



*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

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**March 11, 2026 – Midweek Lenten Worship: The Gift of Being Thunderstuck**

**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**

*Eric Elnes*

“Amidst the thousand voices that chatter within you, there is one voice that comes from a place that is perfectly safe, perfectly free from anxiety. It is not reacting to, or running from, anything. In this place you experience no sense of judgment or condemnation—by your peers, by your conscience, by God. The voice that speaks from this place knows what's most important to you, and for you. It is the voice of your deepest freedom, your truest self. Often when I'm privileged enough to overhear this deep, inner voice I discover that what it considers important is quite different from what I consider important on more superficial levels where I am beset by anxiety, anger, or fear. In this small but very real place—this Holy of Holies—the questions, yearnings, hopes, and dreams that well up within me are most closely aligned with my particular calling.”

## Hymn

*Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness*

### 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

*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.

### Exploring Together

*Wow!*

- Even in the Dark Wood, there are wonders to be found, those things that leave us breathless, that cause us to shout “wow!”
- Wow is a short but very important word. We live in a wonder-filled world created by a wonderful God. Sometimes the best thing we can do is stop and simply say, “Wow.”
- This week pay attention and be alert. Carry within you a spirit of openness, ready to be stopped in your tracks by something wondrous. Allow yourself to delight in creation, whether in the big, powerful moments or the smaller, quieter ones.
- Sometimes we just have to pause and look up to see the wow-worthy moments that are right in front of us.

### 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 insight is needed. 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 long to experience wonder and joy anew. Let us name those places with honesty...God, in your mercy, year our prayer. Amen.

## Hymn

*How Can I Keep from Singing*

**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](http://www.worshipdesignstudio.com). "There's a Path" words by Marcia McFee, music by Chuck Bell.