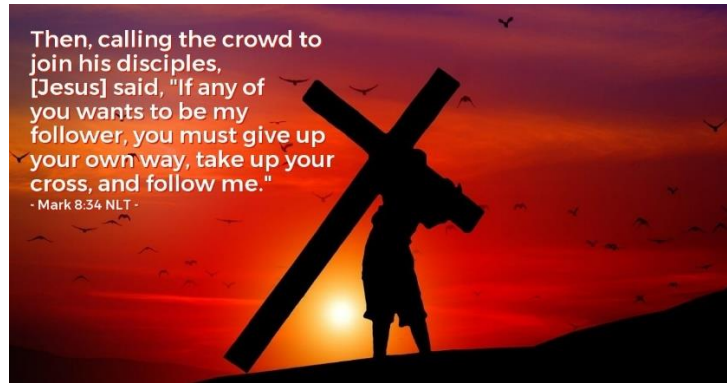


FEBRUARY 28, 2024
SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT



ST. JOHN UNITED
CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Rev. Rosemary Captain

Organist – Sharon Banjavcic

Liturgy – Rev. Dr. Chad Abbott

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: Do not be afraid to answer the call to discipleship.

MANY: What does the call require?

ONE: Letting go of our life as we know it. Following the way of the cross. Aligning our soul with God's.

MANY: We step out in the way of Jesus by losing our life to save it.

ONE: Do not be afraid to walk in the way of Jesus.

MANY: We answer the call, unashamed and unafraid. Amen.

***INVOCATION:**

O God, we are offered every opportunity to embrace the path that helps us gain the world at the expense of our soul. Instead, you have called us to yourself and to follow in the way of love and compassion. Teach us about Jesus' way and lure us away from the paths of self-absorption and greed. You have called us to discipleship, to self-emptying, and embracing your way with courage. May it be so. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: "The Summons" John L. Bell**

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?

**Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?**

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?

Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?

**Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare?**

Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

**Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the
same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean in you and you in me?**

**Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call
my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus, I'll move and live and grow in you and you in
me.**

***INVITATION TO CONFESSION:** In this season, when we reexamine our lives and find our faith tested, we often discover a barrenness within. Our relationship with God is weak, not because God has turned away, but because we have failed to trust the Almighty or spend time in prayer. We have not sought God's answers to our daily problems. Let us be honest with our Creator in this time of prayer.

***PRAYER OF TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:
Holy God, like Peter, sometimes we think we know
better than you do. We make our own attempts to
save ourselves and others from the cross filled path**

**you have called us to walk. Help us to get behind
you, because it has become easier to rely upon
ourselves, rather than on your strength and
presence. Grant us grace and help us to let go of our
need for control so that you and your way might be
our guide and path forward. Amen.**

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Dear ones, may the God of compassion, Jesus the wounded healer, and the Holy Spirit who shapes and transforms us anew, grant you peace and hope for your soul. For we know that the One who calls us to follow in the way of Jesus is merciful and offers the consolation of love in a world of empty promises. Be at peace and thanks be to God.

***GLORIA: Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and
the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall
be forever, One God always here. (repeat)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

**SCRIPTURE LESSONS: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
God's covenant with Abraham**

17 When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Walk with me and be trustworthy. ² I will make a covenant between us and I will give you many, many descendants." ³ Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, ⁴ "But me, my covenant is with you; you will be

the ancestor of many nations. ⁵ And because I have made you the ancestor of many nations, your name will no longer be Abram but Abraham. ⁶ I will make you very fertile. I will produce nations from you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will set up my covenant with you and your descendants after you in every generation as an enduring covenant. I will be your God and your descendants' God after you.

¹⁵ God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, you will no longer call her Sarai. Her name will now be Sarah. ¹⁶ I will bless her and even give you a son from her. I will bless her so that she will become nations, and kings of peoples will come from her."

EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 4:13-25 The words of Paul Abraham's promise is received through faith

¹³ The promise to Abraham and to his descendants, that he would inherit the world, didn't come through the Law but through the righteousness that comes from faith. ¹⁴ If they inherit because of the Law, then faith has no effect and the promise has been canceled. ¹⁵ The Law brings about wrath. But when there isn't any law, there isn't any violation of the law. ¹⁶ That's why the inheritance comes through faith, so that it will be on the basis of God's grace. In that way, the promise is secure for all of Abraham's descendants, not just for those who are related by Law but also for those who are related by the faith of Abraham, who is the father of all of us. ¹⁷ As it is

written: *I have appointed you to be the father of many nations.* So Abraham is our father in the eyes of God in whom he had faith, the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that don't exist into existence. ¹⁸ When it was beyond hope, he had faith in the hope that he would become the father of many nations, in keeping with the promise God spoke to him: *That's how many descendants you will have.*

¹⁹ Without losing faith, Abraham, who was nearly 100 years old, took into account his own body, which was as good as dead, and Sarah's womb, which was dead. ²⁰ He didn't hesitate with a lack of faith in God's promise, but he grew strong in faith and gave glory to God. ²¹ He was fully convinced that God was able to do what he promised. ²² Therefore, it was credited to him as righteousness. ²³ But the scripture that says *it was credited to him* wasn't written only for Abraham's sake. ²⁴ It was written also for our sake, because it is going to be credited to us too. It will be credited to those of us who have faith in the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was handed over because of our mistakes, and he was raised to meet the requirements of righteousness for us.

***GOSPEL: Mark 8:31-38**

³¹ Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: "The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and then, after three days, rise from the

dead.”³² He said this plainly. But Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him.³³ Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, then sternly corrected Peter: “Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.”

³⁴ After calling the crowd together with his disciples, Jesus said to them, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me.³⁵ All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them.³⁶ Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives?³⁷ What will people give in exchange for their lives?³⁸ Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Human One will be ashamed of that person when he comes in the Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “Difficult teachings”

There are many things going on in our scripture texts this morning. The Genesis, Romans text and the Psalm talk about God’s covenant promises to the Israelites. What is a covenant? It’s an agreement, contract, treaty, pledge, or a promise. In Genesis we can read about God’s promise concerning land and descendants that God makes with Abraham. God

calls Abram to leave his country and go out to unknown lands to become the Father of many nations. His name will be great and he will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. How would you feel if God said that to you? I think it would provide some blind trust on our part.

In the letters to the Romans, the Apostle Paul talks to his church about this covenant. For Paul, the First Testament character exemplified genuine faith better than did Abraham. This text from Paul reminds us that justification by faith and salvation by grace go hand in hand. To have implicit trust in a faithful God is to recognize that we are saved by a generous and uncalculated gift of divine grace from God. Seen this way, salvation is always a gift, never a reward. That’s another promise from God.

Now that we are comfortable with those promises from God, along comes Jesus to make us uncomfortable. The disciples have just told Jesus that they know he is the Messiah. Now Jesus tells them he will suffer many things, be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed. However, he will rise again after three days. They miss that part of this prediction from Jesus.

If you had been following this prophet around Judah with this man for perhaps years by now, and you have believed everything he has taught them. And now he makes this prediction of his suffering death, what would you think? What would you feel?

Perhaps you would feel ashamed that you had been tricked by this con artist. You trusted Jesus and now you don't know what to believe. What kind of promise is Jesus giving them? No wonder Peter was upset. The Messiah is not supposed to suffer or be killed. The Messiah is supposed to rule the world with justice and love.

And then Jesus continues to challenge them and all the people in the crowd around them. "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross, and let him follow me." What a shock those words from Jesus were? Just the word "cross" is bad enough. At least Jesus is telling them the truth about their association with Jesus; what they can expect? I'm sure some in the crowd decided to walk away. They had other plans for their lives.

