

The Vineyard

*A publication to encourage and motivate participation in the family of God
and an aid in ministry for the members of Myerstown United Church of Christ.*



March 2023

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editor: Lee Ann Kurash

from the Pastor..

“Were You There?”

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Some songs leave us speechless. This one leaves me speechless every time. Words cannot capture its soul-deep, bone-stirring sentiment. Words cannot adequately express the overwhelming events and experiences it describes. When we experience such agony and grief, such stunning shock and surprise, words often fail us.

An African American spiritual that probably predates the Civil War, "Were You There?" was first published in 1899. Similar to Bluegrass music's early fusions of "hillbilly," gospel, and blues music, this spiritual's earlier roots include a white spiritual known in Tennessee as "Have you heard how they crucified my Lord?"

All four verses of "Were You There?" invite us to identify with the witnesses of Christ's death and resurrection. Across the vast distance of geography and time, we become part of the countless millions who have contemplated the meaning of the cross of Christ.

One phrase from the second verse stands out: "Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?" For African-Americans before and after the Civil War, "the cross and the lynching tree" have special meaning. Though both were symbols of horrific death, one represents transformational hope and the other intractable racial hatred.

Few people "apart from black poets, novelists, and other reality-seeking artists, have explored the symbolic connections." (James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, xiii). The symbolic connection was certainly not lost on the first African-Americans to sing it.

The lyrics of this beloved spiritual transport us from the grotesque horrors of Good Friday afternoon to the stunning mystery of Easter Dawn. We are transported from darkness to light, from despair to hope, from defeat to victory. In this Lenten season, as always, we stand suspended between the two, in speechless silence.

Take time to drink in, breathe in, and absorb deeply this profound expression of sorrow, coming from the heartache and backache of those enslaved and beaten down, singing about Jesus' suffering as they suffered, about Jesus' hanging as they were hung. Just as we remember Jesus' redemptive suffering, we remember theirs as well.

Even more, take time to marvel at the heartfelt hope and determination of those who believed that better days were coming; that their children, or grandchildren, or even distant generations, would one day stand tall and proud, free and equal, among all of God's children. For now, just sing this song. Then, speak it. Then, be silent.

Prayer: Silence us, O God, at the foot of the cross. Though words may fail us, amazement and wonder never fail to speak to our souls. May it be so, in Jesus' name. Amen.

+ *Lenten Blessings, Bruce Greer, Interim Pastor*

FROM THE PULPIT IN MARCH

Rev. Greer will be preaching

(Underlined = passage receiving primary emphasis.)

2ND SUNDAY IN LENT – MARCH 5

“Night Test”

Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121;
Romans 4:1-5,13-17; John 3:1-17

3RD SUNDAY IN LENT – MARCH 12

“Noon Test”

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95;
Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

4TH SUNDAY IN LENT – MARCH 19

“Sight Test”

Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

5TH SUNDAY IN LENT – MARCH 26

“Faith Test”

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130;
Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

REV. GREER'S SCHEDULE

Bruce is usually in Myerstown Sundays (8A-Noon), Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. He works at home in Baltimore on Mondays (feel free to contact him there). The “Pastor’s Day of Rest” is Friday. The Church Office will be advised of any changes to his schedule. Drop by to say “Hello!”

Bruce’s Contact information:

Email: revbgreer@gmail.com

Cell: 617.599.6305

(calls, texts, 24/7)

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STORM CANCELLATIONS

Worship cancellations due to winter weather will be announced via email blasts, Facebook page posts, and on our church office voice mail. Please call Rev. Greer (617.599.6305) or Marie Hibshman (717.343.3247) if you have further questions or concerns.



Dear Friends:

Thank you for your gift in support of the ministry of theological education at Lancaster Seminary. Your gift provides support for Lancaster Seminary’s mission. We seek to bring a gifted and dedicated faculty, committed and called students, and supporting churches, organizations, and friends into a vibrant community of faith.

