

# Welcome!

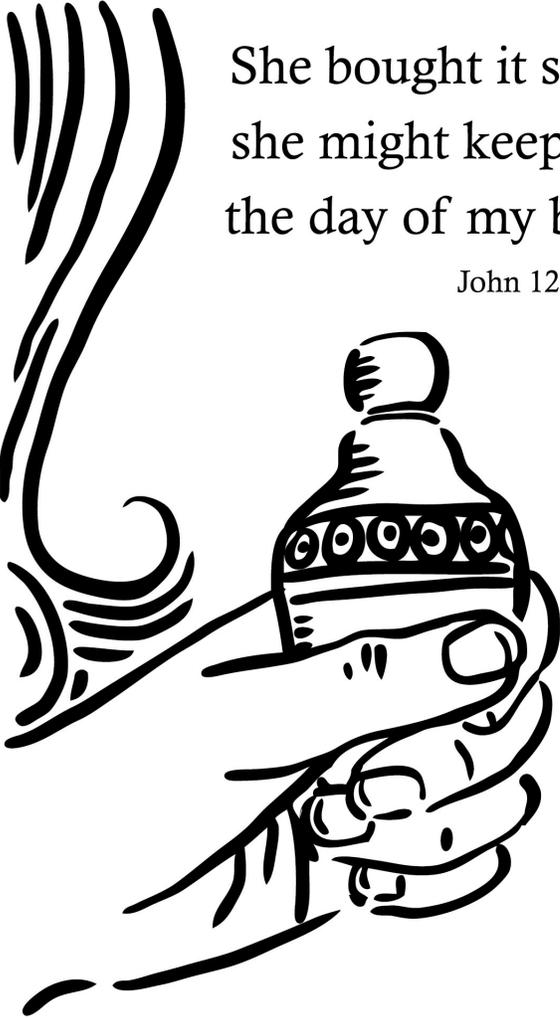
First Congregational Church of Webster Groves

United Church of Christ

Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

March 22, 2020

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT



She bought it so that  
she might keep it for  
the day of my burial.

John 12:7, NRSV

*We respond to God's call by welcoming  
everyone  
regardless of ability, age, ethnicity, race,  
gender identity,  
sexual orientation  
or socio-economic background.*

*To proclaim in word and deed  
the love of Christ, we affirm that all may  
share in the full life,  
ministry, fellowship, responsibilities and  
blessing of our congregation.*

*No matter who you are  
or where you are on life's journey, you are  
welcome here.*

## ORDER OF WORSHIP

### WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

### TOLLING THE BELL

### LIGHTING THE CANDLES

### PRELUDE

### OPENING WORDS

*Disciples of Christ*

Iona Community

### RAISING THE COVENANT

**We who are called of God into this Christian community covenant together; to seek to know the will of God, to experience the joy and struggle of discipleship, to proclaim in word and deed the love of Christ, and to work for peace and justice among all people. We trust God's promise of grace and forgiveness and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our trials and rejoicing.**

### GATHERING HYMN

*Kindred, We Now Meet to Worship*

Thommy Snell

Kindred, we now meet to worship,  
Reaching out through screen and phone.  
Though we dwell in isolation  
We don't have to be alone.  
Worshiping beyond our building,  
Our connection's no less real.  
Though we cannot meet in person,  
Covenant unites us still.

Siblings, share a song of gladness  
Lifting spirits, spreading cheer,  
So that in these days of sadness  
We won't be consumed by fear.  
In this time of mass confusion,  
Sickness, loss, and overwhelm,  
Let's encourage one another  
Hands not joined, but hearts are held.

### RITUAL OF APPROACH

#### *Invitation*

Jesus, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.

**But only say the word, and your servant will be healed.**

#### *Corporate Confession*

We confess, O God, that there have been times when we imagined ourselves more aware than we are. Like the male disciples we have chosen to speak when silence should have been observed. We have pushed against society's restraints when it would have been better to comply, to recognize one another's needs rather than our own fleeting wants. We have even selfishly sought to justify ourselves by claiming to be more righteous or holy than we are.

