

# *Faith Presbyterian Church*

*Christians growing in Faith by caring,  
connecting, & serving community*



**CELEBRATING GOD'S LOVE ON THE FOURTH  
SUNDAY IN LENT**

**March 14, 2021**

**GOD'S PEOPLE GATHER**

CHIMES

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather as God's people in a world divided and distressed.

**Yet we gather as one people, united by God.**

We gather as God's people, journeying to Jerusalem.

**Yet we gather as one people, steadfastly traveling forward together.**

We gather as God's people, confronted by whirlpools of worry which threaten to spin us out of control.

**Yet we gather as one people following in the unfailing steps of Jesus, whose name we praise.**

OPENING PRAYER

**Holy and redeeming God, we thank you for this season of Lent during which we remember your care and concern.**

**We thank you for your ongoing creative energy in the world; for giving us gifts through which we may participate in your work; for enabling us to carry on the message and ministry of Jesus. We ask that in these moments of worship, you will speak to us the words we most need to hear, so that we may respond to you with love and faithfulness. Amen.**

\*HYMN #339

“Be Thou My Vision”

CALL TO CONFESSION

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**God of the wilderness, we confess our own wanderings in sorrow and doubt. We know how it feels to be lost and troubled. It seems often that we are wandering from all that threatens us, and often we settle for only half-hearted attempts at life. Forgive our reckless search for security. Forgive our lack of confidence in the face of death. Grant us a large measure of your grace, so that even in the midst of great difficulty, we might not lose hope. Amen.**

## A TIME OF QUIET/PERSONAL CONFESSION

### ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PARDON

\*RESPONSE "Come and See"

*"Come and see, come and see, I am the way and the truth," said he.*

*"Follow me, follow me, come as a child, O come and see."*

### PASSING THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you!

**And also with you.**

Please share a sign of God's peace- a nod of greeting, a wave of hello, a bow wishing your neighbors God's peace, God's Shalom.

## WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

HEBREW BIBLE READING                      Numbers 21:4-9 (p. 111)

### SPECIAL MUSIC

GOSPEL READING                                      John 3:14-21(p.752)

SERMON "Living Into God's Promises: What's Your Antibody?"

So Lily the puppy is just learning how to walk around the block. What I have to do is pick her up and carry her a few houses down the street and then put her down and let her start walking. If I try to start out with her walking out of our yard, she won't budge.

She just lies down and starts chewing on a stick and looks up at me as if to say, if you think I'm leaving this yard, think again. I can't say I blame her as there are all kinds of scary things out in the world to deal with. Loud car noises, big school buses, strange smells and strange people who want to meet you and barking neighborhood dogs to walk past. The world is a scary place when you're not even a foot off the ground.

The world can be a scary place for us too. A few days ago, on March 11, we marked one year since the CDC declared that there was a global pandemic. This was a whole new thing for all of us. Think of all the ways we've adapted. I remember last spring thinking this whole thing would be over by summer. And then when summer came, we were sure we'd be done with the pandemic by the end of the year. Well finally now, one year later, we are very close to being done, although Covid-19 isn't going to disappear. Our fear of it will go down though.

There are some fears that are universal, like snakes! We don't deal with snakes today nearly as much as the Israelites had to deal with them in their 40 years of wandering in the desert. And to make their situation even more scary, they didn't know which ones were poisonous and which ones were harmless. So God tells Moses to make a snake out of bronze and put it on a pole, so that when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked up at the bronze snake, they lived. I don't doubt there's a bit of superstition involved with this story. In fact, hundreds of years later there's a story about how King Hezekiah destroyed the snake on a pole because people were worshipping it, instead of worshipping God. What does that remind you of? How about the golden calf? Humanity doesn't change much from the snake to the golden calf, to today as we still get off track really easily and worship other stuff instead of God.

