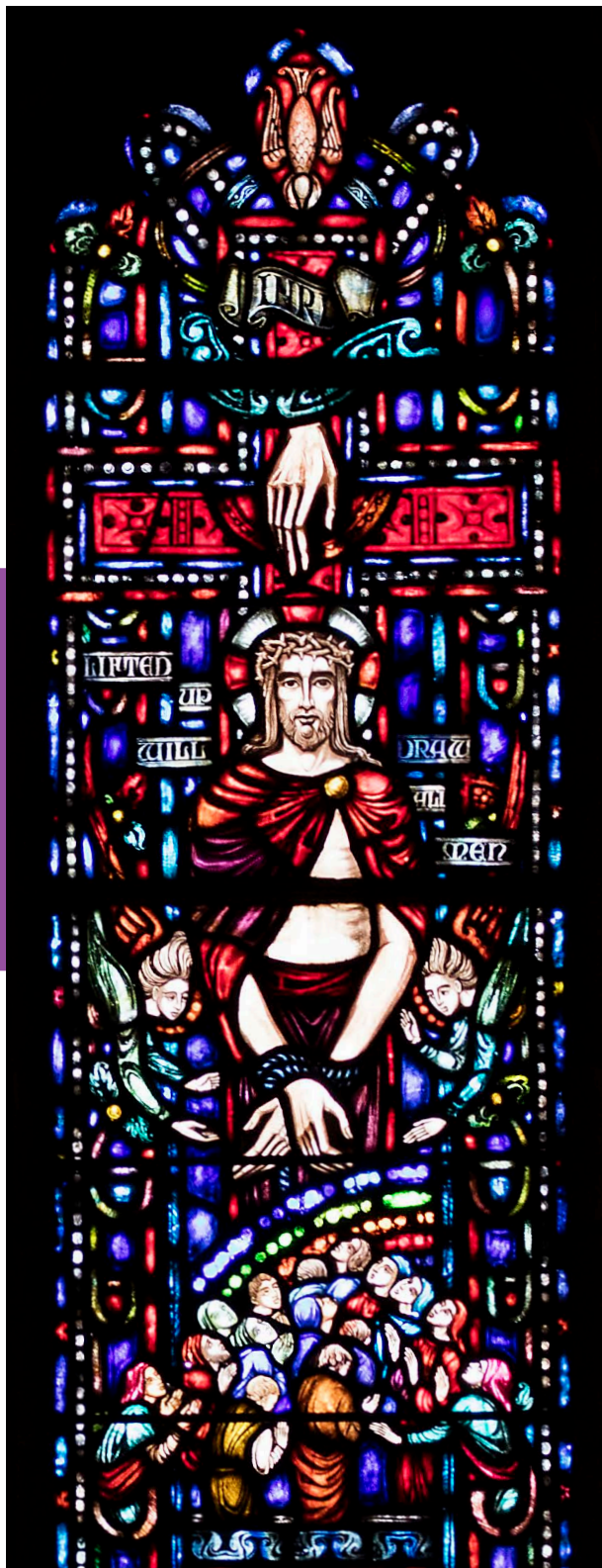
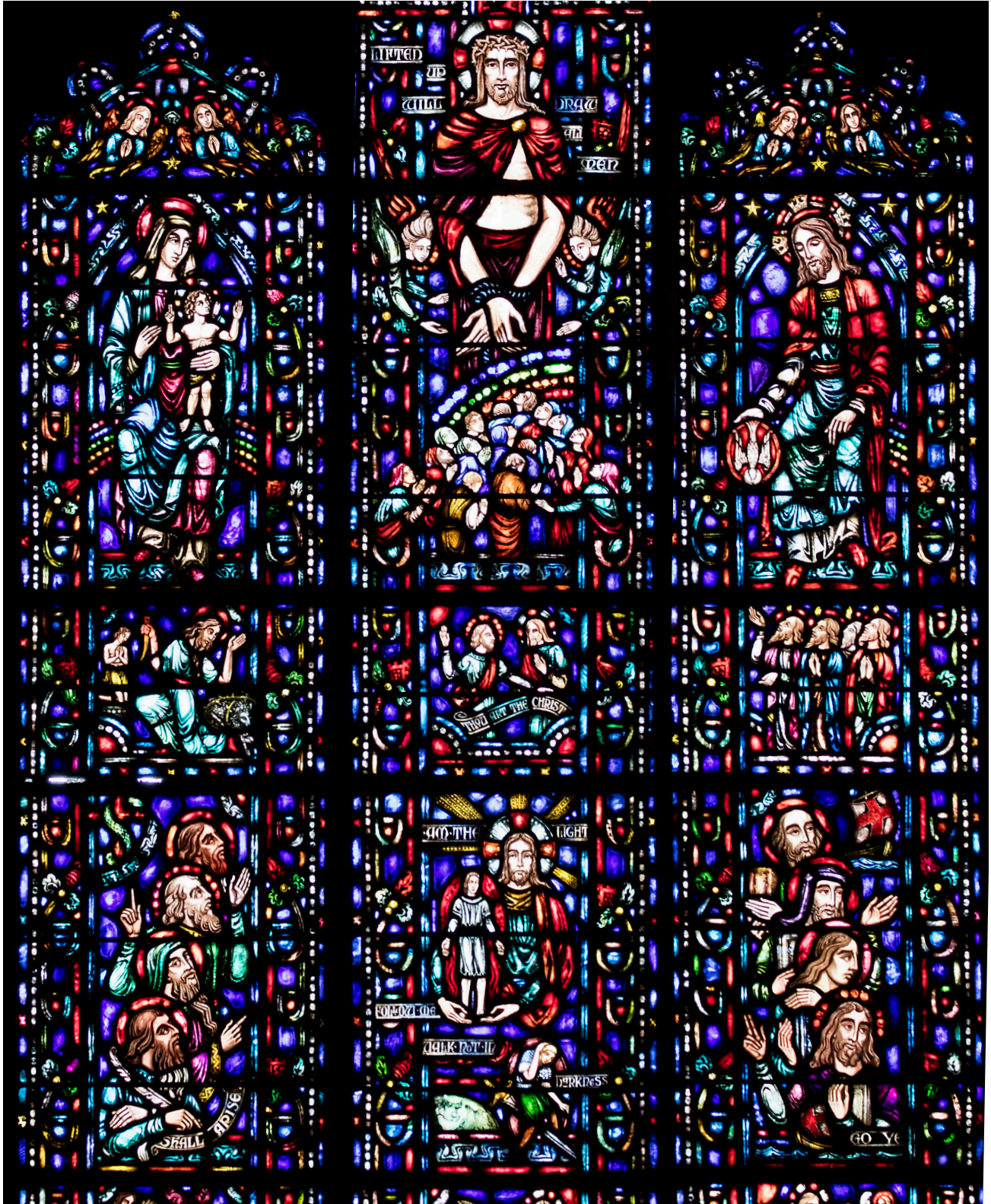


2025 Lenten Devotional

BRYN MAWR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH





INTRODUCTION

As children, my brother and I attended our Presbytery's Music Arts and Drama (MAD) Camp, where we spent an entire week preparing a musical production for our parents when we were picked up on Saturday. These were the typical church musicals that I know were also performed a generation ago here at BMPC. My second year, the musical was a creative retelling of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which most scholars now call the Parable of the Two Brothers. In a twist of gender-blind casting, I was given the role of the younger brother, and my older brother was cast as the older brother. Fortunately, it didn't stir up any latent competition or tension between us. What it actually did do was create within me a lifelong love of that parable and its message of unconditional love and forgiveness.

This is the beauty of parables. Even if we don't all have the opportunity to act out the saga of a parable on the stage, the simplicity and timelessness of the parables that Jesus told allow any of us to step inside of them, imagine ourselves as a player in the drama, and feel the frustration or elation, the comfort or the challenge, the hypocrisy or the hope that they evoke.

This year's BMPC Lenten Devotional book moves through seven of the most iconic parables told by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Each week, you will start with the text of the parable and then read how members, staff, and pastors here at the church see themselves, our world, and the life of faith through the lens of these stories. Also included this year are the images of the Parable stained glass windows that line the sides of the Sanctuary's Nave, illustrating some of the details and nuances of each parable.