Hear, O Holy One, our hearts' confessions to you.

*Silence for Personal Confessions*

*Words of Assurance*

Sisters and brothers, hear this good news: Forgiveness pours forth from God like tears of joy. No barrier you erect can obstruct the flow of these healing waters. Receive the gift of God's forgiveness that you may be restored and filled with peace. Fully forgiven, you are empowered to show great love.

**Thanks be to God.**

NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLY

Tracey Harris,  
*Director of Christian Ed and Student Minister and Rivet*

THE WORD SHARED

Merrimon Boyd, *Student Minister*

*From the Gospels*

Matthew 26:6-13

New Revised Standard Version

While Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table.

But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, "Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor."

But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.

"By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

*Response.*

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the people.

**Thanks be to God.**

MESSAGE OF THE DAY

*"Pleasure vs. Authority vs. Death"*

Rev. David Denoon, *Pastor*

The gospels of Mark and Matthew provide an account of that act of the unnamed woman. The disciples, uncomfortable with such an extravagance, objected.

Later retellings of the story would claim that the woman was Mary of Bethany, as in the gospel according to John. Luke would identify her as a sinner whose sin was not named but apparently was well known to the others at the table. She washed Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped the moisture away with her hair, and anointed them. And the association would grow with her and Mary Magdalene who is introduced immediately afterward by Luke.

"The woman with the alabaster flask" is someone whose story can create unease. This may be because she performs an act so intimate it's off-putting.

In each case – Matthew's, Mark's, Luke's, and John's – the woman is scolded or disrespected by someone at the table. The host of the meal objects in Luke, Judas Iscariot in John, and – as I already noted – the disciples in Matthew and Mark.

But there's another facet to this. Jesus bears the title "Christ" so historically that people sometimes

mistake it for his last name. Christ, however, is a Greek translation of the word Meshiach (Messiah) in Hebrew or Aramaic. In English, we would use the phrase, “anointed one.” And anointing is what this woman does to Jesus.

Put in the hands of someone with authority, anointing is what indicates someone’s royal majesty. In addition to rulers, priests in ancient Hebrew tradition were anointed. And you may even have seen me anoint people who are baptized or confirmed in the faith. Anointing is symbolic of God’s Spirit resting on a person. According to prophecy, the Messiah would be the person who restored David’s royal line to the throne of Israel.

Yehoshua Meshiach. Jesus the Messiah. Jesus Christ.

But in the gospels, the word used for what happens to Jesus at dinner on Wednesday is not the same as that which is used for anointing rulers.

This anointing indicates not simple pouring but applying. It is an act of gentle kindness, performed on someone who is stressed or being bathed. That appearance of the anointing is what made the disciples so uncomfortable. They complained of extravagance and waste.

Did they suppose that Jesus ought to have objected at the extravagance? They wouldn’t be alone in our tradition, you know.

Historically, our spiritual ancestors have objected to such displays of affection.

In fact, ask yourself, how you might feel if you saw someone who is supposed to be humble or holy – the Dalai Lama, say, or the Pope – accept such an offering? (Not that any of us would get an invitation to such a dinner, but still...)

But Jesus did not object. What he did was to say that the action did not mean what they thought it meant. He may have been saying, in fact, that it didn’t mean what the woman thought it meant. “She has performed a kindness for me,” he said. “She has anointed me beforehand for my burial.”

That’s some surprising language. As this act is performed which appears to be, maybe, a coronation. Or, as it’s perceived, it’s an extravagant kindness. Is it pleasure?

Or maybe it’s authority being granted. But what authority does this woman have that would make it possible for her to anoint a regent, a Messiah?