But all superstition aside, they were on to something with that snake on a pole. Going way back into antiquity, snakes were used in medicine for healing. In fact a snake's venom was one of

the best cures for a dangerous snake bite. That's one of the reasons behind the symbol of the American Medical Association. It's that snake wrapped around a pole. Do you know what I'm talking about? So we have a bit of a double edged sword here. Snakes are poisonous. But they also have healing powers. Snakes are scary. But their venom can save your life. This is what we already know from decades of living: that there are two sides to most things. God doesn't remove the dangers, but God does provide an antidote. We might not always like the antidote God provides, but it's always there; including death as an antidote. Maybe I should have called this sermon "what's your antidote instead of antibody." But let's keep going.

Let's fast forward to today. The biggest conversation today is all about the vaccine. Who has gotten it and who hasn't; where they've gotten it and how long it took to get the appointment. I have my appointment for my first shot tomorrow at the UD Arena. I'll let you know how it goes. So the vaccine is a little bit of the virus that your body can handle along with who knows what else. The important thing is you get injected with the virus. Then your body says what is this foreign stuff? It shouldn't be here! And in response to this foreign intruder, your body then starts to make antibodies. That's why people have a reaction to the second shot and not the first one. When it's time for the second shot, your body has already made a whole army of antibodies ready to fight the intruders. Then when you get the second shot, the intruders appear and the fight begins. Aches, chills, sore arm, fever- all signs that your body is fighting off that virus. That's my layperson's account of the whole thing.

Here's the insight I had from these scripture readings today. What can harm us can also save us. God took the pain of the world to the cross. The cure is in the disease. What is harming us most right now? Is it fear? Or worry? Or pain? Or sadness? Let's lift it all up to God. God has made a covenant with us. God has promised us never to turn his back on us again. God has promised us love

and forgiveness. God has not promised us a problem-free, pain-free or worry-free life. And let's throw in the idea that living is a group effort. More on that in a moment.

I've said before that the stories in the Bible like to talk to each other. This is what's going on in John 3. It's an odd comparison to make between Moses lifting up the snake in the wilderness and Jesus being lifted up on the cross. One helped to heal people from a deadly snake bite. The other heals us from ourselves- from the pain and the worry and the sadness that threaten us every day. This image of Jesus lifted up on the cross comes right before that well-known verse: John 3:16. *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* Unfortunately this verse is often taken out of context, made too simple and misused, I think in a similar way to that snake on a pole. It borders on superstition to believe that you need to pray a certain kind of prayer and believe a certain way, and then you are "saved." I don't think that's the way it works. What helps me to wrap my mind around it is to think about what the gospel writer John meant by "eternal life." What if he meant life right here on this earth instead of some unknown after-death kind of life? Then the verse takes on a whole different meaning.

Then we can start to think about antibodies. What's your antibody? In other words what experiences, what kind of pain or sadness or fear have you and I been able to deal with in a small dose, so that we can build up our antibodies for when it comes to the really difficult parts of life? Getting the vaccine is one good example. I thought of another one while I was walking my puppy Lily around the block the other day. Whenever something got too overwhelming for her, like when the school bus drove by, or when she heard the rumble of garbage cans being brought inside, she would tell me she wanted me to pick her up and carry her for a bit until the scary thing went away. She knows her limits. She knows when something is a little bit too scary. But I bet the next time she

encounters a school bus or noisy garbage cans, she'll be a little bit less scared.

So are there things that we can do (other than go get our vaccine shot) to build up our immunity to the scary, troubling things in the world? Like this little boy who was afraid of the dark. One night his mother told him to go out to the back porch and bring her the broom. The little boy turned to his mother and said, "Mama, I don't want to go out there. It's dark." The mother smiled reassuringly at her son. "You don't have to be afraid of the dark," she explained. "Jesus is out there. He'll look after you and protect you." The little boy looked at his mother real hard and asked, "Are you sure he's out there?"