As you enter this holy season of Lent, allow yourself to enter into these parables as well. Allow yourself to use them as a way to reflect on your own experiences of life and faith, as a way to prepare your heart and mind to walk through the drama of Holy Week, and as a way to plant within yourself, much like the smallest mustard seed that grows into the largest bush, a new way of living out your faith in the love and grace of Jesus Christ.



The Rev. Rebecca Kirkpatrick

Associate Pastor for Adult Education and Mission

Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Luke 18-9-14

⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

LUKE 18-9-14 - THE PARABLE & THE TAX COLLECTOR

Thursday, March 6

I am sure you know something about the two characters in this parable and how they were regarded in Jewish society. Both went up to the temple to pray, which was the central part of Jewish religious life. The respected Pharisee did not really pray to God, but, as one commentator notes, he prayed to himself, congratulated himself on how good he was, and was certainly showing off in the public square. Beyond that, he thought he was better than others and judged the tax collector. His prayer was not heard by God.

Quite differently, the tax collector considers himself before God and finds himself unworthy of God's love. He has no righteousness of his own to stand upon and remorsefully pleads for God's mercy. He prays, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" Because the tax collector was humble, Jesus says he went home justified with God.

This parable reminds us that if we are humble, God will exalt us. But what does that mean? Brother Lawrence, a renowned monk of the Middle Ages, gives me some idea. He used a meditation, probably based on this parable, to imagine himself as a wretched man, having committed many sins against God. Feeling great sorrow, he confesses his sins, asks for forgiveness, and abandons himself into the hands of God.

Furthermore, he imagines that God, full of mercy and goodness, was very far from chastening him but instead embraced him with love, invited him to feast at his table, served him with his own hands, and gave him the keys to his treasures. God conversed with him, took delight in him, and treated him like he was his favorite. Brother Lawrence said, "This is how I imagine myself in His holy presence."

Hear Jesus' words to us, "All who humble themselves will be exalted."

- David Heaton

LUKE 18-9-14 - THE PARABLE & THE TAX COLLECTOR

Friday, March 7

Seems like we live in a “put down” society. Some comedians make a living at it. Social media can serve as a big put-down machine.

Politics focuses on tearing down opposing candidates rather than on policies and solutions, adding fuel to the fire of feeling superior to those we disagree with politically.

I’ll own up to how I boast about being a New Yorker, often regarding Philly with a jaundiced eye.

It’s sad to read about bullying in schools and young girls ganging up on one another. Why do we need to do this?

We can feel superior in a myriad of ways. Where we went to school, what we eat, how we dress, the sports teams we root for, feeling more well-read than others, the music we like or any area of supposed sophistication.

To some extent, feeling superior comes from being made to feel inferior. My father grew up in the Boston area (early 1900s) seeing “Help Wanted; No Irish Need Apply” signs. It infuriated him and caused him to see himself as superior because he was Irish. He would pity people who weren’t Irish, saying: “He is such a nice guy. It’s such a shame he’s not Irish.” This attitude sometimes helped me succeed in a tough New York banking work environment -a temporary and false confidence.

What about confidence – as it relates to thinking you are better than others? It can be a fine line between genuine confidence and feeling superior to others.

Knowing I am a child of God provides me with grounded and true confidence. Knowing I am signed, sealed, and delivered in God’s steadfast love helps with the temptation to feel superior. I find the Assurance of Pardon in our Sunday service a reminder to stay humble and atone for our sins while basking in God’s unending love and forgiveness.

Life’s experiences can knock us off whatever high horse we happen to be on and serve as a reminder to take a humbler stance. Another gift from God.

- Terry Charlton

LUKE 18-9-14 - THE PARABLE & THE TAX COLLECTOR

Saturday, March 8

I love a beautiful prayer, one where every word is thoughtful and poetic; one that weaves a theme through each line. I have stacks of prayer books, ancient and modern, that exemplify this as an artform and a spiritual practice, and yet some of the prayers that have been most meaningful for me were not particularly beautiful or perfectly crafted, but they were honest. I remember a prayer led by a 6th grader before a service project. He told me he didn't know what to pray for and then offered this: "God I hate that someone's home was destroyed. I hope we can make it better, I'm not sure we can. Amen." It was a class of preschoolers who were charged with writing a prayer of confession. They were worried their words weren't "right." When the congregation read their prayer aloud it was followed by a deep sigh, everyone struck by their words: "Dear God, I said things that were not kind. I bit my friend, and I kicked my brother. I wasn't sorry, but now I am." It was a prayer said in exasperation, "God, I can't take anymore." It was a desperate prayer, said before a dangerous surgery: "Stay with her." They are prayers that are said between sobs, in whispers, and through gritted teeth; they are all prayers that dare to speak someone's truth aloud. They are not particularly beautiful, and I have yet to see them collected in a bound volume, but they powerful in their honesty.

When I read the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, I see those moments of honest reflection. I see that middle schooler and those preschoolers and so many others, uncertain of their own voice and place, and yet offering a prayer holy and perfect, a prayer to be exalted.

- The Rev. Rachel Pedersen, Associate Pastor for Children and Families

1ST SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 9

Parable of the Great Banquet

Luke 14:15-24

¹⁵One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” ¹⁶Then Jesus said to him, “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. ¹⁷At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’ ¹⁸But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’ ¹⁹Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ ²⁰Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’ ²¹So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ ²²And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’ ²³Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. ²⁴For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’”

LUKE 14:15-24 - THE GREAT BANQUET

Monday, March 10

God has set the table, God has created the world and invited us to enjoy its bounty. The creator has prepared a feast – of food, fellowship, and service – that will connect us with the kingdom on earth. We need only accept his invitation, and “those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... they will be filled” (Matt. 5:6).

In this story, the host starts by inviting the wealthiest members of society – those who can afford to buy land or oxen. So, it seems a little unlikely that a savvy businessman would use the need to check out something he has already purchased as an excuse for not coming to a feast. The third man’s excuse - that he was just married – might have seemed a valid reason at the time, according to the Law of Moses (Deut. 24:5).

But these rich men have plenty to eat, so it’s not as though the feast will supply material food they otherwise would not have. What they don’t realize is that “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). What they are missing is the opportunity to engage in fellowship with their neighbors thankful for the bounty God has already provided. At BMPC, this same invitation is extended every week; you are invited to come to the table on Wednesday nights not only to eat food you could just as well prepare for yourself at home but to feast on the fellowship of community.

“Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and take their places at the banquet in the kingdom of God. Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (Luke 13:29-30).

- Phoebe Sheftel

LUKE 14:15-24 - THE GREAT BANQUET

Tuesday, March 11

Babs and I have five children. Our number two, Jes and his wife and two young boys, live in Los Angeles. At the very young age of 6, Jes informed his mother and me of his intent to get into the film and television business. I think he may have said, "I want to be a movie star." Now, Babs and I know nothing about Hollywood. But like any parent, we set out to learn everything we could. Getting into an LA school to study film and television production is insanely competitive. Only made harder by the fact we are not related to Spielberg or Lucas or anyone of note. Jes did it on his own and matriculated at Loyola Marymount University in Santa Monica. Babs and I also didn't know much about the Jesuits, Ignatius, or the tradition and heritage of this community. But we were going to find out. And after four terrific years of countless films in all genres, it was time to graduate. There were 25,000 people at the graduation ceremony, and the Cardinal of Los Angeles was going to celebrate the Graduation Mass. All Jes's siblings came, and we were seated like parents of a graduate. At the appropriate time, graduation turned into a rather serious Mass, but as Presbyterians, we weren't invited to the "table." Instead, we heard, "Come forward for a blessing." "Everything was ready." Babs looked at me and said, "Let's get a blessing for our family." So off we went, and this young eucharistic priest wrapped his arms around my family, put his hand on the head of each of my children, and blessed us. It was a lovely moment and one I will not forget.

But I must admit, feeling somewhat disappointed that as "sharers of this table," Babs and I and our family were not invited. We are mature believers. We know the differences between the Catholic and Protestant celebrations of Communion. But I keep coming back to this passage. No excuses. "Go out to the roads and lanes, compel all people to come so my table will be filled." Scripture permits this: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are one in Christ Jesus." We are together on this journey for the glory of our Creator ... so come to the table, as it was prepared by Jesus himself, and at great cost, be blessed... all are welcome. "Anyone who has been let down, All the lost, you have been found. All who have been labeled right or wrong, to everyone who hears...Come to the table...come join the sinners, for we have been redeemed." Come.