Jesus bring us back to the reality of his passion. He reminds us, as he reminded them, of the reason Holy Week happened. There would be suffering and death, and it would happen suddenly and speedily. There would not be time – because of the holiday – to attend to all the necessities of a proper burial.

There is a group of women in Christian history referred to as “the myrrh bearers” – Mary

Magdalene, Joanna, Salome, and Mary the mother of James. There were others there, unnamed, according to Luke. These are the ones who went to the tomb on the morning of the resurrection. They took with them ointments and spices for the rightful preparation of the body of the dead Jesus. But when they arrived, the tomb was open, and the body was missing. They were terrified, Mark says. And one can imagine that this had as much to do with their inability to prepare the body as it did the appearance of a grave robbery. But his body had been prepared beforehand. His body had been prepared beforehand. So, lacking their expected role, this group would be the ones who would herald Jesus' resurrection to the other disciples.

And that is a profound role for them, especially given the way that women have been treated by the church and its wider society and cultures.

Through centuries and millennia, the place and role of women in the church has been challenged pretty consistently. And the choice by church authorities to do this has been grossly problematic, especially considering the prominence that the women around Jesus enjoyed.

They may not have been among the twelve disciples, who were all men. But there was a bunch of symbolism going on about those men – emulating the sons and grandsons of Jacob for whom the twelve tribes were named. But, remember, Jacob also had daughters. And even though he and his wives would have loved their daughters just as much as their sons, those daughters are memorable for their mistreatment and the dismissive way in which they were treated.

In fact, speaking of dismissiveness, so often women don't even have names in our tradition. Who knows the names of Noah's wife or Lot's or Job's? Yet these women were crucial to the lore in which their stories are found.

Jesus touched women, traveled with women, received reproof from them, and even made one of them – Mary Magdalene – his original apostle. How dare we have spent so many centuries deriding and dismissing them!

He clearly was establishing a new spiritual order.

And we men in the church decided, rather than take the risk that he did of recognizing the equality of women, instead to forget that his grace is given equally. Thus, until only a few generations ago, we Americans ignored their equal status as citizens, and really only until a few decades ago we mainline Christians have ignored women's right to equal status as leaders in the church.

How dare we have done this?

The gifts that women bring to spiritual caregiving and prophecy were set aside for far too long. How could we survive times such as this without women to lead us, to remind us that feeling

small or powerless does not mean that we will be crushed, that strength, real spiritual strength, is rooted in us, growing out from us. We with Mary of Nazareth are God-bearers; with Mary Magdalene and the others we are myrrh-bearers.

Let's face it, men don't convey that message very well. We can repeat God's admonition, "Be not afraid" or the promise, "I am with you," but we have had our own societal strength and social privilege to protect us. And, besides, that same power that has enabled us to face the struggles of this world with confidence is the power that has created stratified society, racism, classism, discrimination, and xenophobia.

It was time to end that kind of power in Jesus' day. "You must be like children," he said. "Those who would be exalted must humble themselves." "The first shall be last, and the last shall be first." Pretty clearly, he knew something that is only beginning to dawn on us as a religion, as a species.

And it began with a woman with an alabaster flask full of perfume, doing our Savior a kindness – not giving him pleasure, though that's how it was perceived. Not crowning him king, although he rules our hearts. But anointing him beforehand for his burial, so that we might understand truly why he came among us and dwelt here so briefly, full of love and glory, full of grace and truth.

Amen.

#### PRAYER HYMN

*A Woman Came Who Did Not Count the Cost*

R. D. Leech

A woman came who did not count  
the cost of doing what she could, She broke an alabaster flask,  
and sweetness spilled on Jesus' head.  
O God, you are th'Anointing One  
who does not count your passion's cost.  
And when we gather you will spill the sweetness of your grace on us.  
You give as she, surprisingly,  
you give with beauty as she gave, You give as she, not holding back,  
you make us Christ-like with your love.  
O God, you are th'Anointing One  
who does not count your passion's cost.  
And when we gather you will spill the sweetness of your grace on us.

#### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

*We Lift Our Joys and Concerns to God*

*Prayers of the Day*

*Prayer of Our Savior*

**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 sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

## What's Happening at First Congregational Church March 22, 2020

### CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

#### All activities at First Church suspended until mid-May

On Wednesday, May 18, the Executive Ministry decided to suspend all activities held onsite, from now through the middle of May. We hope to be able to return to worship, the weekend of May 16 - 17, when not only are we planning some very celebratory worship. We also will host a wonderful organ concert by Andrzej Zahorski of the Benedictine Parish at the Priory, honoring 25 years of our Casavante Freres instrument. Watch here for further updates and details.

### First Day of Spring

As the temperatures rise and flowers start popping up, I always see spring as the season of hope and joy. I will confess to being a card carrying member of the 12-step program for gardener's and, I'm thankful that if we have to go through this crisis and have to distance our selves, it's springtime! Gardening is an activity that is safe and healthy! There's (almost) nothing that gives me more joy than to see flowers emerge and grow.

I thought I might bring a little cheer and share a few photos from our gardens. The Helebores, (Lenten Rose) are blooming and the daffodils are starting to pop open.

My all time favorite gardening quote:

"In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt." ~  
Margaret Atwood

Happy spring!  
Debbie Tolstoi



**Sunday, March 22 – Fourth Sunday in Lent – 10:00 AM**

**Watch on our YouTube channel**

**<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZO7v1QNm6F1F1jRAzCLapA>**

Precautions against the spread of the novel coronavirus caused us to decide not to have the Oikos Ensemble perform (Good Friday Blues has also been cancelled.) Scripture: Matthew 26:6-13. An unnamed woman anoints Jesus as he enjoys a meal in a friend's home. This story or another similar to it happens in every one of the four gospels. But in each case, someone objects, perceiving that pleasure may be the woman's intention. Also, however, in each case Jesus says it means something else. We riff together on the themes to be found here. Message of the Day: "Pleasure vs. Authority vs. Death"

### **Sundays in Lent**

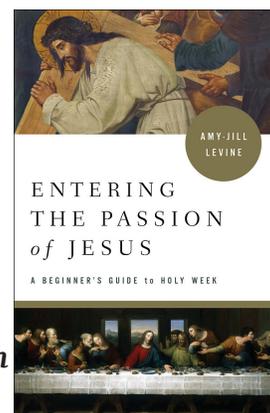
*A mind-blowingly insightful, Jewish interpretation of Christ's Passion!*

***"Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week"***

*by Amy-Jill Levine*

For the Sundays in March and Palm Sunday, Pastor Dave Denoon will lead a Bible study series based on a book by the (Jewish) professor of Christian history at Vanderbilt University, Amy-Jill Levine. The series includes video commentaries featuring Prof. Levine and vibrant discussion featuring you!

***Join Pastor Dave Denoon and the student ministers Tracey Harris and Merrimon Boyd for this Sunday's Bible study, on our YouTube channel at 11:00 AM.***



### **Time with Miss Tracey**



Student minister Tracey Harris is, of course, also Director of Christian Education Tracey Harris. "Time with Tracey" is our newest web innovation, including stories and activities. Meet Miss Tracey at our YouTube channel now, to see and hear a story read by Tracey in our very own Holaday Library! A new "Time with Miss Tracey" will be available, Friday and Saturday too. Each one will appear on the YouTube page at 12:30 PM.

### **Easter Flowers Available**

Normally, during Easter we enjoy having our sanctuary beautifully decorated with a variety of beautiful spring flowers. As we will only be here in spirit this Easter, our order has been dramatically reduced (in part to save money and in part to keep the vendor from going out of business). Debbie Tolstoi has placed an order for 12 flowering hydrangeas and 12 flowering azaleas. We are hoping to bring some cheer to those of us who are stuck inside.