"Yes, I'm sure. He is everywhere, and he is always ready to help you when you need him," she said. The little boy thought about that for a minute and then went to the back door and cracked it a little. Peering out into the darkness, he called, "Jesus? If you're out there, would you please hand me the broom?"

Moses gave the people that snake on a pole and God has given us Jesus. Verse 19: *"this is the verdict: light has come into the world."* Jesus is God's ultimate expression of covenant. But unfortunately, like in these verses from John, talk about Jesus often leads to talk about judgment and condemnation. I really hope and pray that that the church has gotten beyond that kind of language because it's not helpful and it drives people away. What is helpful is to remember God's covenant promise to be with us always. Light has come into the world! That's good news.

And so we find the strength to slowly build up our antibodies; build up our ability to take on the really hard parts of life and death: to embrace eternal life right here and now, not in some future sense. And to embrace the idea that living is a group project. There are scary things that some people face that we will never have to face. But if living is a group project, we are bound by covenant to be there for others. If they lose, we lose too. The people faced those snakes together. Jesus was lifted up for the

whole world, not just a select few. Jesus is God's ultimate antidote.  
Thanks be to God for his wondrous love. Amen.

## MOMENT OF REFLECTION

### WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

HYMN #85

“What Wondrous Love Is This”

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Sharing Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer & The Lord's Prayer

## OFFERING OUR GIFTS

Call to the Offering

\*Doxology

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;*

*Praise Christ, all people here below;*

*Praise Holy Spirit evermore;*

*Praise Triune God, whom we adore. Amen*

\*Prayer of Dedication

**Accept these gifts, we pray, O God, as a sign of our willingness to care for your creation, and our desire to take your message of love and forgiveness out into the world. Transform them into your blessing for others, and for your world. Amen.**

\*HYMN #80

“Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley”

\*BENEDICTION

\*RESPONSE (#536) *Lord, make us more faithful, Lord make us more faithful, Lord make us more faithful, Until*

*we meet again. Faithful, faithful, faithful, until we meet again.*

POSTLUDE

**PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH FAMILY**

<i>Chris Adams</i>	<i>Alice Dibo</i>	<i>Jan Schroeder</i>
<i>Iris Anderson</i>	<i>Beth Griffin</i>	<i>Mary Swartzel</i>
<i>Maria Beimly</i>	<i>Norma Lesher</i>	
<i>Bob Christian</i>	<i>Betsy Morris</i>	

**Events March 15 – 21**

Tuesday	6:30 PM	Popcorn with the Pastor
Wednesday	10:30 AM	Blankets by Faith
	5:00 PM	Zoom Lent Study
Sunday	10:30 AM	Worship Service

**Sunday's Leadership**

	March 14	March 21
Worship Leader	Cyndi Adams	Jan Gifford
Usher	Bev Brown	Chris Adams

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Our **annual congregational meeting** will be held today, following worship, to share and receive the annual reports.

Thank you for following the guidelines for worship and any other time you are in the church building. Please wear a mask, observe social distancing, and make ample use of the hand sanitizers throughout the building.

*We will be sending an Easter bag of Goodies to the preschool since we will not be able to have an Easter Egg Hunt. You may*

donate candy, small toys, or money to help buy items. We will be collecting until March 21. Please give your donations to Samantha Adams. *Thank you for your support.*

If you are interested in **Easter flowers**, please speak with Cyndi Adams. We are not doing envelopes this year to simplify the process. The orders must be in by March 21.

*An update on our 2021 Capital Campaign* to raise dedicated funds for a multitude of necessary repairs which include air conditioning and front door replacement, to name a few. We have asked for \$33,700 in much-needed funds and to date, we have received in either pledges or donations \$26,600-- nearly 75% of the amount requested. We would like to thank everyone for their generosity. Above all else, we must thank God for his faithful generosity and praise him for what he has provided.

*Pastor Julia Williamson  
Music Director John Derrickson  
Secretary Sarah Harner*

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