

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.



November 2023

Volume 42, Issue 11

editor: Lee Ann Kurash

Preparing for Final Exams

NOVEMBER 2023

The Revised Common Lectionary's (RCL) readings for the Church's liturgical year build from Advent's messianic prophecies to the incarnation of God-in-Christ, to the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ, to the birth of the Church at Pentecost. The Church Year always ends with the Festival of Christ the King (or "Reign of Christ"), the Sunday before Advent starts a new Church Year.

Since Advent of 2022, we have worked through "Year A" of the RCL, which features Matthew, the first Gospel. "Year B" features Mark (12/2023-11/2024); and "Year C" features Luke (2024-25). This year, the Festival of Christ the King, celebrating the reign of Christ and ongoing ministry of the wider Christian Church, will be on Sunday, November 26th, just after Thanksgiving.

Planned or not, the final three Sundays of Year A feature Matthew chapter 25: the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids, the Parable of the Talents, and the Judgment of the Nations. They are the "Three Final Exams for the Church" – the tests of faithfulness, resourcefulness, and compassion. Have we: Kept our lamps trimmed? Invested our talents wisely? Been compassionate? Or not?

Ultimately, the Church in all its forms must be assessed in at least these three ways. Have we kept the Light of Christ burning? Have we been faithful and resourceful stewards? Have we shown compassion towards all God's children in their need, as symbolized by the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and prisoner in Matthew 25:31-46? If we fail the final test, we fail Christ in all things.

Matthew is the Gospel for the Church because it is the only one that mentions the word "church," and offers guidance specific to churches (e.g., Matthew 18:15-20). What better way is there to assess our church than through the "three exams" of Matthew 25? How might our faithfulness, resourcefulness, and compassion be measured over time; high points, low points; successes, failures?

As we pass through what could be your last days as the church your ancestors and you have known and loved since 1855, can you keep the Light of Christ burning brightly even if it means leaving your current church home? Can you be faithful stewards and compassionate disciples beyond this much-loved location? Is there life for this Body of Christ beyond 306 West Main Avenue in Myerstown?

These are spiritual and theological questions – questions of faithfulness, resourcefulness, and compassion – that have little to do with where we gather to sing, pray, reflect, and fellowship on Sunday mornings. These questions involve the health of our faith and our life together as a Body of Christ, regardless of where our house of worship is located.

(please see next page)

This begs the question: Are you called to continue as a Body of Christ even if it means leaving this physical location and moving to another? Or, will the sale of our church property mean the end of the Myerstown United Church of Christ for all time? (As I write, we have no formal offers to buy our property.) Do you have the spirit and strength to go on, or not? *Please pray about this!*

Rather than thinking about how “we can’t go on like this,” think instead about how we go beyond ourselves into the future to advance Christ’s mission and ministry. If not us, then pass the torch to someone else who can carry it forward. If we are tired, so be it. *Well done good and faithful servants!* But our work is not done until we make major decisions about our future.

The end of a 168-year era has come. Do we celebrate a New Start by Pentecost Sunday, 2024, or pass the Light of Christ to another church? + *Blessings, Bruce Greer, Interim Pastor.*

P.S. FROM THE PASTOR

“TOWN HALL MEETING”

Sunday, November 12, After Worship

ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, November 19, After Worship

Big decisions may be required of us sooner, not later. With weakened participation, envelope giving down 35% in just three years, very few volunteers, aging members, and low energy, continuing our church “as is” will be very difficult at best. The time has come to decide about our future.

This is why we need your prayerful presence and courageous creativity as we hold an open forum on November 12th to discuss concerns and answer questions before the Annual Meeting on the 19th. Major decisions, requiring formal votes, may be needed on the 19th. Please attend on the 12th to better understand the issues that will come before us on the 19th.

Active members and friends of our church are invited to attend these meetings, prepare prayerfully, participate thoughtfully, and to seek the Spirit’s guidance for what is best for the ministry of Christ through and even beyond our church. See you on the 12th and 19th. *Please plan to attend!*

+ *Grace and Peace, Bruce Greer, Interim Pastor.*

FROM THE PULPIT IN **NOVEMBER 2023**

PENTECOST 23 – November 5 **“The Bread of Life”**

John 6:25-35

Rev. Keith Tussing, guest preacher
Sarah Wagner, guest musician

SERMON SERIES: NOV. 12, 19, 26 **Matthew 25 – Three Final Exams** **for the Church**

Rev. Greer preaching

PENTECOST 24 – November 12

1: Faithfulness

Matthew 25:1-13

PENTECOST 25 – November 19

2: Resourcefulness

Matthew 25:14-30

CHRIST THE KING – November 26

(End of the Pentecost Season)

3: Compassion

Matthew 25:31-46

Note – Advent begins on Sunday, December 3

Important Dates November 2023!

Wednesday, November 1—Troop 20 meeting 6:30 pm
In social hall

Monday, November 6—Myerstown Women’s Club
7:00 pm in social hall

Saturday November 11— Scouting for Food Bag drop
off 8:30–11:30 am social hall

Sunday, November 12—Town Hall meeting immediately
after worship.

Tuesday, November 14—Council meeting at 6:30 pm
in the Library.

Saturday, November 18—Scouting for Food bag pick up
8:30–11:30 am social hall

Sunday, November 19—**Annual Meeting** immediately
following worship

Thursday, November 23—**Thanksgiving Day...**
Count your Blessings!