In Christ,

Matt Hanna, Asst. Dir. of Data Management

Scout Sunday February 5, 2023



We are so proud to have had such a good turnout for Scout Sunday, which is always celebrated the first Sunday of February. We enjoyed their energy and participation during worship. We then got a chance to greet the Scouts and some of their parents during coffee hour following worship. We, as a congregation, are so blessed to have such a strong Scout Troop to sponsor. The Troop’s leaders are dedicated parents, most who stay on even after their son ages out or most likely earns their Eagle rank. They are very busy out in our community promoting the principals of scouting. Just a few things they do: trash pick-up twice a year on Elco Drive, help with spring clean-up at our Mt. Hope Cemetery, and set up a Memorial Day Veteran’s display at the VFW, as well as putting out flags at local cemeteries. **‘Do a good turn daily.’**

JULIUS MUTHENGI

MISSION MOMENTS

Subject: Prayer and Ministry Update

Dear Friends at Myerstown UCC,

Greetings in the precious name of our Lord and Savior who was, is and is to come. I trust this e-mail finds you being sheltered and upheld by his amazing grace. Indeed, it is by that grace that we live, move and have our being. Agnes and I are grateful to God for being there for us irrespective of the challenges our family have faced over the last several months. As you are aware, our daughter was admitted to the hospital on January 5th, 2023). We are, however, thankful to God because she was discharged on Saturday, February 4th, 2023! The hospital bill was quite high but God miraculously provided for the cost. In addition, on Thursday, 26th January '23, we had the burial of the late Dr. Gershon Mwiti, the father-in-law of our daughter Eunice. Thank you for your prayer support during such difficult times.

In spite of challenges, God has continued to bless my teaching and also the ministry in the village. One of the courses I am teaching this semester is Old Testament Poetry and Prophets, covering the books of Job to Malachi. It is always my privilege to walk such a journey with my students. Agnes has been used by God to impact the lives of women and their families. As always, she shares God's word with three small groups of women each month, as well as giving them food to take home, as God provides. Thank you so much for your prayers and financial support. We acknowledge with sincerity and humility your support contribution of \$100, received through Grace Community Church in February, 2023. Please be assured that we greatly appreciate your partnership with us in advancing the kingdom of God in Africa and the world. May God continually multiply his multifaceted blessings in amazing ways.

Your coworkers in Christ,

Julius and Agnes

Julius Muthengi, Ph.D.

Professor of Biblical & Theological Studies/Intercultural Studies
International Leadership University, Kenya

"Africa's greatest need is not economic or material in nature. Rather, it is that of transformed lives. . . men and women who are daily being renewed by the power of the Gospel and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. . . who treasure the Word of God, and are being captivated by its enduring power. This is a fundamental truth of Christianity whose value is as relevant today as it was centuries ago!"

-Prof. Julius Muthengi-



"VISION TEAM" UPDATE

Approved by our Annual Meeting (11/20/22), the "Vision Team" started after the holiday season. The team read an 88-page resource on churches facing difficult decisions re: their future (*Living Legacy*, published by the national United Church of Christ). At their first meeting (2/1), Rev. Greer distributed more readings to be discussed at their second meeting (2/15).

Starting 3/1, the Team will interview "experts" on various topics from property management to real estate, to church decline and partnerships/mergers. The Team's goal is to identify the most viable options for our future: from closing/disbanding, to continuing "as is," to every thing in between, all pros and cons considered. Informal conversations with other churches are starting.

Until the Team has more definitive information, they can't answer specific questions. Be patient! It's simply a matter of not having enough information to speak factually. Stay tuned for more reports. Meanwhile, please pray for the Team: Lindy Bennetch, Travis Bicher, Doug Bohannon, Bill Brown, Lee Ann Kurash, and Charlee Redick, led by Rev. Greer.



'Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.'

Psalms 50:15 NSRV

Lebanon County Christian Ministries March Wish List

We are in dire need of the following personal care items

- ~ size newborn 6 and 7diapers
- ~ shampoo
- ~ deodorant
- ~ body wash
- ~ tissues
- ~ shaving cream
- ~ feminine hygiene products
- ~ laundry detergent
- ~ paper towels
- ~ conditioner
- ~ toilet paper
- ~ bar soap
- ~ disposable razors

Current Wish List

- ~ oatmeal variety pack
- ~ Chunky/Progresso soups (ready made—no Water added)
- ~ chicken broth
- ~ whole grain products
- ~ pancake mix
- ~ cooking oils
- ~ Jello/pudding
- ~ mayonnaise
- ~ mustard
- ~ 24 oz. tomato sauce
- ~ cold cereal
- ~ baked beans
- ~ bagged pasta
- ~ canned potatoes
- ~ gravy
- ~ ketchup
- ~instant brown rice

Lebanon County Christian Ministries continues to operate as a help agency for Lebanon County.

