



# Johnsville United Methodist Church

Union Bridge, MD

Our mission is to nurture the members of the congregation in developing a personal relationship with God and to share His word and His love with the larger community.

PRAISE, WORSHIP AND CELEBRATION

Lent 1 - February 21, 2021

PRELUDE

"Because He Lives" (Gaither)

WELCOME

Opening Hymn

"Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days"

UMH 269

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| <p>1. Lord, who throughout these forty days<br/>For us didst fast and pray,<br/>teach us with thee to mourn our sins<br/>And close by thee to stay.</p> | <p>2. As thou with Satan didst content,<br/>and didst the victory win,<br/>O give us strength in thee to fight<br/>in thee to conquer sin.</p> |
| <p>3. As thou didst hunger bear, and thirst,<br/>so teach us, gracious Lord,<br/>to die to self, and chiefly live<br/>by thy most holy word.</p>        | <p>4. And through these days of penitence,<br/>and through thy passiontide,<br/>yea, evermore in life and death,<br/>Jesus, with us abide.</p> |
| <p>5. Abide with us, that so,<br/>this life of suffering over past,<br/>an Easter of unending joy<br/>we may attain at last.</p>                        |  |

## Call to Worship (Psalm 25, Mark 1)

Leader: To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

**People: In you, O God, I place my trust.**

Leader: known your paths.

**People: Lead me in your truth.**

Leader: Your kingdom is coming near.

**People: Be present in our midst.**

Leader: To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

**People: In you, O God, I place my trust.**

## Opening Prayer of Confession (Mark 1, Genesis 9)

Leader: Holy One, we often lack the courage and strength to resist the temptations in our path. It is so hard to believe that your realm is near, so hard to act as if we truly believe. We fail to hear your call in our lives; we miss your rainbow among the clouds.

**People: Hear us now as we confess our weaknesses and temptations.**

## Words of Assurance

(Mark 1, Psalm 25)

Leader: Our Creator God sustains us in paths of love and faithfulness. Jesus the Christ offers us repentance and new life. The Holy Spirit breathes fresh energy and strength through us. The God who calls us “beloved” offers us forgiveness of sin and fullness of grace.

## Special Music

“Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy” (Trad. American Melody)

Alison Kersten, flute, Elise Kersten, violin

## PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

We come to you, O God, in this Season of Lent, to reflect again on Jesus' journey to the cross and beyond that, to resurrection. We dare to do that, supported by stories of the many promises and covenants you made to your people throughout history. Come to us in this season, O God, and remind us once again that you're always with us: in death and resurrection, in desert and in flood.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our 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, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

## Hymn

“You Are My Hiding Place”

TFWS 2055

You are my hiding place.  
You always fill my heart  
with songs of deliverance,  
whenever I am afraid,  
I will trust in you, I will trust in you.

Let the weak say,  
“I am strong in the strength of the Lord.”  
Let the weak say,  
“I am strong in the strength of the Lord.”

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

### Hebrew Scripture Lesson: Genesis 9:8-17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup>As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup>and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the

domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.<sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.’<sup>12</sup> God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:<sup>13</sup> I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.<sup>14</sup> When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup>When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.’<sup>17</sup> God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.’

#### Gospel Lesson: Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” <sup>12</sup>And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup>He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Leader: This is the word of the Lord.

#### **People: Thanks be to God!**

Sermon

“Someone to Count On!”

Rev. Shari McCourt

In the last few weeks as I have been checking on many of you to see ‘how it with your soul?’ I hear similar concerns. Many of you have shared concerns regarding misinformation in the news; opinion out weighing factual reporting. Many have also shared the challenge of people you thought that you could count on, not being there for you, as had been promised. The good news is that our scripture lessons for today, are full of God’s promises that we can actually count on.

I have tried to resist temptation, but I found a couple of old, corny, Noah’s ark jokes that must be shared.

**Q. When was the first meat mentioned in the Bible?**

**A. When Noah took Ham into the ark.**

We remember Ham was Noah’s youngest son.

**Q: Who was the greatest financier in the Bible?**

**A: Noah - he was floating his stock while everyone else was in liquidation.**

**Q: What kind of lights were on the ark?**

**A: Floodlights of course!**

Our first reading from Genesis, comes from the story of Noah's ark. When we were children, we may only remember the story of the animals being loaded into the ark two by two, and song of the rain coming down as God saved Noah's family. God was also in a place where God had, had it with humanity going astray.

Genesis 6:5-13 from the *Message*, by Eugene H. Peterson, describes it this way, "God saw that human evil was out of control. People thought evil, imagined evil—evil, evil, from morning to night. God was sorry that he had made the human race in the first place; it broke his heart. God said, "I'll get rid of my ruined creation, make a clean sweep: people, animals, snakes, and bugs, birds—the works. I'm sorry that I made them." But Noah was different. God liked what he saw in Noah. This is the story of Noah: Noah was a good man, a man of integrity in his community. Noah walked with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. As far as God was concerned, the Earth had become a sewer; there was violence everywhere. God took one look and saw how bad it was, everyone corrupt and corrupting—life itself corrupt to the core. God said to Noah, "It's all over. It's the end of the human race. The violence is everywhere; I'm making a clean sweep."

Then God instructed Noah to build the ark and fill it with two of every animal. Noah was allowed to take his wife and family.

God kept God's promise, and brought a flood upon the earth wiping out everything. On the seventeenth day of the seventh month, the ark arrived on the Ararat mountain range. The water continued to go down until the tenth month, when they began to see the tops of the mountains.