- Rob Bickhart

LUKE 14:15-24 - THE GREAT BANQUET

Wednesday, March 12

When I was growing up, my parents and grandparents made it their practice to accept every invitation. They attended all the weddings, funerals, reunions, backyard barbecues, and birthday parties they could. As a younger, more introverted person, I did not understand the profundity of what they were doing. I sometimes declined invitations, defaulting to excuses for why I was unavailable when I was simply shy and worried about the potential for social awkwardness.

As I've grown in maturity and faith, I now appreciate the lesson my elders were teaching me by example. If it was a celebratory occasion they were attending, their presence increased the joy; if it was a sorrowful one, they helped to care for the bereaved simply by their willingness to show up and be by their side.

When I try to imagine receiving an invitation to a banquet in the Kingdom of Heaven, as this parable asks us to do, it almost feels too awesome to contemplate. My knee-jerk instinct is to revert to a version of my younger self, thinking that I am unworthy and that sitting at God's table would be overwhelming.

Then I remember the Quaker lesson I learned through my daughter's school that there is that of God in each of us. If we adopt this perspective, then every time we come into contact with one or more other people, we have the opportunity, disguised in the mundane, to honor the Divine. Through this lens, every human interaction, whether it's a grand celebration or a simple, friendly salutation exchanged with a passerby on the street, takes on new meaning and importance.

The Lenten season is traditionally marked by a call to identify a personal sacrifice we can make. This parable, though, challenges us not to do without something but rather to rise to another level in our human interactions. When we elevate our approach to other people, we are opening ourselves not only to deeper relationships with our fellow human beings but also with God.

- Julia Schott

LUKE 14:15-24 - THE GREAT BANQUET

Thursday, March 13

Isn't it odd to hear Jesus talk about excluding people from the kingdom of God? Our understanding of God is that he loves all people and welcomes even the worst of sinners. Jesus continually champions the inclusion of "the least of these": the woman caught in adultery whom the Pharisees would stone; the woman at the well; the little children who came to Jesus for a blessing; the leper whom Jesus healed; the good Samaritan—to name just a few. And yet, Jesus talks about the exclusivity of the kingdom of God on more than one occasion.

In this week's parable, Jesus' protagonist (and stand-in) declares that no one who was invited to the banquet (God's kingdom) will be admitted after turning down his invitation. Another event (and notably not a parable), recorded in Matthew 15:21 – 28, tells of Jesus rejecting the plea of a Canaanite woman—and, in fact, ignoring her entirely—to heal her daughter of demonic possession. Jesus states flatly that he was sent solely for the sake of the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," not to minister to Gentiles. "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." This bold woman answers Jesus, saying, "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table," and Jesus is forced to admit that her faith has won him over. A pastor friend of mine has noted that in this story, Jesus is "caught with his compassion down around his ankles." I wonder if all these incidents prompted Paul's statement to the Galatians (3:26 – 29) that we are "all one in Christ Jesus," regardless of where we were born or who we may have been earlier in life.

As imperfect humans striving to be better people, we can take comfort—and inspiration—in Jesus' ability to grow in his understanding of God's law, as well as in seeing his humanness and growth toward becoming a better person.

- Brian Middleton

LUKE 14:15-24 - THE GREAT BANQUET

Friday, March 14

Répondez s'il vous plait is the French phrase that in English is rendered RSVP. I don't know how to translate or even pronounce French phrases, so hooray for an easily pronounceable acronym whose meaning I do know – please respond! This parable uses imagery that encourages me to think of God's call as an invitation that ends with the message: please respond. The invitation, in this case, is to a great banquet at which those in attendance will have their appetites met sumptuously. That sounds like something not to be missed. Yet, several invitees let it be known that they will not be able to go to the banquet. The reasons offered for their absence are not just conflicts in their schedules; they are significant business or relationship reasons that lead them to say, "Regretfully, I cannot come." The story challenges me to assess not just the lesser reasons to say 'No' to God's invitation. I need to examine even the central ways I conduct my business and the most committed relationships that could stand in the way of being able to say 'Yes' in word and in showing up in response to God's gracious invitation.

Since a banquet is not a banquet without dinner guests, the story's host invites others. Those acquainted with the Gospel of Luke won't be surprised that it is those at the bottom of the social order who get invited. That crowd would appreciate having their appetites filled and their souls nourished. The message of the parable calls upon me to not let anything stand in the way of my being able to respond positively and joyfully to God's gracious invitation, for I would certainly regret missing the opportunity to have my deepest appetites filled and my soul nourished by the food and the company of a holy and joyful banquet. To what is God calling me to say, 'Yes,' on this day, in this season?

- The Rev. Kirby Lawrence Hill, Interim Associate Pastor for Pastoral Care and Senior Adults

LUKE 14:15-24 - THE GREAT BANQUET

Saturday, March 15

One of my greatest joys is teaching the pre-K and Kindergarten Sunday school students at BMPC. We retell Bible stories and then ask open ended wondering questions. These questions allow us to walk around the story – to enter it from different perspectives – to imagine ourselves in the story.

This story of the Great Banquet is a lot of fun to tell! Everyone can relate to how wonderful it is to be invited to a party, about how much we look forward to going, and who else will be there. What warmth, welcome, and joy that invitation can bring! In the parable, I can relate to the outsider, so surprised that this amazing banquet was for me – bought and sold at such a price by Jesus – for us to be able to partake in the Kingdom of God!

However, if I am honest, I remember that I am also much like the people who are too hung up on their worldly jobs, items, and tasks to stop and respond to the invitation of God. Excuses like 'I'll welcome that person next time,' 'I'll respond when the house is clean,' and 'I'll sit with them when the schedule is clear and the tasks are done.' Invitations and opportunities to be present for God and one another don't work like that. The invitation comes – but do I stop, listen, and respond?

Finally, who are the servants that have been in my life that have invited me to come to the Great Banquet? My grandmother was one, urging me to open my heart to God when I was younger. Members of this church are some, inviting me into prayer and conversations about how to be faithful in a secular world. Kids are servants, too, inviting me to wonder, explore, and see anew the stories in the Bible.

I pray that I, too, can be a servant, inviting someone to go deeper into the Kingdom of God. There it is again: listening, being open, being responsive, and honoring the will of God in our life.

God has set the table. The feast is ready for us. How do we want to show up?

- Kristyn (Kiki) McKendrick, Director of The Middleton Counseling Center

2ND SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 16

Parable of the Sower ***Luke 8:4-15***

⁴When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: ⁵“A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. ⁶Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. ⁷Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. ⁸Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.” As he said this, he called out, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” ⁹Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant. ¹⁰He said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that ‘looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.’” ¹¹“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹²The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. ¹⁴As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. ¹⁵But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.

LUKE 8:4-15 - THE SOWER

Monday, March 17

Words of the Lord have been sown plentifully for us. They are available for us to read in our Bibles, they are preached to us in sermons, we have lifted our voices and sung them in our hymns, and we probably remember hearing them recited to us by our parents and grandparents. Words of our Lord come to us here in a humble parable, so gently presented in easy-to-envison garden metaphors. It is up to us to listen and take to heart their meaning. Oh, there are many competing words and voices that fly around our world, tempting us into self-serving habits and pulling us into directions that are not Christ-like.

Ultimately, as we grow, we choose which words we want to truly believe in, and these will slowly become a seeded pathway that, in turn, forms the roots of our being. These roots shape who we are. They may indeed be the wall on which someday we need to lean. Life indeed has thorns, but strong roots can guide us through difficult times. Therefore, we must listen carefully, choose carefully, and then cultivate good earth so that the seeds of our Sower can flourish.

As we tend our personal gardens, we also should consider the seeds we, in turn, cast around us, either purposely or by chance. What messages, what seeds are we strewing, especially to our younger ones? Are they the fruits or traits we truly want to be remembered or responsible for? Thus, we have many reasons to both nurture and pass along good seeds from good words.

