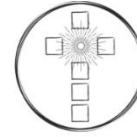




## WHAT ARE YOU UP TO? Lent 2024



*Serve & Enrich*  
Zion United Church  
of Christ

### Welcome

*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**

**Meditative Moment:** An important aspect of the season of Lent is turning to God with an honest heart and asking for the grace we need. This Lent, we are praying the Psalms as we confess our brokenness and seek God's mercy. Hear assurance in what the Psalmist proclaims in Psalm 22 as we go to God in prayer:

You who fear the Lord, praise God! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify God; stand in awe of God, all you offspring of Israel! For God did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; God did not hide God's face from me but heard when I cried out. From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear God. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek God shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever! (*Psalm 22, excerpts*)

By the grace of God, may your spirit be uplifted. In the name of Christ, you are forgiven. Glory to God. Amen.

### Hymn

*Be Still for the Spirit of the Lord, 129*

### We Hear God's Word—*Mark 8:31-38*

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took

him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

### **A Message that Uplifts**

“This is why for thousands of years Christians have found the cross to be so central to life. It speaks to us of God’s suffering, God’s pain, God’s broken heart. It’s God making the first move and then waiting for our response.” –Rob Bell

#### *The Dance of Life*

In the world about us, a radical distinction is made between joy and sorrow. People tend to say: “When you are glad, you cannot be sad, and when you are sad, you cannot be glad.” In fact, our contemporary society does everything possible to keep sadness and gladness separated. Sorrow and pain must be kept away at all cost because they are the opposites of the gladness and happiness we desire.

Death, illness, human brokenness...all have to be hidden from our sight because they keep us from the happiness for which we strive. They are obstructions on our way to the goal of life.

The vision offered by Jesus stands in sharp contrast to this worldly vision. Jesus shows, both in his teachings and in his life, that true joy often is hidden in the midst of our sorrow, and that the dance of life finds its beginnings in grief. He says: “Unless the grain of wheat dies, it cannot bear fruit...Unless we lose our lives, we cannot find them; unless the Son of Man dies, he cannot send the Spirit.” To his two disciples who were dejected after his suffering and death, Jesus says: “You foolish people, so slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?”

Here a completely new way of living is revealed. It is the way in which pain can be embraced, not out of a desire to suffer, but in the knowledge that something new will be born in the pain. Jesus calls our pains “labor pains.” He says: “a woman in childbirth suffers because her time has come; but when she has given birth to the child, she forgets the suffering in her joy that a human being has been born into the world” (John 16:21).

The cross has become the most powerful symbol of this new vision. The cross is a symbol of death and of life, of suffering and of joy, of defeat and of victory. It’s the cross that shows us the way.” –Henri Nouwen

### **Up to Something Good**

*Prayers of the People*

Each midweek service, we’ll have an extended time of prayer. If you like incense or candles, we encourage you to light them at home each day when you spend time in reflection and prayer. This connects our practice to an ancient practice mentioned by the Psalmist in chapter 141: *“I call upon you, O Lord; come quickly to me; give ear to my voice when I call to you. Let my prayer rise up as incense before you and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.”*

During our time of prayer, you’ll be invited to speak aloud, at different points, that refrain from Psalm 141. It will appear on your screen. Let us pray:

We cry out to you, O God, from the wreckage of a world wracked with sorrows. Our hands are often idle in the face of injustice, though we know you call us to take action. Even when we feel so small and are tempted to believe that we cannot make a difference, we pray that we can be “up to something good” for our selves, our neighborhoods, and our world. And so this week we start with thanksgiving for these acts of uplifting goodness: for those who use their voice to speak up against wrongs, for random acts of kindness, for generosity that allows new possibilities to unfold...

**Let my prayer rise up  
like incense before you,  
the lifting up of my hands  
as an offering to you.**

We call upon you, O God, to incline your ear and extend your love and healing power for these laments: for dreams that never came to be, for words we were too afraid to speak, for loss held heavy in our hearts...

**Let my prayer rise up  
like incense before you,  
the lifting up of my hands  
as an offering to you.**

We call upon you, O God, to give us the strength and courage to be up to something good for the sake of The Good. In this moment — in our mind’s eye — we imagine and offer our commitment to one small thing this week that will lift someone up, elevate and affirm the good when we see it, and bring a bit more justice and joy where we are. And if we find we are not up to it, we pray we can accept the goodness of others and feel your encouraging love.

*[pause for a few moments]*

**Let my prayer rise up  
like incense before you,  
the lifting up of my hands  
as an offering to you.**

We pray this in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray...

**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**

*They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love, 595*

**Benediction**— Beloved, go forth to uplift those around and to get up to something good. 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!**