To order a plant, follow this link:

**<https://fccwgstlmo.breezechms.com/form/3e5607>**.

*(Once we have reached 24 flower sponsorships, the link will no longer be active.)*



## Lighting our “Virtual Globe”

Last Sunday, March 15, the Globe was lighted to celebrate the birth of James Edwin Miller. Sweet baby James is the son of Megan and Gabe Miller, grandson of Jennifer Jones and great grandson of Kay and Phil Roush. James was born on March 10th at 6:11 PM. He was 7 pounds, 7 ounces and 19.5 inches.



This Sunday, March 22, the “Virtual Globe” was lighted for Valerie Paci who celebrates five years cancer free.

### **The Present of Presence: The Gifts of Mindfulness and Compassion for Everyday Life**

**April 14, 21, 28, May 5, and May 12 (Tuesday)**

**7:00 to 8:30 P.M. Online led by the Rev. Dr. Laurel Hayes  
FCCWG’s Campus Minister at Webster University**

In these anxiety-ridden times, we need spiritual practices and community more than ever. Increased mindfulness and compassion can benefit us all right now. This free five-week course will help you to notice your experience of the present moment by focusing on the breath, bodily sensations, thought patterns, and emotions. You will learn how to return to the present moment when your mind wanders off, become more aware of where your thoughts go, work gently with physical and emotional sensations, and cultivate kindness toward yourself and others. You are welcome to meditate in a chair, so you do not need to be flexible.

Please email Laurel at [laurel.hayes@sbcglobal.net](mailto:laurel.hayes@sbcglobal.net) if you would like to participate in the five-week course. Each class session will build on the last, so please plan to attend all five if you register for the course.

We will meet together online (via Zoom, a video-conferencing platform) for as long as we cannot meet in person.



# Invest in futures

Give to One Great Hour of Sharing

**One Great  
HOUR**  
OF SHARING

“You are God’s field; God’s building.”

Through the One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) offering, we are planting seeds of new life. Together, we are investing in communities world-wide: providing education to girls and boys, empowering communities through vocational training, supporting microcredit lending and seeing people through to self-sufficiency, empowering families with skills to support themselves and their neighbors, and participating in sustainable solutions that offer dignity to all. These are just a few ways the OGHS offering touches God’s children, in addition to disaster relief and refugee initiatives.

Through your generosity, the world is a better place. But more is needed. Today, you have an opportunity to plant seeds into the lives of others. Be a co-worker with God. Building, planting, watering...and trusting that God gives growth to all good gifts shared in faith. Thank you for your partnership. Thank you for your generosity.

If you wish to donate to OGHS, please feel free to send a check (put OGHS on the memo line) or make your donation on our secure website. Just select One Great Hour of Sharing from the dropdown box. <https://firstchurchwg.org/donate/>

## **FCCWG Plant Swap! – Marilyn Claggett, Convener**

*(We are working on a creative way to make this plant swap happen. Stay tuned for updates!)*

As you ready your gardens for spring and summer you may be dividing perennials and you may be redesigning or creating new spaces. As you work, pot or bag the plants you want to share, label them, keep them watered.

We do not want to pass along invasive plants or obnoxious plants. Please do not bring euonymus, vinca vine, bush honeysuckle, or “ditch” daylilies (the common orange ones). There are others as well, and you know them if you have had them.



## How to Continue Making Donations to the Church

The staff will be in and out of the church throughout this crisis. Debbie will be coming in to pick up mail and take care of business.

If you write a check, just put Pledge, OGHS, Flowers, etc. on the memo line.

You can make donations on a secure page on our website at the following address:

**<https://firstchurchwg.org/donate/>**

Whether you would like to make a Pledge Payment, wish to send a Memorial / In Honor of Donation (we will send a card), or wish to donate to a specific fund, donating online couldn't be easier!

You have the option to make an ACH transfer from your checking account, or you can use a debit or credit card.

Thank you and stay safe!



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*Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.*

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