- Ellen Anderson

LUKE 8:4-15 - THE SOWER

Tuesday, March 18

For much of my life, when reading or listening to this parable, I have always asked myself, “Which soil am I?” Is my heart the path on which the seed superficially sits, hearing the Message but immediately losing it? Is my heart the rocky ground that initially responds with enthusiasm but in which the Message does not deeply saturate, thereby surrendering when challenging times come? Is my heart the thornbush in which the Message is choked out by other worldly concerns? Is my heart the good soil enabling me to manifest the Message in my life?

Yet, in studying this parable for our 2025 Lenten Booklet, I am struck by the thought that, while this parable is about various responses to the Message, it is really about the sower. Jesus clues us in at the beginning: it is a parable of the sower, not just of the soil. It is a parable about God as much as it is a parable about us.

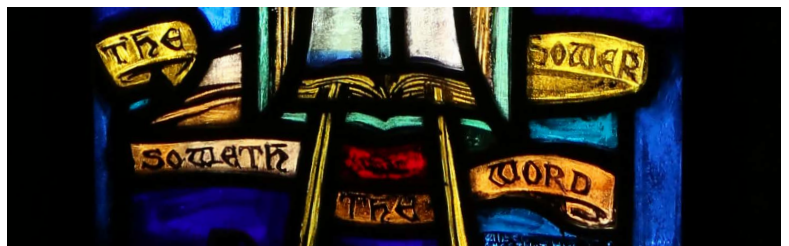
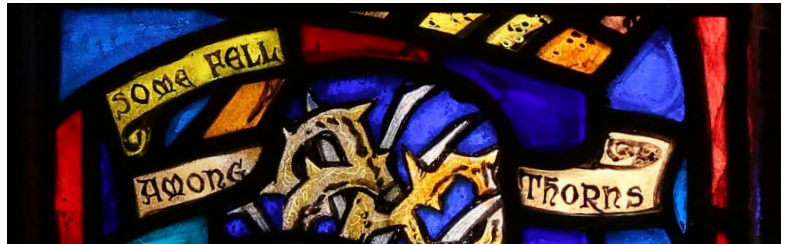
What knowledgeable and experienced sower would wastefully scatter valuable seed on unproductive ground? Yet our generous God is willing to see that there is possibility even in rocky, hard, shallow or thorny places. The productivity of the soil does not determine where the sower sows. Even knowing that His Word may not thrive in poor conditions, God scatters His Message everywhere anyway. The hard-packed soil, the rocky soil, the thorny soil, as well as the nutrient soil, are all good enough to sow. All are included in God’s Message of salvation.

Praise be to our gracious God, who loves us whether we feel good enough or not. We are each God’s beloved, and His grace and mercy extend to every single one of us. Praise, indeed!

- Judy Ehrman

LUKE 8:4-15 - THE SOWER

Wednesday, March 19



LUKE 8:4-15 - THE SOWER

Thursday, March 20

This parable in Luke 8:4-15 is a fecund source for devotional meditation. In a 2003 book, author David Healy suggested what he called the Luke Effect. That is, although the seed of an idea is important, just as crucial is the soil on which it is sown. The results of seeds being sown depend greatly on the soil on which they land, as Jesus teaches in this parable. It makes a huge difference whether the seed lands on a trampled path, on a rock, amid thorns, or on good soil.

As we read and ponder God's Word, we encounter many seeds of divine wisdom. But have we always, in our hearts, prepared the soil to receive and nurture those seeds? As I reflect on my devotional life, I've found the Luke Effect quite relevant. If I'm busy, worried, or distracted, my heart becomes impervious: I can read the Bible, and it will have almost no effect on me. The divine wisdom runs off me like water on a duck's back.

But if I purposefully clear my mind and do my devotions when there are few external distractions—say in the wee, small hours of the morning, when the busy world is hushed—then I find the seed of God's word falls on fertile soil. In order to best nurture the seeds of scripture, I prepare my mind and heart to receive those seeds. So, I begin my devotions in a quiet time and clear my mind of distractions from within and without to prepare the soil of my heart to receive and nurture God's wisdom.

- Joe VanderVeer

LUKE 8:4-15 - THE SOWER

Friday, March 21

For so many reasons, stories are always open to interpretation. Sometimes the storyteller may struggle with the details, and the point is not clear. Sometimes the listener does not absorb the details well and becomes confused in a later retelling of the story. And sometimes a group hears and interprets the same story in vastly different ways, creating a wonderful opportunity for discussion, which can include agreements and disagreements.

I remember being quite young in Sunday school and hearing the Parable of the Sower for the first time. As a child, I was not able to make sense of how the seeds could flourish in different ways and still not be pleasing to Jesus. In hindsight, being confused about the intent of the story is integral to it, as Jesus' disciples ask what the point of the story really is. In fact, it is quite reassuring that Jesus is happy to rethink the story and make sure its point is understood. The mark of a good teacher!

The opportunity to teach or share a story is frequent in conversations with my spouse, children, friends, and many others. Though my words may not always be in the form of an extraordinary metaphor acting as the Word of God, we as humans spend so much time each day connecting with others by sharing experiences we have had or wanting to learn about the experiences of others. So, these conversations create many opportunities to share something, as well as the chance to share it in a different way. And Jesus sets that model so early in this Parable.

- Edward Landin Senn, Assistant Director of Music

LUKE 8:4-15 - THE SOWER

Saturday, March 22

The writing from Luke made me think about the phrase ‘Grow where you’re planted.’ Upon reflection, applying this to my own life, I’ve been blessed and lucky to be raised in a stable home with parents who spent a lot of time raising my siblings and me with faith in God and a strong moral compass. I’ve also been blessed with the ability to travel to many different places in this country and around the world. I’ve met many people raised in various ways with other faiths and people who have not had the opportunity to be in the best environment to grow and flourish in their faith, making a difference throughout one’s life. All of these experiences throughout my travels have increased my gratitude for the seeds that have been planted in my life by my family and the community where I was raised. This has allowed me to belong to a strong faith and continue to grow in the future. Like a strong plant, my faith has been well-tended and well-tested and continues to grow through consistency and resilience. I can only hope that my current faith, strong foundation, and family roots fuel my strength in my future environments when I set off from my family to lead my own adult life and what I carry with me to endure for a lifetime with God in my life. As I move forward, I aspire to plant seeds of kindness and compassion wherever I go, hoping they flourish and inspire others.

- Eli Press, Youth Elder

3RD SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 23

Parable of the Good Samaritan *Luke 10:25-37*

²⁵Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” ²⁹But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” ³⁷He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

LUKE 10:25-37 - THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Monday, March 24

These verses are the essence of the Christian faith. What is most important? To love God and to love neighbor. How are we to love God? By recognizing that there IS this active force in the universe that loves us and wants to be loved in return. And to give our ALL to that relationship for our own good. Because it will sustain us, which has certainly been true for me.

Yet at the same time that we are to love God, we are told that there is more to it. Jesus reminds us that we are to obey what is already written (the Law): we are to love God AND love neighbor. Equal emphasis. We are to revere God by loving others, by showing care, and by offering ourselves in kindness. To ANYONE in need; not selectively. The victim in this story is anonymous...our neighbor is EVERYONE.

It doesn't matter who we are. Power (the priest) and position (Levites) don't make us better in God's eyes. It's a Samaritan - someone who would have been despised and considered unclean by the Jews - who comes to the rescue here. Someone not "righteous" does the righteous thing. In other words, we are ALL worthy and ALL being called to offer mercy where it's needed. And to give of ourselves freely and generously. Why? Because God tells us that's our purpose in life. And it's how we can be obedient to God's purposes for us and find favor with God.

And why? Whoa....we are told the "reward" is eternal life. In other words, if we just LOVE, both God and neighbor, death has no sting and we need not be afraid of it. How lovely is that?

- Donna Barrickman

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LUKE 10:25-37 - THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Tuesday, March 25

Penning these words in his “songs of experience,” Paul Hewson (the modern poet and minor “prophet” known as Bono, lead singer of the band U2) reflects on a faith journey filled with bends that bring mystery, motivation, and renewal:

The road, no road without a turn and if there was

The road would be too long

What keeps us standing in this view

Is the view that we can be brand new

As a street busker turned global activist, Bono sings truth to power, challenging the hypocrisy of champions of the poor. Unlike him, I don’t preach from concert stages. Yet, we all walk this road—what soul-searchers of all stripes might call the Camino, or “The Streets That Have No Name.”

