

Faith Presbyterian Church

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

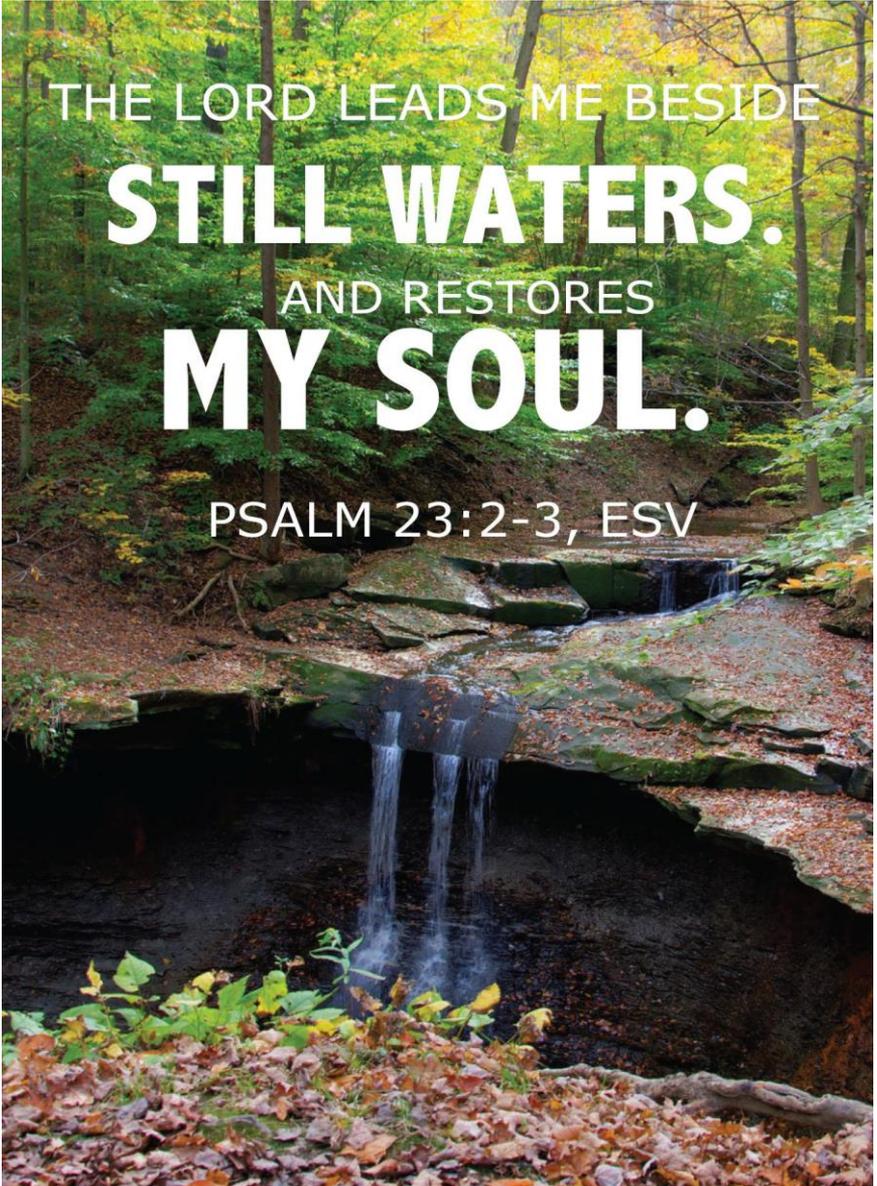
THE LORD LEADS ME BESIDE

STILL WATERS.

AND RESTORES

MY SOUL.

PSALM 23:2-3, ESV



March 20

Hello Faith Church Family,

I am sitting at my dining room table and looking out the window where I see the trees beginning to come back to life with some small red blossoms. And the grass looks extra green today, although our backyard has deep puddles from all the rain last night. Happy first day of spring!

Today the scripture is from the Prophet Micah. Micah hears God asking the people to remember what God has done for them. He writes:

² “Hear, you mountains, the Lord’s accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth.

For the Lord has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. ³ “My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me.⁴ I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam... that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord” (from Micah, Chapter 6.)

I hear in these words the deep connection between people and the earth. God is talking not only to the people, but also to the mountains and the earth’s foundations. God wants all of creation to know that he is calling the people back to him. God does this over and over throughout the Bible, but usually the people don’t listen. Maybe we’d pay more attention if we saw ourselves as just one part of creation.

