you'll live in me;  
I am the Lord of the dance, said he. R**

## **Sending Forth**

As you leave this place,  
when you meet anger, speak with love.  
When you meet fear, speak with hope.  
When you meet pain, speak with gentleness.  
But no matter what, speak this good news.  
For the good news of the gospel is:  
love and justice for all.  
It is joy that surprises,  
and nonviolence that transforms.  
The good news of the gospel is alive in the world,  
so go forth speaking.  
For if you won't, then who will?  
Thanks be to God  
for this good, good news.

## **Sung Amen**

VU 969 (Kriewald)

## **Music to Send Us Forth**

# ***End of Worship, Beginning of Service***

**Thank you for joining with us this morning.**

**Please join us, following the service for a time of refreshments and fellowship.**

## **Musical Acknowledgements**

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**613-236-0617, x 21**

## Glebe-St James: March 22 – March 28<sup>th</sup>

Monday			
	9 am – Noon	GMS: cooking with Chef Scott	GSJ Kitchen
	1 pm	Monday Crafts	Judy Wolanski's
	1 – 3 pm	GMS: Art Class	Art Room
	3:30 – 7 pm	GNAG: after school programming	Art Room & Lounge
	6 – 7:30 pm	Embers (return March 22 <sup>nd</sup> )	
	8 pm	Monday Meditation	Zoom
Tuesday			
	10 am	Chess	Sanctuary
	1:30 pm	Knitting	Lounge
	3:30 – 7 pm	GNAG: after school programming	Art Room, Lounge & Sanctuary
	6 – 7 pm	Queer Space	Lounge
	6:30 – 7:30 pm	Beavers (return March 22 <sup>nd</sup> )	Fraser Hall
	7 pm	F&A Meeting	Art Room
Wednesday			
	3:30 – 5:30 pm	GNAG: after school programming	Art Room & Lounge
	5:30 pm	Men & Friend's Potluck	Art Room
Thursday			
	3:30 – 6:15pm	GNAG: after school programming	Art Room & Lounge
	7 pm	Writing Group	Art Room
	7 pm	GSJ Choir	Sanctuary
	7:30 pm	Venturers	Lounge
Friday			
	1 - 4 pm	GMS: Art Class	Art Room
	3:30 – 6:15pm	GNAG: after school programming	Art Room & Lounge
Saturday			
	9 am – 1 pm	Exercise with Cate (2 sessions)	Fraser Hall

If you are interested in any of the above events, please contact Jennifer ([admin@glebestjames.ca](mailto:admin@glebestjames.ca)) and she will provide you with contact info.