Life’s winding path grants limited views, disclosing our fate only with each dogleg. Along the way, faith invites us to pause, recognize fellow journeyers, and develop mercy for one another. Faith, for me, blooms not in the “destination” but the here and now.

Hairpin turns remind us that we’re not alone. My habit is to brace for curves, but I’m becoming more optimistic, feeling balanced about what lies ahead: the promise to be brand new. Before I get there (if I ever do), the Gospel teaches that through shared experience—service, struggle, solidarity—we become neighbors: priest, Levite, Samaritan, stranger. We are them; they are manifest in us. We do as they do or ought. With goodness today and a resolve to be better tomorrow, further down the road.

Wayfarer Jesus walks with us, often ahead or beside, through the twisty turns. And so, we trek onward, blazing, stumbling, orienteering, reversing, as faith reveals Christ in our neighbor, whom we’re called to love as we love Jesus and ourselves. That’s the journey, upward in mercy—not for, not to, but with.

Eschewing the race, let’s sojourn. Won’t you be my neighbor?

Ambling and adventurous. #BrandNew.

- Seth Pidot

LUKE 10:25-37 - THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Wednesday, March 26



LUKE 10:25-37 - THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Thursday, March 27

This parable teaches us Christ's obligation to love individuals in distress. This Church, of course, has many ministries loving victims of all kinds of distress. We help them upstairs in the Middleton Counseling Center, in the neighborhoods of Philadelphia, and in support of multiple missions overseas.

My own experience of unloved neighbors in distress ranges from "undocumented" immigrants in Philadelphia and Delaware to refugees at our infamous "Southern Border" to Congolese, Afghans, Pakistanis, and Iraqis in Greece. Some are teenagers fleeing grinding poverty, dead-end futures, or deadly gang violence in El Salvador and Guatemala. Others who, if they had stayed home, would almost certainly be dead—for example, a gay couple from Russia, a Mormon family from the South of Mexico, Afghan and Pakistani couples fleeing "honor killings" by fathers avenging their daughters' unapproved marriages and an Afghan sought by the Taliban for his role in promoting universal education.

Each of these neighbors has their own compelling, often horrific, story of persecution, deprivation, abuse, and hardship, but they all share a common experience -- a world that doesn't want them.

In America, we have erected arbitrary, unloving barriers to entry and safety for most refugees. For anyone who enters our immigration system, the rules and procedures are so byzantine that, without sophisticated legal assistance, the chances of gaining legal status are minimal. For an immigrant living here without legal status, there is the constant fear of arrest and deportation.

The European Union doesn't love its neighbors any better. A refugee in Greece, for example, may be given one day to prepare for a mystifying asylum hearing. A refugee who survives a perilous boat crossing from Turkey, as most of them in Greece have done, will be sent back to first apply for asylum in Turkey, although Turkey rarely even considers asylum applications. EU countries also strictly limit how many asylum-qualified refugees they will take.

Returning to Jesus' Good Samaritan parable, I am constantly stricken by how much we, Americans and our fellow Europeans, are like the unloving Pharisee and Levite of that parable. How surely Jesus has called me, and you too perhaps, to love these refugee and immigrant neighbors of ours.

- Kent Walker

LUKE 10:25-37 - THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Friday, March 28

A Roman Catholic colleague once told me that the problem with us Presbyterians is that all our discipleship is done from the neck up. Of course, this doesn't apply to all Presbyterians, and certainly, there are other denominations who could be credibly accused in the same way. I responded that right thought will always lead to right action. My colleague wasn't too convinced, and I'm not sure I was either.

I'm lucky to have had jobs that enable me to say I am caring for my neighbor in the ditch. I could show mercy by building houses destroyed by Hurricane Katrina or serving vulnerable Philadelphians and getting paid. But the question is rightly asked, "What have you done for me lately?" More to the point, would I perform what my Catholic colleague calls corporal works of mercy if I wasn't paid to do them? If they cost me time and money, not to mention emotional labor? Have I too readily assented to the belief that direct service is for the young and I, in my middle age, now must do thought work and management?

I am hung up on Jesus' cliffhanger words, "Go and do likewise." They are at the inflection point between right thought and right action. Having understood what is right, will the lawyer put it into practice? Will I? The text is silent on the lawyer's next moves, but I'm stuck wondering what mine will be!

Lent, with all its embodied practices, is a time to live like our critic is right: maybe right thought does not always lead to right action. Maybe we show mercy at great expense and, in doing so, discover a new love for our neighbors and enemies. It's worth a try!

- The Rev. Andy Greenhow, Interim Associate Pastor for Youth and Their Families

LUKE 10:25-37 - THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Saturday, March 29

What made the Samaritan traveler a neighbor to the man who was beaten and robbed by thieves? I find this clue in the story Jesus tells a lawyer who wants to know, “Who is my neighbor?”

“Seeing him, he was moved with pity.”

The verb here translated “was moved with pity” is related to the word for intestines. It is sometimes used literally in the New Testament but is more often used metaphorically to talk about deep emotions. Where English speakers talk about the heart, Greek speakers of the first century often talked about the “innards.”

In Jesus’ tale, the Samaritan experienced a feeling deep inside himself when he saw the naked man lying half dead by the side of the road. So he stopped where others had walked by. It was his capacity to feel for this poor victim that led him, a Samaritan, to become a neighbor to a Jew.

Samaritans had grudges against Jews that went back centuries. The Jews did not consider the Samaritans to be proper worshippers of God. Most notably, a Jewish king had destroyed the Samaritans’ temple many years ago. Yet moved with compassion, this Samaritan reached out a helping hand.

We like to think of ourselves as the Samaritan in the story. Certainly Jesus encourages his interlocutor, and by extension us, to “go and do likewise.” But what can the story teach us if we imagine ourselves as the victim? What do we learn when we contemplate how the people thought to be role models ignored the wounded man’s need, while the one who had the least reason to be neighborly was “moved with pity” and became a neighbor?

- Joshua Yoder

4TH SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 30

Parable of Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32

¹¹Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²²But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate. ²⁵“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ ³¹Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

LUKE 15:11-32 - THE PRODIGAL SON

Monday, March 31

As the older brother in a family of two children, I find it easy to identify with the elder brother in the parable and his feelings of aggrievement upon finding his father celebrating the return of his younger sibling. The elder brother wanted recognition for his loyalty and hard work, viewing his father's celebration of the prodigal son as a personal insult. Yet, the father's reaction—marked by grace, forgiveness, and unconditional love for both his sons—serves as a reminder that my perception of mistreatment can sometimes be unnecessarily heightened.

When I feel slighted or offended, I need to ask myself, "Is my sense of being wronged appropriate, or is my ego causing these feelings?" More often than not, it is the latter.

In such moments, I need to recall how God has worked in my life. God is in control and has always been faithful to me. Clinging to resentment simply prevents me from experiencing the fullness of God's grace. I must surrender these feelings of mistreatment to God.

When I acknowledge this need and remember Christ's example of humility, my feelings of being wronged gradually diminish. Focusing on the slight obscures God's grace, which extends not only to me but to everyone.

The elder brother's story reminds me to take every aspect of my life and let God control it. Changing my focus from the source of my grievance to God's mercy, compassion, and forgiveness opens a path for God to exalt me in due time.

- Stephen McConnell

LUKE 15:11-32 - THE PRODIGAL SON

Tuesday, April 1

The parable of the prodigal son has provided artists of all media an opportunity to reflect on this story. Two interpretations present us with differing views of the story – at least for me.

This spring, Eric and I attended the Philadelphia Ballet’s magnificent performance of George Balanchine’s “Prodigal Son.” Choreographed in 1929 when Balanchine was only age 25, the ballet captures the exuberance of the son in his new freedom as he leaves home – joy and athleticism in his dance. The ill-intended comic, almost robotic Goons lead the son astray into a dissolute life in which the son’s material and spiritual fortunes are squandered. Stripped of his means of survival, the son drags himself home where his father, standing erect and unbending, waits for him, and the son hauls himself up into his father’s arms, curled in a fetal position, hanging from his father’s neck.

