



*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

8916 East Troy Avenue

Indianapolis, Indiana 46239

(317) 862-4136

zionsecretary@sbcglobal.net

[www.zionuccindy.net](http://www.zionuccindy.net)



## March 25, 2026 – Midweek Lenten Worship: The Gift of Temptation

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*

“The Spirit beckons us not to be good, but to be human—humble, of the *humus*—which ultimately means finding your elemental waters, which are connected to God, and living into your fullest energies. You can (and will) do a lot of good by walking the path that brings you most fully alive in this world, but in order to stay on this path, you must learn to say no to doing a great many ‘good’ things.”

**Hymn**

*Called As Partners in Christ's Service*

**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**

*Matthew 4:1-11 (CEB)*

4 Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him. <sup>2</sup> After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was starving. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came to him and said, "Since you are God's Son, command these stones to become bread."

<sup>4</sup> Jesus replied, "It's written, *People won't live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.*"

<sup>5</sup> After that the devil brought him into the holy city and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, <sup>6</sup> "Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down; for it is written, *I will command my angels concerning you, and they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone.*"

<sup>7</sup> Jesus replied, "Again it's written, *Don't test the Lord your God.*"

<sup>8</sup> Then the devil brought him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup> He said, "I'll give you all these if you bow down and worship me."

<sup>10</sup> Jesus responded, "Go away, Satan, because it's written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*" <sup>11</sup> The devil left him, and angels came and took care of him.

*2 Corinthians 5:16-17 (NRSV)*

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

## **Exploring Together**

*Who Am I?*

- When you were a kid, how many times did people ask you, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"
- Dreaming about the future can be fun, but we also need something to help us when we're tempted to spend all our time in the future.
- I try not to ask the kids in my life what they want to be when they grow up too much because, in every season of our lives, God's is already calling us to be...us. They are already awesome right now.
- No matter what we want to be or think we want to do in the next season of our

lives, God has a special call for us right now – to be ourselves.

- A better question might be, “Who am I?”
- Think about all the gifts and talents you have, all the things you are already awesome at or love doing. Is there a way that God can use one of those things to bring more meaning and purpose to your life? Is there a way God can use one of these things so that you can do your good, the right good, in this world?
- Pick one of those things and lift it up to God and see if God has something in mind.
- There’s what we can do, and there’s what we’re meant to do.
- Don’t be afraid to ask God for some guidance for what you’re meant to do right here and now.

### **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 people are hurting. 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 to reconnect with who you are calling us to be. Let us name those places with honesty...God, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.

### **Hymn**

*They’ll Know We are Christians By Our Love*

**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.