It was another forty days before Noah opened the window on the ark. Noah first sent out a raven several times to search for dry land. It returned without a sign. Waiting all of that time must have been very difficult.

Noah's family was depending on him, and all he could do was to depend on God to keep God's word. Having flooded the entire earth, it would have taken time for the waters to recede into a new balance, where dry land could reappear. It is much easier for us to understand this waiting game as we see it from a position of hind sight. We can only imagine the challenges living a life where God literally saved them, while they waited on the floating zoo.

Noah's signs of promise came from the dove who returned with the olive branch. The olive branch was an important sign of God's promise to Noah. The olive was a mainstay whether it eaten

as fruit, or the olive oil itself. The olive was found at every meal. It was also considered a symbol of fertility, signaling God's promise to Noah to reproduce the earth with his family. The olive was associated with beauty, healing, medicine, light for lamps, anointing, God's peace, and blessing. This olive branch was delivered by a dove. The dove was used for sacrifice, when a family was too poor for a lamb, and to make a family or individual spiritually clean. The dove is a symbol in our gospel lesson of the Holy Spirit. The dove and olive branch strongly suggest not only God keeping God's word, but doing so with the protection of God's own Holy Spirit, and with abundance! God's promises are more than we can imagine.

Today's Hebrew scripture begins with Noah having landed the ark. In Genesis 9:1-4, God told Noah and his family to go forth, prosper, and reproduce!

Noah and family were tasked to care for the earth and its inhabitants, as good stewards of all God had given them. They were given specific instructions on care, and against violence toward humans, and animals.

God made a covenant with Noah, and his sons. A covenant is a promise, an agreement. This text lays out that new agreement, and the new relationship that God has with the post-flood world, which includes humans, birds, and animals. The rainbow is a sign of that agreement. It is a sign of the covenant that made with us as God said, "It is between me and you." The promise is that God would save us from ourselves. This God is the same God who blesses, and promises. God will never destroy humanity, but instead will love us. This covenant from God is as good, as God is. God's part is that God is ever steadfast in love. We can literally rest in the everlasting arms of God's promises. We like to sing about the everlasting promises when we sing "Standing on the Promises of God." We sing, "Leaning on the everlasting arms of God." God's side of the covenant never needs to be renewed, because God keeps God's word. We need to renew our covenant with God.

The rainbow is a sign of hope, and promise for all of creation that God's saving action is at work in both seen, and unseen. The rainbow exists as a symbol of hope, and promise instead of the deserved judgment. It is a symbol of an ongoing deep commitment to all of creation. This covenant is the foundation for all other covenants.

The gospel text from Mark continues the story of fulfilling God's covenant with us. After Jesus was baptized the Spirit descended on him like a dove, and a voice from heaven identified him as the suffering servant by saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Baptism is a sign of identity as to who, and whose Jesus is. Baptism for us is a covenantal act, this sacrament is God's gift, by means of which Jesus Christ incorporates us into a new covenant, and a new creation; by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we understand the importance of Baptism, then we also understand how important we are to God.

Jesus came in fulfillment of God's promise to save us from ourselves, and show us the way. The Spirit drove him out in the desert for 40 days to be tempted by Satan, not even the evil forces of the world could keep God from keeping God's covenant.

Jesus came to Galilee to proclaim the good news. "The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is near. Repent, and believe in the good news." Repentance is when turn back toward God.

When we feel disappointed, as though there is no one that we can count on, we can count on our Lord! Now is the time to turn back toward God, our Lord of all! People may disappoint us, as they have disappointed God since the days of the flood, God's grace prevails, and God's love for us never fails! So, we are instructed to repent, turn our lives toward God by our belief, and faith in the good news that God's saving acts are alive, and well.

During these forty days we are to practice spiritual disciplines that help us to grow in faith, and love of God. This morning we celebrate the covenant God has made with you, and me by the saving acts through God's Son, Jesus the Christ. Praise be to God, glory alleluia!

#### OFFERING OF OUR GIFTS TO GOD

**Many thanks for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of the church.**

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**As an act of worship, please consider keeping current in your tithes and offerings. Even though the church building is closed, we still have financial obligations we need to meet. The mailbox will be checked daily. The address is: Johnsville United Methodist Church, 11106 Green Valley Road, Union Bridge, MD 21791**

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#### OFFERTORY

DOXOLOGY                      "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow"                      UMH 95

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
praise him, all creatures here below;  
praise him above, ye heavenly host;  
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.  
Amen.

#### Offering Prayer

Holy One, work through these gifts. As we provide loaves of bread for the hungry, work through our offering, tithes and gifts that others may be fed, not only in body, but also in spirit. As we seek to bring justice to our world, may we embody faith in your righteous love, that your people may know the source of their hope. Amen.

Closing Hymn                      "Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)"                      WS 3104

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| 1. Amazing grace<br>How sweet the sound<br>That saved a wretch like me<br>I once was lost, but now am found<br>Was blind, but now I see | 2. 'Twas grace that taught<br>my heart to fear<br>And grace my fears relieved<br>How precious did that grace appear<br>The hour I first believed |
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#### Refrain

My chains are gone  
I've been set free  
My God, my Savior has ransomed me  
And like a flood His mercy reigns

3. The Lord has promised good to me  
His word my hope secures  
He will my shield and portion be  
As long as life endures  
**Refrain (2 times)**

Unending love, amazing grace

4. The earth shall soon dissolve like snow  
The sun forbear to shine  
But God, Who called me here below,  
Will be forever mine.  
Will be forever mine.  
You are forever mine.

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

“Shall We Gather at the River?” (Lowry)