Painted around 1667 towards the end of his life, Rembrandt’s “The Return of the Prodigal Son” depicts the father entering into the son’s sphere, bending to shelter the ragged son, with two hands pulling the son to him, one hand a soft, tender maternal one and the other hand a strong, protective paternal hand.

Luke describes the father as running to greet his returning son, and, to my mind, Rembrandt captured the grace and love that God extends to all of us, no matter our condition, by God’s constant, unchanging, and eager presence.

Regardless of our reception of the grace offered, God is ready to meet us where we are – in the manger at Christmas, on the cross, and on Easter Sunday. Luke and Rembrandt remind us that we also stand in God’s and Christ’s shoes, running to welcome home our children, grandchildren, community members, and the lost and marginalized, no matter their condition or ours.

- Lindsay Johnson

LUKE 15:11-32 - THE PRODIGAL SON

Wednesday, April 2



LUKE 15:11-32 - THE PRODIGAL SON

Thursday, April 3

After a brief time away, I returned to worship and was met with a reminder of God's love through the warm embrace of the church family. The smiles that greeted me, the gentle jokes about my absence, and the heartfelt rebukes from those who thought I should have informed them reminded me of something profound: the church is not just a building; it is a family.

In those moments of welcome back, I saw the importance of small steps. New chapters in life or some of life's challenges may cause us to pause, falter, or even be away, but what matters is trying again, even imperfectly.

I accepted that it's okay to come to church for the singing, the sermon, or even the cookies and conversations. I learned that as much as I depended on seeing others around, there were people who were counting on my presence, too. What keeps me away might be different each time, but I have come to realize that every step toward God is a step in the right direction.

The beauty of the church lies in the wonderful individuals I have met here. We are not perfect (arguably, some are), but together, we reflect God's grace. We laugh, we weep, we worship, and we welcome. In this shared experience, I find a home, a place where God's love is tangible in the hugs, smiles, rebukes, and nods from afar.

So, I will keep trying. I will keep taking those seemingly small steps and continue to believe that the church is more than just a place—it is you and me.

- Ibukun Ogunjimi

LUKE 15:11-32 - THE PRODIGAL SON

Friday, April 4

This parable is relatable as I am the youngest in my family growing up. I have a terrific father and a wonderful older brother. I may not have received the fatted calf or comfortable robe from my father, but, instead, the third family car to be used solely at my discretion. To this day, I am constantly reminded of this “privilege” from my older siblings. I could drive this car to my activities, see friends, and transport myself back and forth to college (my parents were simply too tired to carpool me after doing so for my older three siblings). I would return home from college with a car smothered in Central NY rock salt and snow grime, possibly a fresh ding on the body, low on gas or traceable amounts of oil. On the other hand, my brother had successfully navigated a rigorous architecture program at a demanding academic institution in Pittsburgh. To return home for breaks, my tired brother had to find his own way back. Usually, my brother had an arduous bus trip with many stops or a partial car ride to somewhere mid-state and then connected with a train for the rest of the way home.

This biblical passage ends happily ever after. The father is benevolent, the youngest son gets redemption, and the oldest son receives a life lesson. I am curious about what happens to these three from this passage in the days, weeks, and months that follow. How do all three characters move on from this lesson? Do they experience any changes? Does the younger son boldly take advantage of his second chance? It is this reflection that causes me to again ponder my own situation.

I transform myself from the so-called prodigal son in the past to the father I am in the present. Can I constantly provide unconditional love to my children, as inspired by the Lord’s love for us all? Do I resist the urge to wallow in disappointment after any setbacks? The Father from the passage inspires me to always walk together with my children (and loved ones) as God does with each of us.

- Ted Collett

LUKE 15:11-32 - THE PRODIGAL SON

Saturday, April 5

I relate to the prodigal son's brother. After having spent his life tirelessly obeying his father, the older brother feels angry at his father's joyous and extravagant reception of the prodigal son. He feels that he is more worthy of such celebration, and he grows jealous.

Similarly, as a first semester senior, I often compare myself to others. Even though I try not to care, I have become very stressed about college admissions. Right now, it feels like getting into a good school will prove my worth as a student. I worry that if I do not get admitted somewhere I feel confident about, my hard work in high school will have been fruitless. Unfortunately, I sometimes feel jealous of my classmates who have been admitted to prestigious colleges.

However, just as the father in the parable assures his elder son, I know I will end up where I am meant to be. Even if I do not go to a prestigious college, all of the knowledge I have gained in high school will still be meaningful to me. In addition to learning subject matter, I have learned how to be a better studier, artist, friend and family member. And, all of this I will carry with me no matter where I am next year. Furthermore, my classmates who have gotten into amazing colleges are all extremely deserving. They have worked hard, learned a lot and inspired me in many ways.

Additionally, as the father loves his sons unconditionally in the passage, even his wayward son, I am blessed to have a family who will love me no matter what. Regardless of the outcome of college admissions, my family will support me.

- Maeve Daley Gibson, Youth Elder

Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus ***Luke 16:19-31***

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ ²⁷He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ ³⁰He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

LUKE 16:19-31 - THE RICH MAN & LAZARUS

Monday, April 7

Luke's Jesus is deeply committed to the poor. The beatitudes in Luke name the reciprocating blessings and woes (Luke 6: 20 & 26). Other parables warn of subsequent adverse events in the lives of the rich and privileged and entitled, like the rich man who built more barns for his growing possessions, only to die unexpectedly.

I have long considered that Dickens' figure of Marley's ghost, who returns to warn Scrooge of the consequences of his indifference to the plight of the poor, is modeled on the unnamed rich man. Dickens' story ends on a more hopeful note, with Scrooge's acceptance of his obligation to help those who suffer, although he is silent about the subsequent fate of Marley's ghost, who did the beneficent act and warned Scrooge of the consequences of his insensitivity and of his own prior neglect of the poor.

Lazarus is not only poor but infested with sores. This made him in life not only a pathetic figure but also, in his times, someone whose illness was odious and contemptible.

The rich man's motivation for ignoring Lazarus is unclear: was it contempt and loathing for such a piteous figure, or was it mere indifference to the needs of the wider world and the opportunities he ignored to provide comfort and mercy? He has a late revelation that he needs to spread the word to his surviving relatives to serve the poor. His final act is one more attempt to draw upon his privileged lifetime connections and appeal to Father Abraham, who merely reminds him of his lifetime disdain or indifference to suffering at the gates of his home. We cannot discern whether his motivation is to help the poor or protect the well-being of his surviving relatives.

This parable has some dangers. Mere pity for the poor and empty theological nostrums that promise afterlife rewards can invite empty gestures to the real-world needs of the poor.

The bottom-line message is clear: to Jesus, the poor have a claim on us as individuals, as believers, and as a society. This claim is grounded in their status as poor. Jesus is scathing in his judgment of those who neglect, ignore, or have contempt for the poor. He draws no distinctions to who the "deserving poor" are-not their gender, ethnicity, or immigration status. And the previous loathsome sores are a reason for engagement and not for neglect or avoidance. Although policy specifics are lacking, those who would follow Jesus know from this parable and others that this obligation is inescapable.

- Rich Allman

LUKE 16:19-31 - THE RICH MAN & LAZARUS

Tuesday, April 8

Themes that resonate with me in this parable are seeing, hearing, and a call to love and serve others. There is an urgency in the call with a strong warning that time may run out, and it will be too late to act.

The rich man failed to “see” or “hear” the distress of Lazarus, a person right at the man’s gate with such needs that even the dogs came to lick his sores. The rich man was fully consumed with himself and neither “heard” nor responded. The metaphor of burning in hell makes plain what it means to be too late to act.

Searching my life story for situations to learn from this parable, two come to mind. One, the joy of using our gift of hospitality to serve others; the other, great sadness in a broken relationship.

The first is how my husband Frank and I have opened our home and cottage for extended periods when friends, family, and others have been without housing due to fire, relocation, financial circumstances, etc.; we have felt a call to respond in those situations and have seen God acting in the resulting relationships.

Sadly, in contrast, I have a broken relationship in my family that has intensified over the past few years because of widely different political and theological beliefs, creating a gulf that seems impossible to cross. Even with agreement to avoid these topics and repeated attempts to communicate in love, nothing has worked. I pray for a breakthrough before it is too late.

