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.

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March 4, 2026 – Midweek Lenten Worship: The Gift of Uncertainty

Welcome

Gathering Song *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"

Contemporary Reading *Parker Palmer*

"Like a wild animal, soul is tough, resilient, resourceful, savvy, and self-sufficient: it knows how to survive in hard places. I learned about these qualities during my bouts with depression. In that deadly darkness, the faculties I had always depended on collapsed. My intellect was useless; my emotions were dead; my will was impotent; my ego was shattered. But from time to time, deep in the thickets of my inner wilderness, I could sense the presence of something that knew how to stay alive even when the rest of me wanted to die. That something was my tough and tenacious soul."

"Yet despite its toughness, the soul is also shy. Just like a wild animal, it seeks safety in the dense underbrush, especially when other people are around. If we want to see a wild animal, we know the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods yelling for

it to come out. But if we walk quietly into the woods, sit patiently at the base of a tree, breathe with the earth, and fade into our surroundings, the wild creature we seek might put in an appearance. We may see it only briefly and only out of the corner of an eye—but the sight is a gift we will always treasure as an end in itself."

Hymn *Breathe on Me, Breath of God*

Readiness Prayer
Our eyes are ready to see your face.
Our ears are ready to hear your call.
Our feet are ready to walk your path.
Our hands are ready to share your peace.
Our hearts are ready to feel your love.
Our minds are ready to know your grace. Amen.

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."

Exploring Together *Nothing At All*

- We tend to avoid emptiness as much as possible in our culture. We fill up our homes, our schedules, our down time. We even fill up the quiet around us.
- The world can be a pretty noisy place — T.V. commercials blaring, radios booming, people yelling to be heard, people telling us what to do ALL THE TIME if we want to be happy or successful or rich.
- But what if, for just one minute, the rest of the world would be quiet? Imagine how you might fill that minute. Imagine what you might say. I have a good idea what *I* would say.
- Sometimes the best thing to say is…nothing at all. Let's practice that.
- Whatever you're doing right now, find a quiet space if you can, and let's sit in silence.
- Imagine yourself holding your hands in the shape of a bowl, empty, and ready to receive.
- Now let's have one whole minute of uninterrupted quiet time as we gaze into our empty bowls and sit, think, or simply *be*.
- Whenever the world starts to feel too busy and noisy, remember your empty bowl, and that even one minute of uninterrupted quiet time can make a big difference. Let our silence be our Amen.

Prayer

There are many people who are walking the Dark Woods for various reasons. Let us lift up names of those who need our prayers…God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.
There are many places in this world where fear reigns. Let us lift up names of places in this world that need our prayers…God, in your mercy, hear our prayer. There are places in our own souls where we feel empty. Let us name those places with honesty…God, in your mercy, year our prayer. Amen.

Hymn *I Need Thee Every Hour*

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."

Series based on *Gifts of the Dark Wood* by Eric Elnes. All liturgy by Marcia McFee, www.worshipdesignstudio.com. "There's a Path" words by Marcia McFee, music by Chuck Bell.