So what is God saying to us today? The world is in quite a mess. How is God calling each of us to respond? Is God

calling us to change anything about our lives or to do anything (besides stay home) in response to this pandemic?

Today I am thinking about the call for blood donors, because what do we have in common with all the other creatures of the earth? You guessed it—blood! And the blood supply in Dayton is critically low. I haven't given blood in a while. So I went to [donortime.com](https://www.donortime.com) and found out that the Lutheran Church in Beavercreek is having a blood drive on March 30. You can make an appointment online too. Or you can call the **Dayton Community Blood Center (349 S. Main St., Dayton) at 937 461-3450**. For those of us who are able to give blood, how about giving it a try? I see it as one way to remember what God has done for us and to answer God's call to fit into his grander scheme for all creation.

Inspiring Verse of the Day *“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him (James 1:12.)”*

Take Good Care today,

Pastor Julia

Dear Faith Family, I invite you to put aside some quiet moments in your day and engage with these prayers and thoughts. Let us quiet our minds and our hearts as we listen for God's word to us today.

CELEBRATING GOD'S LOVE ON THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT March 22, 2020

CALL TO WORSHIP *Read prayerfully*

When we can't be in the same room together...

Touch us with your love, O God of life!

When we must keep six feet apart...

Touch us with your love, O God of life!

When we aren't even supposed to touch our own faces...

Touch us with your love, O God of life!

Help us to feel your presence.

Touch us with your love, O God of life!

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, today we give you thanks for your presence in our lives which brings us together even when we are apart. May we feel the connection to one another through your Holy Spirit moving through our lives, our world and our church, that once more soon we will be your gathered people. Amen.

CALL TO CONFESSION

Let us bring to God in prayer whatever weighs heavy on our minds and hearts today as we pray...

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God, as we walk through this dark time we confess that we are fearful and anxious. We fear we will run out of food and basic necessities. We fear we will not have enough money. We fear that our anxiety will get the best of us. We fear we and others we love will get sick. Forgive us when we become so self-consumed that we only focus on the dire situation and fail to see goodness around us.

Today we pray that you will lead us to a still place where we can feel and know your presence. We pray that your promise is true, that you constantly pursue us with goodness and love, and that we are never alone. Amen.

A TIME OF QUIET/PERSONAL CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PARDON

Dear friends, read or sing aloud these familiar words and feel God's strong, assuring presence...

***This is the good news which we received,
In which we stand, and by which we are saved:
That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.
We believe He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.***

Now fold your hands in front of your heart and bow to your neighbors near and far, wishing them God's peace.

WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

Psalm 23

*The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.*

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me

all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The Gospel of John 9:1-7

As Jesus went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent.”) So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

The story of the blind man takes up the whole of the Gospel of John Chapter 9. So if you would like the “big picture” of this story, I invite you to open your Bible and read John 9. In Jesus’ day, as today, people wrestled with the eternal question of “why bad things happen to good people.” There are no really satisfying answers to this question. The answer Jesus gives in verse 3 seems harsh to us. Was the man born blind so that Jesus could come along years later and heal him, therefore showing off the works of God? There’s no justice there. But when we consider the alternative, that the man was born blind as God’s punishment because his parents had done something wrong, that seems even worse.

Today we see things from a more scientific point of view. We know that the Covid-19 virus jumped from an animal to a human at that meat market in Wuhan, China back in

December. Then it mutated and began human to human transmission, which allowed it to travel around the world. Unlike the flu virus though, we have no natural immunity to it. In Jesus' time, they didn't understand any of this of course. They had many diseases, but no explanations. Yet the human need to explain things was as strong as ever.

If you're still waiting for the good news of this story, be patient. The big question throughout the story is, who is really blind, and who can really see? The answer is surprising. The disciples are blind, because they are still asking the old question: who did something wrong? Someone must have done something wrong, in order for this man to be born blind. The neighbors don't understand either, and neither do the Pharisees. They are all blind and they all miss the point. They focus on the fact that Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath and some of them don't believe the miracle happened at all. But let's not condemn them too quickly, because we are skeptical too and we also cling to our routines. We love our daily routines, and now many of them are gone, at least for a little while. Everything happened so quickly, and we are still in disbelief.

I don't believe God causes bad things to happen, but I do believe that God walks with us all the time. And I believe that any situation can speak to us in a way that's beneficial. Jesus was calling everyone out of their old tried and true ways of believing—the disciples, the neighbors and the Pharisees. Only one person in this whole story has his eyes open. Only one person truly gets it. And guess who that is? If you said, the blind man, you're right! Just when we think we have life

figured out, that's when we are most in the dark. Just when we think we can see the answer, it escapes us.