Merciful God, thank you for your abundant love that covers all things. I pray for eyes to see, ears to hear, and the love and courage to act in response to your call. When my actions fall short, as they surely do, I pray for your grace and mercy to stand in the gaps. Amen

- Dottie Bowen

LUKE 16:19-31 - THE RICH MAN & LAZARUS

Wednesday, April 9



LUKE 16:19-31 - THE RICH MAN & LAZARUS

Thursday, April 10

Role reversal – a classic pattern. My favorite AI app calls this a chiasmic structure where ending events mirror beginning ones around a central turning point. The parable’s mirroring is strikingly precise: the rich man’s feast transforms into thirst, his purple robes into yellow flames, his overlaid table into tormenting emptiness. Meanwhile, Lazarus’ crumbs become abundance; his suffering turns to comfort, and abandonment becomes Abraham’s embrace.

Appealing to our innate sense of justice, the story powerfully illustrates a favorite theme of Jesus - that the first will be last and the last first. Would it work without the arbitrary fixing of the great chasm? My science mind wonders, “How did the chasm form? Is this part of God’s rulebook for heaven? Or does it emerge from some physical law of eternity?”

But those questions eventually fade before what, for me, is the story’s emotional core: the rich man’s belated turn of heart. It’s a moment of conversion - a flash of clarity where he recognizes his deeply flawed life choices and his earthly self-absorption transforms into genuine concern for his five still-living brothers. Perhaps he hopes that saving them might bring him some relief, the spiritual equivalent to that denied drop of water.

The emotional gut punch is it’s too late – another of eternity’s apparent rules places a space-time limit on repentance. His words “I beg you” hint at his deep anguish, regret, and helplessness at being unable to warn them.

Am I the rich man? Of course. My comfortable Main Line bubble makes it SO easy to look past the suffering of others.

What should be my prayer? The first verse and chorus of an old hymn comes to mind –

*“Open my eyes that I may see
glimpses of truth thou hast for me.
Place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.*

*Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me,
Spirit divine!”*

- Paul Burgmayer

LUKE 16:19-31 - THE RICH MAN & LAZARUS

Friday, April 11

“Poor man Lazarus, sick and disabled!” Singing in the Sanctuary Choir, I have been confused by the lyrics to this African-American spiritual. I knew the story told in John 10:28 of Lazarus’ death and resurrection, but the Lazarus in this parable was less familiar. There are many similarities between the two passages, from their foreshadowing of Jesus’ own pain, death, and resurrection to the agency of concerned siblings. While the parable in Luke reads as a straightforward “last shall be first,” “reap what you sow” morality tale, it also sparked for me a deeper message around faith and miracles.

I never really believed in miracles, except in an “airy fairy” kind of way, until my brother got a shadow on his lung x-ray. Then, my family feared the worst for him, as a heavy smoker. In an anxious grasp for comfort, I randomly seized my Bible, which fell open to John 10:28. It seemed to speak to our situation and fears, launching confident prayers that all would be well. Was his cure a miracle? It has always felt that way to me, undergirding my faith.

In this parable from Luke, what perhaps matters more to the rich family’s fate than sin and pride is their lack of faith. Does the rich man really believe the sight of a resurrected Lazarus will change his brothers’ life decisions and judgment, or is he grasping at straws? After all, if true faith lay behind his request for a miracle, would hell have been his final destination? The prophets and Saints have always been there, pointing the way with pronouncements, miracles, and signs. That this Lazarus’ faith lifted him out of suffering to join them is a miraculous match for Jesus’ journey and, hopefully, ours. Thank God for such unmerited grace through Christ’s sacrifice.

- Anne Chamberlin

LUKE 16:19-31 - THE RICH MAN & LAZARUS

Saturday, April 12

For me, this story served as a powerful reminder that no matter how successful we are, or how much material treasure we amass during our brief time on earth, we won't be able to bring it with us after we pass away. I want to start doing a better job of trying to honor God by having more of a heart posture of gratitude and trying to serve God with blessings like Lazarus did. However, I often find myself falling into a scarcity mindset or falling into the trap that I really do "deserve" the [insert whatever I want to buy in moment] to justify my purchase. I realize that this heart posture of generosity with our possessions is a very counter-cultural mindset in a culture that tells us it's always better to buy more. You don't need me to tell you that companies and advertisements try to convince us, hundreds of times per day, that we desperately need the newest, brightest, shiniest thing to bring us joy. But maybe those purchases and possessions are only a temporary band-aid on a larger issue. Maybe we're trying to fill a larger need for joy, hope, comfort, satisfaction, and peace that only God can truly bring to our souls. I've fallen into this trap countless times, thinking that new clothes, skincare, makeup, or books will fix whatever internal issue I'm struggling with. While it does give me a brief surge of dopamine, it can also leave me feeling even more empty and broken because we're turning away from God, and not spending that critical time with the ultimate healer and sustainer when we should be. My prayer for us this Lent is that we would always and only turn to God to fix God-sized issues that we're tempted to fix with solutions that are temporary, insufficient, and maybe even harmful to us in the long run.

- Kylie Liggett, Youth Deacon

PALM SUNDAY - APRIL 13

Parables of The Mustard Seed and Yeast Luke 13:18-21

¹⁸He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? ¹⁹It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.” ²⁰And again he said, “To what should I compare the kingdom of God? ²¹It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

LUKE 13:18-21 - THE MUSTARD SEED & YEAST

Monday, April 14

A mustard seed. Three words spin me back to a vivid Sunday morning childhood memory. Starched dress on, Mary Janes buckled, and my mother smiling at me as she affixed a silver chain around my neck. From it dangled a clear glass marble with a mustard seed inside. She explained, "This tiny seed is the faith God has placed in your heart. Together, you will watch it grow."

My faith was pretty simple then. I knew God could send me to hell if I were really naughty, that Jesus would find me if I were lost, and I sure hoped that the Holy Ghost wouldn't scare me.

My juvenile faith gently transformed as the Spirit opened me to God's love and light. I was led by Christ's teachings of loving, kindness, service, grace, forgiveness, and eternal life. But in the busyness of midlife, I admittedly found myself scheduling "God time" to a quick evening prayer, grace before dinner, and Sunday morning worship.

I thought all was well. And then it wasn't.

My world was upturned, and I was broken. I dissolved into the darkest of nights with a fervent plea, "God direct!" I immediately felt physically held and clearly heard a voice directing me on an unexpected path into healthcare. I followed. By helping and reaching out to others, I was healed and made whole again.

Now, with the gift of more free time, I have made an intentional commitment to grow my faith. Although it is a work in progress and not without struggle at times, I have turned to deeper and longer daily prayer and devotions, church classes, Bible study, service to others, long walks in nature, the Labyrinth, and a breath prayer I say throughout the day. I am learning to listen to and see God in countless new and wondrous ways. My evolving faith to better connect to God, to others, and to the whole of creation is a journey I awaken to each morning with a wide smile of gratitude.

A smile like the one my mother gave to me.

- Karen Scott

LUKE 13:18-21 - THE MUSTARD SEED & YEAST

Tuesday, April 15

Leading a congregation to be mindful of the suffering love of God in Jesus Christ is a challenge that preoccupies pastors and musicians preparing for Holy Week. Many folks show up for Palm Sunday and Easter, moving from hopeful parade to joyful triumph, and skip the passion in between. We who plan worship, however, think Easter's Alleluias resonate more deeply if folks have communed at the Last Supper, glimpsed the betrayal, and knelt at the foot of the cross to recall Jesus' sacrificial love for us.

