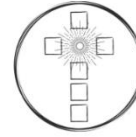




WHAT ARE YOU UP TO? Lent 2024



Serve & Enrich
Zion United Church
of Christ

The 1st Sunday of Lent

Prelude

My Jesus, I Love Thee

Gathering Lent is often known as a time of giving something up in order to make room in our lives for spiritual pursuits. Rather than just “giving up” in Lent, the scriptures ask us to consider all that Jesus is “up to” and all that he asks us to be up to in his name. Instead of bemoaning what we can’t do, or used to do, in a culture where “measuring up” to external standards seems impossible, this Lent we will celebrate the small things that we can do right now to respond to God's call in our place, for our time.

The first Sunday of this series brings us to the moment at which Jesus comes up out of the waters of baptism to hear, “You are my beloved.” We are called to come up out of the depths of whatever seeks to keep us under and know that we are beloved of God. Come up, for now is the time to be fully who you are created to be for the sake of the world.

Lenten Chorus: “You Raise Me Up”

**When I am down and, oh my soul, so weary
When troubles come and my heart burdened be
Then, I am still and wait here in the silence
Until You come and sit awhile with me**

**You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas
I am strong, when I am on Your shoulders
You raise me up to more than I can be**

Prayer—Loving God, we come before you needing to feel lighter. We are weighed down with expectations and difficult news. Sometimes it is our own doing that weighs us down. In this moment of quiet, we lift up to you those things we’d like to give up for good...for the sake of The Good.

The Lord's Prayer (unison)—Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Hymn

When Morning Gilds the Skies, 111

Exploring God's Word for All Ages

Lessons from Up

We Hear God's Word—Mark 1:9-15

Paula Prange

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 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. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Meditation

Come Up

Hymn

Borning Cry, 680

We Respond to God's Word with Our Giving

Invitation—Beloved, we have Good and uplifting news to share. God's own Son moves among us proclaiming that God's kingdom has come near. Let us bring our gifts this day for the building up of God's kingdom here and now.

An Uplifting Gift—Hot Air Balloon Messages: You're invited throughout the season of Lent, to share uplifting messages with our church family by writing them on the hot air balloons that you'll find on the side table. The messages could be scriptures you've found inspiring, quotes that nurture your spirit, or just a simple message like "you are not alone." We'll add those messages to our sky each week.

Our uplifting message this week comes from Mary Oliver’s poem “The Summer Day.” I was reminded of it while working through our Lenten Journal. It is referenced in the entry for Ash Wednesday. I’ve shared it before, but I think it is worth sharing again.

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?¹

Our ballon today has those last two lines, that question: “Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

February Benevolence—Our Church’s Wider Mission

****Doxology**

We Give Thanks— Spirit of Belovedness, we ask you to multiply these gifts in ways that extend what we can do exponentially. Through them may many be uplifted—our gifts transformed into your voice of love in the world. Amen.

¹ Mary Oliver (1935-2019) was a Pulitzer Prize winning poet. She published several poetry collections, including *Dog Songs: Poems* (Penguin Books, 2015).

Hymn

Go My Children, with My Blessing, 719

Benediction— And so now go into the world, knowing that as a disciple of Jesus, as a beloved child of the Holy One, and an heir of the Holy Spirit with angels attending you, you have all you need to be up to something.

When someone asks you, “What are you up to?” you can respond,
“With God’s help, I’m up to something good!”

Let the people say, Amen!

Amen!

Postlude

They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love