Thank you for your ongoing support. Remember that besides food and clothing, other services are available at LCCM. If you have a need, please call LCCM at 717/272-4400.



Myerstown Troop 20 meets Wednesday evenings from 6:30—8:00 pm in the social hall. Please contact Scott Hentz, Scoutmaster, at 717/507-8804 for more information.

MARCH OUTREACH

One Great hour of Sharing

As is our tradition, during Lent we donate to One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS). This is an ecumenical mission that dates back to 1946 when it was actually begun by the Episcopal Church. It became an ecumenical effort among a number of denominations and currently OGHS comprises nine Christian denominations. The purpose of OGHS has remained the same—to collect gifts to assist those in need. Today, projects are underway in more than 100 countries, including the U. S. And Canada. Each denomination may differ in how they allocate funds, but all funds are used to make possible disaster relief, refugee assistance and development aid. It is evident to us all that there are critical needs in our world today. OGHS is nearly 50 years old. The needs of the world continue. Our giving is one way that we can make a difference in a person's life. Please, during this Lenten season, give serious thought to what is happening in our world and how we as a church can join with others to make a difference. Throughout Lent



there will be continuing information as we lift up this important offering.

C. Williams

Important!

Myerstown Women's Club meeting on Monday, March 6th at 7:00 pm in the social hall.

Council Meeting Tuesday, March 14th in the Library at 6:30 pm



March

- 3—Jennifer Kinsey
Carolyn Williams
- 4—Sally Ann Shaak
- 10—Derek Noll
- 12—Ronald Louser
Eric Shaffer
- 14—Linden Bennetch
Karen Leppo
- 16—Elizabeth Rittle
- 17—L. Patrick Krum
- 18—Diana Eisenhauer
- 20—Evangeline Zimmerman
- 21—Marcia Bicher
- 22—Carol Behney
- 25—Katie Fields



During March try to...

- Be present.
- Let the day flow with grace.
- Expect joy. Be positive.
- Serve with compassion.
- Speak only kindness.
- Impart only love.
- Never forget you're not alone.
- Give thanks for everything.
- See goodness in others

Mary
Davis



From Rev. Greer -- A Prayer for Lent

O God, there is no gift worthy of Christ,
Save for life and love itself.
Strip us of every pretension as we ponder the cross
And call us to sacrifice for the greater good,
As Jesus did.
This we pray in his courageous
And compassionate name.
Amen.

(Written by Bruce Greer)



WE ARE WHERE YOU ARE!



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***PLEASE
LOOK FOR
US!***



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@myerstownucc2072



IT'S TIME TO SHARE




In Galatians, the Apostle Paul encourages followers of Jesus to generously help and care for others. Though there is great need in the world and we can grow weary because we do not know how to help, God's Spirit energizes and re-energizes us in every season.

We can make a difference. We do make a difference. Your generosity makes all the difference. Your gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing provide immediate aid and long-term support to people experiencing hunger, thirst, disaster, or crisis around the world.

The need has never been greater. The opportunity is now. **It's time to share.**

YOUR GENEROSITY MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

Esmerelda Robles lives in rural Honduras. She and her neighbors participate in a "pass chain" program. A family receives a pregnant pig, sheep, or cow; families are taught how to feed and care for the animals. When the next piglet, lamb, or calf is born, it is passed on to another family, which in turn will do the same. "A dream we have as a family is to have a micro-business for the production and sale of meat," Esmerelda says. Families now envision a future not possible before. This is just one part of a program to improve food security. This program and its components are made possible because of your contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing.



So let's not allow ourselves to get
fatigued doing good. At the right
time we will harvest a good crop
if we don't give up...

— Galatians 6:9

One Great
HOUR
OF SHARING

 UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST