



*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:** Collin Bennington

**Tech Steward:** Collin Bennington



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**March 8, 2026 – The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent: The Gift of Being Thunderstruck**

### 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**—Awe-some Love, enter our lives and open us to the gifts residing deep within the Holy Darkness of our lives. Form us as expectant people, watching for your presence among us that comes through quiet intuition or thunderous “a-ha’s.” 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**

*For the Beauty of the Earth, 40*

### **A Litany of Confession**

One: For being too busy to be wonder-struck by Your works,

**Many: Forgive and restore us, O God.**

One: For filling the holes in our spirit with things that cannot truly feed us,

**Many: Forgive and restore us, O God.**

One: For denying the world our best selves,

**Many: Forgive and restore us, O God.**

### **Assurance of Grace**

One: Hear these words of assurance: God is already making a wonder of you. You are a part of this awesome creation. God is with you, forgiving and restoring you to wholeheartedness.

**Many: Thanks be to God! Amen!**

### **We Hear God's Word**

*Job 37:1-5 (NRSV)*

At this also my heart trembles, and leaps out of its place.

Listen, listen to the thunder of God's voice  
and the rumbling that comes from God's mouth.

Under the whole heaven God lets it loose,  
and God's lightning to the corners of the earth.

After it God's voice roars;

God thunders with a majestic voice

and God does not restrain the lightnings when God's voice is heard.

God thunders wondrously with God's voice;

and does great things that we cannot comprehend.

### **Reflection**

*The Gift of Being Thunderstruck*

**A Time for Reflection**— This week, you are invited to share a moment that felt like being “thunderstruck.” It might have been a time when you felt resolve about a decision, an “a-ah!” or it may have been simply a time when you were awed by God's presence through nature, through a person or an incident and you experienced peace and joy, if only momentary. If you would prefer simply reflecting inwardly you are welcome to do that.

Folks worshipping with us at home may want to journal about this moment or call up a friend to share with them what that moment was like. You can always leave a comment on the livestream, too.

## Hymn

*God of the Sparrow, 29*

## We Respond to God's Word with Our Giving

**Invitation**—Today, we bring our treasurers, 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

*How Great Thou Art, 51*

**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

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

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### THIS WEEK AT ZION

- Sunday – SPRING FORWARD: Time Change
- Sunday, 9 am – Choir Practice *CANCELED*
- Tuesday, 1 pm – Fundraising Team (Zoom)
- Tuesday, 6:30 pm – Young Adult Matthew Study (Zoom)
- Wednesday – Midweek Lenten Worship (Online)
- Wednesday, 5:30 pm – Worship Team (Zoom)
- Thursday, 7 pm – All Church Matthew Study (Zoom)
- Saturday, 9:30 am – 2 pm – Council Retreat (Zion Room)
- Sunday, after worship – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Lunch at El Toro

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **CHOIR PRACTICE**—There will be no choir or choir practice this Sunday as Martha heals.
- **TIME CHANGE**—Don't forget to Spring Forward on Sunday, March 8.
- **HOLY WEEK AND EASTER INVITATIONS**—We hope you'll join us this year for our Holy Week and Easter celebrations. Our journey takes us from the Dark Wood, to the cross and the tomb, to the glorious hope of resurrection. It's not an easy journey, but you don't have to do it alone. Maundy Thursday Worship is April 2 at 7 pm, and Good Friday is April 3 at 7 pm. Easter worship is April 5 at 10 am. All services are in-person and online. There are invitations available for you to pick up in the sanctuary as you invite your friends and family to worship with us, too.
- **EASTER FLOWERS**—You're invited to help us decorate the sanctuary for Easter! An order sheet will be available soon for you to select your flowers. Pricing will vary depending on the type of flower. You'll be able to purchase the flower in honor or memory of loved ones. Following Easter Sunday worship, you'll be invited to take your flowers home with you. Thank you to Michelle for taking the lead on this again!

### 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**

- **3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY LUNCH**—For our 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Lunch in March, we are heading to El Toro (7242 US-52, New Palestine, IN 46163), just a few minutes away from the church down 52. It’ll be a great afternoon of fellowship and delicious food. RSVP to Becky Osher if you plan to attend so a reservation can be made.
- **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.
- **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.

- **GOLDEN FRIENDS**— Join the Golden Friends in the Fellowship Hall on Thursday, March 19 at 2 pm for card games! Please bring a snack to share, and invite your family and friends to join us, too. This ministry is open to people of any age. Come ready to have some fun and make some new friends.
- **YOUNG ADULTS**— The Young Adults are heading out into the woods on the first weekend of Spring for a hike at Southeastway Park. We'll meet at the park on Saturday, March 21 at 10 am. RSVP to Pastor Sarah if you plan to attend and check your emails and texts for more information.

### **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!