



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.

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March 18, 2026 – Midweek Lenten Worship: The Gift of Getting Lost

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

David Wagoner

Stand still. The trees ahead
and bushes beside you

Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here. And you must treat it as a powerful
stranger. Must ask permission to know it and be known. The forest breathes.

Listen. It answers.

I have made this place around you.

If you leave it you may come back again. saying Here.

No two trees are the same to Raven.

No two branches are the same to Wren.

If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you. You are surely lost. Stand still.

The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

Hymn

Be Thou My Vision

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

Psalm 42:1-3 (NRSV)

As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When shall I come and behold

the face of God?
My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me continually,
“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.

Exploring Together

Help!

- Sometimes when we're lost, especially in the Dark Wood, no map or compass will help.
- Sometimes the best tool we have is to simply say, “HELP!”
- A lot of people think they don't need or want help. They're afraid that asking for help makes them look weak or dependent.
- No matter how tough we think we are, everyone needs help sometimes.
- Getting lost can be a gift because it teaches us how to ask for help.
- If we kept reading more in Psalm 42, we'd see that even the great King David needed help, especially in times of despair when he felt lost and abandoned. In verse 5, David proclaims this: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and

my God.”

- Samuel, who would become one of the greatest prophets in all of Israel, needed help discerning that it was, indeed, God who was calling him. At first, Samuel couldn't recognize God's voice. Only when Eli offer assistance did Samuel come to realize the voice he heard was God's.
- It's not a bad thing to ask for help, especially in the Dark Wood. God sets people on our path to help guide us and our great and awesome God is ready to be our help when we cry out.
- That's reason to praise God.

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 direction 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 need your help. Let us name those places with honesty...God, in your mercy, year our prayer. Amen.

Hymn

In Christ There Is No East or West

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.