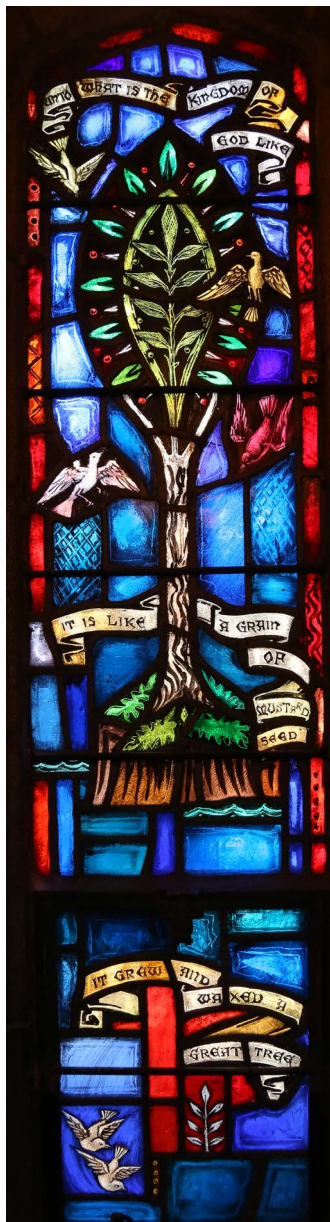
We also know that not everyone can or wants to attend those more somber services, so it has become our custom for Palm Sunday worship to move from parade to passion. We begin by singing All Glory, Laud, and Honor in joyful praise, but before the service ends, we've woven in hints of the pain and suffering to come. Palm Sunday worship becomes layered as if to mimic the descent into Holy Week itself, to reveal the unseen truths about the depths of God's love.

The layering of unseen truths is what Jesus is talking about when he tells the Parables of the Mustard Seed and Yeast. Using everyday examples of seeds and yeast, he shows how God's purposes are often hidden. Unseen, they are nonetheless doing what they are meant to do. In due time, a germinating seed will yield new life. Yeast will leaven bread. Likewise, below the visible story of Holy Week, with its awesome drama taking place in the streets, the upper room, the court, and on the cross, we can only imagine the hidden powers at work, layered, deeply plotted truths of the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. As we ponder these things, may the potency of seed and yeast yield new life in us.

- The Rev. Dr. Agnes Norfleet, Senior Pastor

LUKE 13:18-21 - THE MUSTARD SEED & YEAST

Wednesday, April 16



LUKE 13:18-21 - THE MUSTARD SEED & YEAST

Thursday, April 17

One of my math professors at the U of Oregon, David Harrison, was famous for forbidding students ever to draw a picture. He was even suspicious of any examples illustrating a concept. He wanted us to think solely of axioms and abstract properties. Images and examples put your thinking in a box, he argued, leading to misunderstandings and poor arguments. A specific example may come to stand in for the much larger concept, thus diminishing it.

I sometimes wonder if he had a point and if this is not the reason why some religions forbid images of God: God is so much greater than anything we can draw or even put into words.

It is true that even beloved images can hinder our faith: What is a Father God to a person whose own father was abusive? What does God the King mean to someone who thinks of kings as anything but nice?

When I read Jesus' parables, I am delighted by the way Jesus is shaking up our preconceptions. Can we stretch our mind to embrace a new way of understanding God?

In the given verses, Jesus goes so far as to compare God's presence with a process. Wow. Not a person seated in glory, not a time standing still in a state of bliss. No. Jesus tells us to think of God in new ways. God's presence is about growth. It's about living into what we are not yet. It's about the assurance that with God's presence in our heart, our lives, so insignificant in the face of the universe, can grow into something great and meaningful.

- Klaus Volpert

LUKE 13:18-21 - THE MUSTARD SEED & YEAST

Friday, April 18

Observing the beautiful trees, feeding the birds, and starting flowering plants from seeds are sources of joy. Additionally, I find baking to be reassuring. So, comparing the kingdom of God to a fruitful mustard seed and leavened flour was initially easy. The passages evoked calming images of the natural world and comforting memories of baking bread.

My thoughts about the mustard seed and leavened dough took on a contrasting tone as I entered a time of cynicism and sadness. This period was just before the November election, when the reminders of political divisiveness were inescapable, with the constant stream of disheartening electronic communications, phone calls, and mailings. Simultaneously, I was saddened by the loss and suffering that beloved people were experiencing, while I felt powerless to help. Additionally, I was troubled by the local drought conditions. As I became resigned to pessimistic regard for myself and certain others, plus indifferent action, I saw the risk of figuratively planting destructive seeds and mixing poisonous yeast into the flour. I did not want to do either, but I was struggling to move forward.

After a night with dreams about an earthquake and human violence, the Sunday sermon entitled “A Little Apocalypse” invited hope and faith-grounded action. A few days later, there was much-needed rain. Soon after, a trusted advisor shared her wisdom about coping with our intranational strife in a way that is factually informed and realistically positive. She is inspiringly active in operationalizing this advice. These events, in close and timely succession, helped me to reach beyond my resignation. They reminded me of the prolific mustard seed and leavened flour in God’s kingdom. I know the sermon’s message, my friend’s example, and the replenishing rain are benefiting many.

- Anita Iyengar

LUKE 13:18-21 - THE MUSTARD SEED & YEAST

Saturday, April 19

Remembering the parable of the mustard seed has helped me at times when I have doubted whether my efforts at producing a certain outcome could be fruitful. Whether it be praying, volunteering, mentoring, daily interpersonal relations, a simple smile, or something else, the parable reminds me that if something so small and seemingly insignificant as a mustard seed can grow into a large tree that my efforts, however small I consider them to be, can produce a significant result.

In this same parable, a woman took a small amount of yeast and leavened a larger amount of flour by mixing it in. Again, the size of the portion of yeast wasn't significant, but the effects spread throughout the flour and transformed it like the Kingdom of God, which has the power to transform a life, community, or nation.

We should remember that everything we do to help others is important, no matter how small, and we should continue to do good works having faith that we can make a significant difference to others.

- Linda Griska

LENTEN WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Ash Wednesday, March 5

5:30 p.m. Family Service with Imposition of Ashes, Chapel

7:00 p.m. Service with Imposition of Ashes, Sanctuary & Livestreamed.

The Rev. Dr. Kirby Lawrence Hill preaching.

Palm Sunday, April 13

8:00 a.m. Worship with Communion, Chapel

9:45 a.m. Children ages 2 - Kindergarten meet in classrooms and children grades 1-5 meet in Chapel for Palm Sunday Procession

10:00 a.m. Worship with Children's Palm Procession, Sanctuary & Livestreamed

Maundy Thursday, April 17

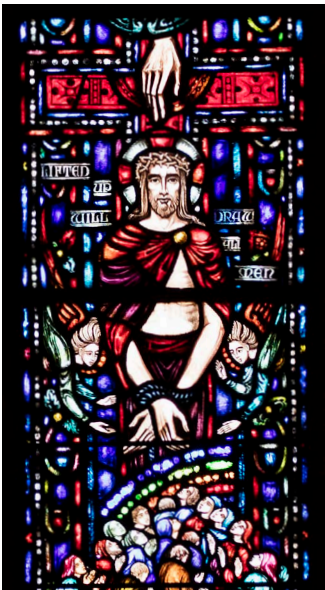
8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. Labyrinth Walk, Gymnasium

5:30 p.m. Family Service with Communion, Chapel

5:30 p.m. Simple Supper, Congregational Hall. Free-will offering.

7:00 p.m. Worship with Communion, Sanctuary & Livestreamed

The Rev. Rebecca Kirkpatrick preaching.



Good Friday, April 18

8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Labyrinth Walk, Gymnasium

12:00 p.m. Worship led by BMPC Youth, Chapel

7:30 p.m. Worship featuring the Bryn Mawr Chamber Singers, Chapel & Livestreamed

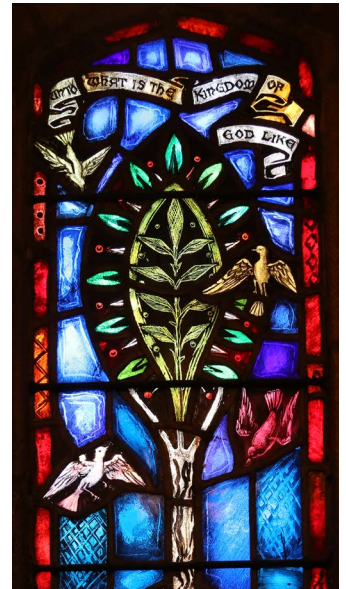
Easter Sunday, April 20

6:30 a.m. – Sunrise Service, Front Lawn. The Rev. Rachel Pedersen preaching.

7:00 a.m. – Continental Breakfast, Education Building

9:00 & 11:00 a.m. Worship with Choir and Easter Brass, Sanctuary. 9:00 Service Livestreamed.

The Rev. Dr. Agnes W. Norfleet preaching.





Bryn Mawr
Presbyterian Church