We all want to know what's going to happen next week and the week after that. But we can't. Yet how about this... read Psalm 23 again. If we had a contest of all the characters in this story to see who could read Psalm 23 in the most genuine, heart-felt, honest way, who do you think would win? I say, the blind man would win. He is the one who gets what Jesus is all about. And his story asks us to take a look at ourselves and find those places in our lives where we don't see the truth. Take a look at ourselves, but then give it all back to God-- because life truly is a miracle. We are each of us walking miracles. Do you know how our eyes work? Beams of light first pass through all the different parts of your eye. When the light rays get to the lens, the lens bends the light rays to form a clear image. The lens focuses the light so we can see. The light rays then cross before they hit the retina at the back of the eye, making the image upside down. Your brain then flips the image upside down again so the image appears right side up. Pretty amazing!

Who would have thought that our brains would know to flip that upside-down image right side up? Maybe that's what this virus is doing to us. It's taking the way we see our world and flipping it upside down. As we are shaken up by the events of this past week, let's try to let Jesus pick up the pieces and put us back together when we are ready. I bet then we'll be a little more like the blind man, who is truly able to see, in more ways than one. The good news today is that when we humbly recognize and acknowledge that we really are walking in the dark in many ways, then God can open our eyes for us to see

the world as God does, in all its beauty, mystery and yes we admit, terror.

And now let's be together in prayer, keeping in mind those on our prayer list. If anyone would like to add someone to the prayer list, please let me or Maria know, and we will do that. Let us pray...

Holy God, we are apart this morning, but we are bound together in prayer. We thank you that you are always with us, wherever we find ourselves. We lift up to you first our joys—for those celebrating birthdays this week. For signs of spring; for the love of neighbors, friends and family; for warm beds and food on the table; for the gift of faith and church; for the circle of life which embraces us all.

And yet dear God, many of us feel very stressed and worried this week. We may even feel like we are walking through the valley of the shadow of death. And so we ask you to help us set aside our fear and help us to understand our duty toward others, and how your call for community at this time means isolating ourselves for the good of all.

Walk with our caregivers – doctors, nurses and all in the medical community. And walk with our first responders. Protect them and their families. Support their sense of purpose in a time when little makes sense.

We pray for all of those who have tested positive for the virus, and for all of those who worry they will.

We especially hold up those folks that are at higher risk for complications from the virus.

We pray for parents who have to explain what is going on to their children, and children who have to explain what is going on to their parents.

We pray for those who have anxiety as we all try to hold our own anxiety at bay.

We pray for those who are afraid for their finances, especially small business owners and employees with nowhere to report to work.

We pray for teachers and students to look with hope toward the future.

We pray for our leaders who are doing their best.

We pray for our churches, that we may strive to be at our best today and in the weeks ahead.

And we especially lift up our ailing Faith Family in prayer today, as well as all of our preschool teachers, and families.

And finally, we ask for peace that passes all understanding. Lead us in this unfathomable time dear God. Help us to see clearly through the darkness and walk with us now and into the weeks ahead. For we lift up all of our prayers, named and unnamed, in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray... *Our Father who art in heaven... Amen.*

I will be in touch again with everyone in the days ahead. In the meantime, if you would like to talk, give me a call anytime.

In God's Love,

Pastor Julia

Monday, March 23

Hello Faith Family,

As you may know, folks from Faith Church have been volunteering at the House of Bread a few times a year, helping to prepare and serve the hot meal provided each day for anyone in need. When we were there last time, we served close to 100 people. Now we just got word that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the House of Bread, while still remaining open, will no longer be using volunteers. Instead they will hire extra staff. And they also will need to purchase more of their food, as the grocery stores they rely on for donations have seen such an increase in customer demand. Melodie Bennett, Executive Director, writes: *“In the blink of an eye, the COVID19 virus has upended all of our lives. Our guests are frightened and confused, as many of the services they rely on are no longer operating. So they rely on us as a constant in their already stressful lives.”*

Our verse for the day is



*What does the Lord require
of you but to do
justice, and to love kindness
and to walk humbly with your God?"*

MICAH 6:8



It is hard to know how to do that right now. We are living into a new reality. But today one way we can all do that is by donating to the House of Bread. You can read more about them on their website, houseofbread.org. Prayers and action go hand in hand. Micah 6:8 is all about action, and so is Faith Church. Today let's be all about justice, kindness and humility. Amen.