



*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:** Paula Prange

**Tech Steward:** Michael Brown



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**March 15, 2026 – The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent: The Gift of Getting Lost**

**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**— Permeating Love, enter our lives and open us to the gifts residing deep within the Holy Darkness of our lives. When we feel overwhelmed by the twists and turns of life, quiet us, open us, heighten our senses to perceive your nudge toward life... In your many names, we pray. Amen.

**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**

*Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness, 326*

### **A Litany of Confession**

One: For plunging ahead without listening to You,

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

One: For not recognizing Your still small voice within us,

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

One: For forgetting to ask for assurance—your greatest gift,

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

### **Assurance of Grace**

One: Leader: Hear these words of assurance: Lost is not lost to God. You are not lost to God. God is with you, forgiving and restoring you to wholeheartedness.

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

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

*Psalm 42:1-3 (NRSV)*

As a deer longs for flowing streams,

the face of God?

so my soul longs for you, O God.

My tears have been my food

My soul thirsts for God,

day and night,

for the living God.

while people say to me continually,

When shall I come and behold

“Where is your God?”

*1 Samuel 3:6-9 (NRSV)*

The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said,

“Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy.

Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak,

Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

### **Reflection**

*The Gift of Getting Lost*

**A Time for Reflection**—“In the Dark Wood, even those who are lost themselves can be gift-bearers to others seeking their way in the dark (101).” This week, you are invited to use a marker to write a word of encouragement on a rock for someone who may cross the path where you have been, feeling utterly lost. What would you say to them? What would

God say to them? Pastor Sarah will come by and collect your rock. As you leave worship today, you'll be invited to take one of these rocks with you.

## Hymn

*As the Deer, 471*

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

**Invitation**—"Let each one give as (they have) chosen With a heart of gratitude, Not with grumbling or reluctance, But with a cheerful attitude And God is able to make all grace Abound toward you So you will be fully equipped And be blessed in all you do." –*A poem by Michelle Lowndes*+

## March Benevolence

*One Great Hour of Sharing and OCWM*

## Ministry Moment

*A Story from One Great Hour of Sharing*+

## \*Doxology

**We Give Thanks**—Generous God, we offer these gifts in the spirit of generosity and with a heart full of gratitude for what we've been given. These offerings are one way of showing our commitment to sharing with those who are in need, neighbors near and far, whom we are unlikely to meet. We offer these gifts with a cheerful heart as our love offering to brothers and sisters we may never meet. Bless the gifts, just as you have each of us, with an extra measure of your grace. In Christ's name, Amen.+

## Hymn

*Amazing Grace, 422*

**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. +One Great Hour of Sharing Offering Resources.

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### THIS WEEK AT ZION

- Sunday, after worship – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Lunch at El Toro
- Monday, 10 am – 12 pm – Knitting Group (FH)
- Tuesday, 11 am – 2 Minute Tuesday (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube)
- Tuesday, 6:30 pm – Young Adult Matthew Study (Zoom)
- Wednesday – Midweek Lenten Worship (Online)
- Wednesday, 6:30 pm – Council (Zoom)
- Thursday, 2 pm – Golden Friends Cards (FH)
- Thursday, 7 pm – All Church Matthew Study (Zoom)
- Saturday, 10 am – Young Adult Group Hike at Southeastway
- Sunday, March 22, after worship – Choir Practice

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **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. Palm Sunday is March 29. 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 is now available in the back of the sanctuary 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!
- **THANK YOU!** Because of some incredibly generous donations, we are able to move forward with purchasing a new lawn mower to replace the broken one. Council is so grateful for the generosity of our community. Thank you to the Lawn Rangers for finding the replacement mower and for their commitment to another mowing season.

### SERVE

- **WELCOME BROOKE’S PLACE**—Brooke’s Place is an amazing organization that serves children, teens, young adults, and their families as they face loss and grief. They recently opened a new center on the southside and are looking for volunteers. Tara Ntumba, their Support Group Director, will join us in worship on March 29 to share more about ways we can support their work.
- **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.
- **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.