Saturday, November 25—New Horizons Breakfast at
Country Fare (reservations
and pmt. no later than 11/18)

Wednesday, November 29—Troop 20 meeting 6:30 pm



Happy Birthday!

NOVEMBER

- 1—Renee Duffy LaBar
- 3—Emily Frantz
- 4—James Eisenhauer
- 6—Joan Hartman
- 8—Nicholas Garman
- 9—Larry Mentzer
- 19—Donald Brown
- 21—Glenn Bicher
- 23—Nancy Brown
- 27—Jim Diehm
Darlene Noll
- 28—Jennifer Blystone
- 30—Gene Haag



Dear Members of Myerstown UCC: Penn Central Conference notified us of your gift of \$1,000 which was placed in our Benevolent Fund. Your generosity touches the lives of real people and enhances our mission to provide compassionate care and services. Please convey our thanks to the members of your congregation. Helping people, reaching out a helping hand to someone who needs our concern is what UCC Homes is all about. Because of your continued support in this effort, it is what you are about also.

Sincerely,
Victoria Velez
Dir. Of Public Relations
UCC Homes

J'm just checking in...

We are entering the season when social media feeds start filling up with fun parties, holiday festivities, and moments that might make you feel like you're missing out. There's nothing wrong with these celebrations-- they're important and they're beautiful, but I understand how hard it can be to witness these things all over your social media feeds when they're all you want in life. I understand if you don't feel like celebrating or commenting, or even being near the phone.

I think some days we've forgotten that social media doesn't tell the full story. I also think the more time we spend on social media, the more our own lives can become warped. Feelings of discontent can creep in. Our relationships begin to change. Our presence is lacking. I think what we actually need to do is wake up to the reality that social media is changing us. It's changing the way we look at what we've been given. It's changing the way we connect. It's changing how we view ourselves. We have to be careful in using these tools, not letting the tools use us.

I'm not telling you to throw your phone into the woods. That's not it. But I am saying that we aren't talking about the elephant in the room enough: how social media is hindering our mental health and what we're supposed to do with that fact. Do we ignore it? Do we chalk it up to "no big deal"? Do we dare change something? Do we start the conversation?

I want to encourage you to cultivate fullness in your own life. Put down the phone and look around you. Call a friend. Write a letter. Make some plans. Live instead of documenting. Go places without being all plugged in. Be where your feet are.

The first time you turn your phone off more than likely won't be the moment you run into the kind businessman who returned back to his hometown to help his grandfather save the toy store before Christmastime. But, as you dare to unplug more and more, you might find some unexpected magic emerging.

I can't say you won't feel lonely or like other people have greener grass than you this week. Life ebbs and flows in seasons— sometimes, the grass will feel so lush + green, and other days, you'll grapple with envy and comparison. Ebb and flow, friend. It's okay to not always be on the mountaintop.

I hope you show up though. I hope you fall in love with your living, breathing, waking life. I hope you catch the last-minute flight. Eat the candy. Feel the ocean on your ankles. Stay up too late.

I hope you relentlessly check into your own life and realize you have something really good here. And it's all yours. You can cultivate a life you love— but it will take your presence and full attention to get there.

From Hannah B. (Founder of 'More Love Letters')

Julius Muthengi Update

Dear Friends at Myerstown UCC,

Greetings in the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I trust this communication finds you well. Agnes and I together with our family are doing well by the grace of God. Indeed, God has given us comfort in the midst of the deaths of seven close relatives this year. We thank the Lord Jesus for being our shelter and defender in times of storm!

God's ministry is progressing well both at the university and also among our community in the village. One of the courses I am teaching this semester is Pentateuch and Old Testament Historical Books (Genesis to Esther). It is a mammoth task but I thank God for his enabling. Regarding our village ministry, we continue praising God for doing great things to our community. For instance, two weeks ago, Agnes had a wonderful time with approximately sixty women. She preached God's word and also shared a meal with them, as well as giving them food-stuffs to take home! The next meeting will be on Friday, October 27th, 2023. Pray that God will bless his ministry as we continue fulfilling the Great Commission in Africa and beyond.

Thank you so much for standing with us through prayers and financial support. We acknowledge with great humility your support contribution of \$200, sent through Grace Community Church in October, 2023. Please know that we always pray for you as you continue fulfilling God's purpose for you and the globe. As you pray for us, please remember the needs of our marginalized community (food, solar lamps, fees for needy children). Pray also for our country as we await the El Nino rains predicted in October, November and December. The last time we had such rainfall was many years ago. It caused a lot of damage in the country. May God continually bless you immensely.

Your friends in Christ,

Julius and Agnes



PLEASE CONTINUE SUPPORTING LEBANON COUNTY CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES BY DONATING TOILET PAPER.

THIS IS AN ON-GOING AND DIRE NEED.

WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS!



LOOK FOR US WHERE YOU ARE!

<https://www.facebook.com/myerstownunitedchurchofchrist>



<https://twitter.com/myerstownucc>

<https://www.instagram.com/myerstownucc/>



<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRDGqMFCollc92-uGCEsUQmyerstownucc2072>



image courtesy of radionwtn.com (Sharon McFarlin)



Set your clocks back one hour Sunday, November 5th at 2 am. If you haven't already, this is also a good time to check the batteries in your smoke detectors!