



Serve & Enrich
 Zion United Church
 of Christ

LENT 2026 GIFTS OF THE DARK WOOD

Our Mission: United by Christ's loving embrace, a welcoming light in an unsure world, we serve and enrich the community and provide a safe gathering space for fellowship, spiritual growth, and self-exploration.

Our Vision: Transforming and caring for our community through Christ's love.

Pastor: Sarah Frische-Mouri Hannigan

Organist: Martha Main

Bell Choir Director: Vivian Thomas

Office Manager: Michael Brown

Custodians: Anita and Greg Law

Scripture Reader: Vivian Thomas

Tech Steward: Greg Miller



8916 East Troy Avenue
 Indianapolis, Indiana 46239
 (317) 862-4136
 zionsecretary@sbcglobal.net
www.zionuccindy.net

March 1, 2026 – The 1st Sunday of Lent: The Gift of Uncertainty

Prelude

Gathering

with There's a Path, verse 1

*There's a path... though it winds its way through darkness
 We would choose... to avoid it if we could
 We awake... to an unexpected calling
 God says, "come... there are gifts in the Dark Wood"*

Centering Thoughts

*There's a path... though it winds its way through darkness
 We would choose... to avoid it if we could
 We awake... to an unexpected calling
 God says, "come... there are gifts in the Dark Wood"*

Prayer— Trusted Love, enter our lives and open us to the gifts residing deep within the Holy Darkness of our lives. Help us to empty ourselves with every breath. Make room in us so that you might take up residence in the very marrow of our bones... In your many names, we 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

Open My Eyes That I May See, 480

We Hear God's Word

Mark 15:22-38 (NRSVUE)

They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means Skull Place. They tried to give him wine mixed with myrrh, but he didn't take it. They crucified him. They divided up his clothes, drawing lots for them to determine who would take what. It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. The notice of the formal charge against him was written, "The king of the Jews." They crucified two outlaws with him, one on his right and one on his left.

People walking by insulted him, shaking their heads and saying, "Ha! So you were going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, were you? Save yourself and come down from that cross!"

In the same way, the chief priests were making fun of him among themselves, together with the legal experts. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross. Then we'll see and believe." Even those who had been crucified with Jesus insulted him.

From noon until three in the afternoon the whole earth was dark. At three, Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "*Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani,*" which means, "My God, my God, why have you left me?"

After hearing him, some standing there said, "Look! He's calling Elijah!" Someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, and put it on a pole. He offered it to Jesus to drink, saying, "Let's see if Elijah will come to take him down." But Jesus let out a loud cry and died.

The curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion, who stood facing Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "This man was certainly God's Son."

Luke 17:33 (CEB)

"Whoever tries to preserve their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life will preserve it."

Reflection

The Gift of Emptiness

A Time for Reflection—Each week we will take time to reflect, accompanied by music. This week, we focus on how the things that fill us—like ego, fear of being unloved, worry of not measuring up—need to be emptied so that we might live. You are invited to write

something on the piece of paper you received when you came in that you need to let go of, that needs to die in order that you can live more fully. Then bring it to the cross and place it through one of the nails.

Hymn

I Surrender All, 474

We Gather at the Table

Set Your Place at the Table—*For those worshipping with us at home, please use whatever you have on hand to represent the bread and the cup. For those worshipping with us in-person, communion cups are available on the table in the back of the sanctuary, along with goldfish crackers for children.*

Our Invitation

A Litany of Confession

One: For filling up our lives with little room for You,

Many: Forgive and restore us, O God.

One: For worry that outlasts trust,

Many: Forgive and restore us, O God.

One: For choosing being right over being in relationship,

Many: Forgive and restore us, O God.

Assurance of Grace

One: Hear these words of assurance: God chooses relationship over perfection. Who you are is “loved by God.” God is with you, forgiving and restoring you to wholeheartedness.

Many: Thanks be to God! Amen!

The Words of Institution—We remember that on the night of betrayal and desertion, and on the eve of death, Jesus gathered the disciples for the feast of Passover. Jesus took the bread, and after giving thanks..., broke it, and give it to the disciples, saying: “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” Therefore we proclaim the mystery of our faith.’

Blessing Our Meal—God, there are times we feel like an empty cup or broken like this bread. As this cup and this bread fill us, may they be a tangible reminder of what you can do in empty places. Let this meal give us strength to lay ourselves before you

so that you can be at work in the hollow places in us. Pour out your Spirit that we might be fed and filled with your overflowing grace and your abundant life. Amen.

We Share the Bread and the Cup

We Give Thanks—Almighty God, we give you thanks for the gift of our Savior’s presence in the simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. Unite us with all who are fed by Christ’s body and blood that we may faithfully proclaim the good news of your love and that your universal church may be a rainbow of hope in an uncertain world; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.’

We Respond to God’s Word with Our Giving

Invitation—Today, we bring our treasures, our talent, our time, and our lives, and we lay them down before God, knowing that God can do miracles with whatever we bring.

March Benevolence

One Great Hour of Sharing and OCWM

***Doxology**

We Give Thanks—God, we lay these gifts before you, trusting that even in the emptiness of our lives, you can bring forth life. Bless these gifts we bring before you this day. Use them to bring life and renewal to your church and to this world as you work through us to share your love and shine your light in dark places. Amen.

Hymn

The Old Rugged Cross, 260

A Blessing—May the Spirit of the Living God, made known to us most fully within life’s Dark Wood: Go before you to show you the way; Go above you to watch over you; Go behind you to push you into places you may not necessarily go yourself; Go beneath you to uphold and uplift you; Go beside you to be your strong and constant companion; And dwell within you to remind you that you are surely not alone, and that you are loved—loved beyond your wildest imagination. And may the fire of God’s blessing burn brightly upon you, and within you, now and always. Amen.

Sung Benediction

There’s a Path, verse 2

*There’s a path... and it leads us out together
To the wood... where the darkness hovers still
We are sent... and the Spirit goes before us
God says, “go... be my presence in the world.”*

Postlude

PRAYERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

THIS WEEK AT ZION

- Sunday, after worship – First Sunday Fellowship
- Tuesday, 6:30 pm – Young Adult Matthew Study (Zoom)
- Wednesday – Midweek Lenten Worship (Online)
- Thursday, 7 pm – All Church Matthew Study (Zoom)
- Sunday, March 1 – SPRING FORWARD: Time Change
- Sunday, March 8, 9 am – Choir Practice

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **TIME CHANGE**—Don’t forget to Spring Forward on Sunday, March 8.
- **INVITATIONS**—Holy Week and Easter are just around the corner. Pick up invitations in the back of the sanctuary to invite your family and friends to join us for these special services. Help us share the Good News of God’s love by sharing this welcome.

SERVE

- **GREETERS**—Did you know part of our mission at Zion is to “be a welcoming light”? Help be a welcoming light at Zion by volunteering to be a worship greeter. Our goal is to have a set schedule like we do with our live stream and scripture readers. Greeters should arrive at church by 9:30 am to welcome people and make sure they pick up anything they may need for worship like bulletins or communion. When we have visitors or guests, you can help alert our Care Team members so they can also greet them and share a welcome bag with them. Sign up for your Sunday in the back of the sanctuary.
- **BUILDING HOSTS**—Part of our mission at Zion is to provide safe gathering space for our community, including our neighbors. Word is spreading that Zion is a great place to celebrate those special moments in life, and we have been having lots of event rentals. We would love to renew our Building Hosts list and do a training refresher. Hosts help welcome guests and ensure that everyone has a safe, fun, and meaningful time while at Zion. If you’re interested in being a host or continuing to serve as a host, please let Pastor Sarah know.
- **RILEY CHEER GUILD**—The Riley Cheer Guild and the kids at Riley could use your help! They are running low on Hot Wheels and are out of Play-Doh sets, which include a few containers of Play-Doh and some tools. Donations can be dropped off anytime in the sanctuary at our Riley service station. Just look for the big “Riley” sign

and tubs.

- **MARCH BENEVOLENCE: One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) and Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM)**— One Great Hour of Sharing is a special offering of the United Church of Christ that supports partners worldwide with ministries that fund health, education and agricultural development, emergency relief, refugee ministries, and both international and domestic disaster response. In isolation, no single congregation can completely answer God's call to love. Together we are a bold witness to God's extravagant love for all. Gifts to OCWM make it possible for our Indiana-Kentucky Conference, along with the UCC, to strengthen local churches and leaders and to provide support beyond our community.

ENRICH

- **FIRST SUNDAY FELLOWSHIP**—The Care Team invites you to stay after worship on March 1 to enjoy donuts and fellowship. Catch up with your friends. Get to know folks better. Enjoy some time together in community.
- **MATTHEW SMALL GROUPS**—The Faith Formation Team invites everyone in the church to join one of the small groups that will be reading through the Gospel of Matthew. The Young Adult Group meets Tuesdays at 6:30 pm on Zoom. Everyone in the church is invited to join us Thursdays at 7 pm. Zoom links are included in the weekly email each Saturday and in a special email on Thursdays. An in-person group will be offered on Tuesdays from 1-2:30 pm starting in April at Paula's house. We hope this will be a nurturing practice that not only strengthens our spirits but deepens our relationships with each other.
- **LENT**—Our Lenten Worship Series this year is based on the book *Gifts of the Dark Wood: Seven Blessings for Soulful Skeptics (and Other Wanderers)* by Eric Elnes. The series is about "seeing life through new" eyes, recognizing that experiences of failure, emptiness, and uncertainty are as critical for finding our way through life as they are unavoidable." We will see how experiences of life through the "dark wood" are actually clues to our "calling" or "life path." How can the struggles of life be the seedbed of spiritual awakening to the fulness of life?
- **MIDWEEK LENTEN WORSHIP**—The Worship Team is once again offering Midweek Lenten Worship online. Check your email each Wednesday morning for the link to a short service of scripture, song, and contemplation or find it on our Facebook page and YouTube channel.

A SPECIAL INVITATION

As part of Zion’s strategic plan, this fall we plan to open the Zion United Community Center to the wider community through a space sharing program. This initiative is vital to our mission of service and outreach.

To ensure we launch this program in a way that is legally compliant, financially sound, and operationally ready, Council is looking for **3 dedicated members** to serve on the Community Center Task Force.

Key responsibilities include:

- **Policy Development:** Drafting building use policies and rental agreements.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Working with legal, accounting, and insurance agents on IRS compliance and liability.
- **Facility Strategy:** Partnering with the Building Task Force to identify and prepare rental spaces.
- **Operational Staffing:** Defining roles to oversee daily rental operations.

You won’t be alone in doing this! Council and Pastor Sarah will be available as active resources to provide guidance, historical context, and support throughout the process.

Why Join? By serving on this task force, you are playing a foundational role in Zion’s future. If you have a heart for community outreach or a background in policy, finance, or operations, we would love to have your voice at the table.

Let’s work together to make the Zion United Community Center a vibrant space for all!