The cherry on top of the cake is found in the last two things we read in this text. Jesus says, "whoever seeks to save his life shall lose it: and whoever loses his life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel shall save it." Does this mean we are trapped? If we leave, we die?

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE!! Verses 36 – 38. "Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives?" (*That sounds like a trick question.*) Jesus continues, "What will people give in exchange for their lives? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Human

One will be ashamed of that person when he comes in the Father's glory with the holy angels."

I have no answers for you. Read over what Jesus says in this text and decide for yourself. Words to think about. Challenges to meditate on. Decisions to pray about.

Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC: "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"
St. John Choir VIDEO

INSTALLATION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Nancy Eisenhauer – President

Jan Miller – Vice President

Sharon Banjavcic – Secretary

Ginny Ganschinetz – Treasurer

Judy Schmitt and Russ Hartmann –

Financial Secretaries

Lew Thomasino – Buildings and Grounds

With many thanks to Sue Williams and Eric Moayer for serving our church faithfully the last years.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Almighty God, creator of all living things; what you created, you sustain in orderly fashion. What you love in life, you have joined in the entry into our history in Christ. Grant that all who trace to Abraham and Sarah, their faith in one God, the love for one another that will seek reconciliation

among synagogue and church and mosque, that the world that dies all deity will consider more thoughtfully the faith that we have in common. Especially bless the church to which we belong that we may make strong the ties that bind us to others of like precious faith and live up to the high calling that is ours in Christ Jesus. May we convey this faith by daily prayer in our homes as well as Sunday prayers in your house.

Grant to our nation more tolerance of differences racial, ethnic, social, economic, and religious, that we may attain a greater harmony in our common life and less violence on our streets. To Those who monitor our streets and highways and waterways, grant wisdom and caution as they meet threats to our common safety.

Bless with your compassionate Spirit the medical community with the vocation to heal the sick. Grant that the businesses providing the systems for our healthcare may know the concern for persons as well as profits in order to bring us what is needed with fairness to all, both rich and poor.

We pray all these things in the name of your son, who taught us to pray . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER: 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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: "Shepherd Lead" 774
Shepherd, lead, lead me in your righteousness, Make your way plain before my face. For it is you, God, you, God only, who makes me to lie down in safety.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

In a world that offers a vision of never enough, we share in God's abundant provision for all. While we could gain the world but lose our soul, it is from within our soul that we share in a generous spirit of giving.

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

Giving God, Jesus invited us to give our lives away, take up our cross, and to follow. Rather than exchanging our souls, may the sharing of these gifts nurture our commitment to walk in your way. In the name and way of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

We step out into a world offering us the power to gain the whole world, and yet the call to discipleship is one that is less of us and more of Christ. Go forth to serve, to embrace a life of humility, and to walk in the

way of the cross. For such a path is the way of life.
Amen.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE: “Let There Be Peace on Earth”

POSTLUDE: “Fanfare” Kenin L. Raybuck

PRAYER LIST:

CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF BOB SCHWARTZ

LENTEN SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF FASTING AND FEASTING TO BECOME MORE LIKE CHRIST

During the season of Lent, giving up something or adding something to our lives is seeking to become more like Christ. Imagine if we were to do both. Imagine if we chose to fast from the things that become barriers to loving others as Christ did and decided instead to feast on the things that would allow us to embody Christ's love and compassion toward others fully.
So, in this Lenten season, I invite you to...

Fast from complaining and feast on gratitude.
Fast from impatience and feast on serenity.
Fast from bitterness and feast on kindness.
Fast from rudeness and feast on civility.
Fast from anger and feast on composure.

Fast from worry and feast on wonder.
Fast from judgment and feast on acceptance.
Fast from apathy and feast on curiosity.
Fast from hard-heartedness and feast on compassion.
Fast from the things of this world and feast on the eternal things of Christ.

If we do, we will discover the life and blessings God imagines for us.

-Blessings, Rev. Shana Johnson, ISC Conference Minister