

Unrecognizable: Ourselves in Christ**Sunday, April 11th, 2021 || 2nd Sunday of Easter || Pastor Christy Wright****Yes, we are resuming our outdoor worship services at 9:30 AM on the Charmil Drive Green!****For full details, please read below in the Community Announcements Section.**

If you are unable to join us in person, we invite you to light a candle at 9:30 AM and join us in prayer online or over the phone for a pre-recorded service. Audio worship, including the prelude and postlude, prayers, and the sermon is available at <https://georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services> or over the phone at (978) 990-5000, access code 719365#. Just dial in, enter the access code on your keypad, and you will hear the service begin with music. Note that we may not be able to include the hymns in pre-recorded services - thank you for your understanding.

Announcements**Opening Hymn***Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*

UMH 301

<p>1. <i>Jesus, keep me near the cross; There a precious fountain, Free to all, a healing stream, Flows from Calvary's mountain.</i></p>	<p>2. <i>Near the cross, a trembling soul, Love and mercy found me; There the bright and morning star Sheds its beams around me.</i></p>	<p>4. <i>Near the cross I'll watch and wait, Hoping, trusting, ever, Till I reach the golden strand Just beyond the river.</i></p>
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Refrain: In the cross, in the cross, be my glory ever, till my raptured soul shall find rest beyond the river.

Scripture Reading - 1 John 1:1-2:2, 3:1-2

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us - we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

Sermon

I want to start with a story I once heard a while back. A family from a remote area was making their first visit to a big city. They hadn't ever traveled much, really much at all. They checked into a grand hotel and stood in amazement at the impressive sight. While the parents were getting room keys, the kids left the reception desk and went to the elevator entrance. They'd never seen an elevator before, and just stared at it, unable to figure out what it was for. An older lady made her way toward the elevator and went inside. The doors slid closed and she disappeared. About a minute later, the door opened and out came a young woman, completely unrecognizable. The kids couldn't stop staring. Without turning their heads, they called out for their parents in complete shock! What was going on??

Sometimes transformation occurs in the blink of an eye, and other times it seems to take ages. How do we know when we're in the midst of transformation?

In this morning's scripture reading, we hear of the ways in which the message of Jesus has been passed on through stories, through generations, through families and churches proclaiming God's love. Through such stories, the Light of God has

been revealed, and we recognize our call toward living as children of God. But I'm also seeing something else here, in this passage: a movement of four different transformations.

The first is the realization that I am sacred, and that we are all sacred in Christ. Through Jesus' great love for us, we have an abundance of grace that not only meets us where we are, in our brokenness, but also grace that helps us move forward. And when we recognize our own sacredness, we can never be the same. We begin to treat ourselves differently, and others differently, knowing that we have all been made in the image of God. That, indeed, is a transformation.

The second movement in our transformational journey is that, when we live into God's call for our lives, we will begin to sense our own identity coming to fruition. We will begin to live in authentic ways that feed our souls. No longer are we trying to fit the mold of what society expects us to be, or who we feel we should be, but rather, we break free of all expectations and live as God calls us to live: authentically ourselves, genuine to our roots which can be found in Christ.

But this isn't easy. This sort of transformation doesn't just happen. We can't sit back and passively receive, or wait for someone else to do the work. Which brings us to our third movement, our third growth ring: we've got work to do. Yes, God provides, but we are called to partner with God in the work of our souls - whether through prayer and meditation, or through service to the community.

Which leads us to the last and perhaps most beautiful of the transformative movement: the personal transformation we experience when we recognize that *I cannot be me without you*. As a community, we *need* each other. There's a reason we're organized as faith communities - because we can't have a relationship with God without relationships with others. And what a blessing it is to recognize that we do in fact have so many advocates, mentors, and friends who walk with us.

As we embark on this journey of transformation over the next several weeks, we'll be exploring the ways in which we're recognizing the beauty all around us: personally, within our faith community, in our local towns, across the world, and, indeed, in the future to come.

I'd like to close with a prayer adapted by Charlene Dior:

Your Word says, "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2). We know that our thoughts influence our lives. We also know that we can be transformed and our lives can be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We've come a long way from who we used to be. Yet, we know there is so much more for us to become. We pray that You help instill in us the right mindset to go where You'd have us go next.

If we're being honest, we can definitely identify some areas in our lives where we don't have the best mindset. Places where we're selfish and inflexible or have low expectations of people (so what's the point?). At the same time we know in order for You to answer our specific prayers (You know the ones), we have to adopt a selfless and flexible mindset. If we are to accomplish Your will for our lives, we can't hold on to this same mindset. We're praying for Your guidance. We're praying for your grace.

To be honest, a part of us may not want to change our attitudes and mindsets as it relates to some things. Life and circumstances have brought us to a place where compromise and serving others seems counter intuitive and self sabotaging. But we know we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. We know that we are meant to grow and be molded by You. So even though a part of us is resistant, we know our mindset needs to be renewed so our lives can be transformed.

Guide us, God. Plant in us a new way of thinking. Give us new thoughts and new beliefs. We pray for the strength to fully adopt a new way of thinking that aligns with Your Word and the things You have for us to do. Help us release the thoughts and beliefs that do not serve You and will actually hinder us in the places which You are taking us. Thank you for hearing our prayer and for Your presence now and always. Amen.

Hymn of Meditation

He Touched Me

UMH 367

*1. Shackled by a heavy burden,
Neath a load of guilt and shame,
Then the hand of Jesus touched me,
And now I am no longer the same.*

*Refrain: He touched me, O he touched me
And O the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened, and now I know,
He touched me and made me whole.*

*2. Since I met this blessed Savior
Since he cleansed and made me whole
I will never cease to praise him;
I'll shout it while eternity rolls.*

In Our Prayers. Thanksgiving for: the gifts that make ministry possible, medical professionals and researchers. Holding in our hearts: those experiencing unemployment, those facing racial injustice and violence, for our world as we continue to combat gun violence, for our congregation as we grieve the loss of loved ones, those experiencing illness or health issues - especially those who are ill with Covid-19, and (for Al (and family as they care for him), Brad S., Dan D. (Vicki's husband), George, Kelly R., Lindsey S., Peter M.), those in nursing homes or extended care facilities (Betty, Claire), those caring for others (Carrie G., Crystal, Rachel), the United Methodist Church. *Note that this list will renew each month.*

Benediction

And now, may the peace of the Lord Christ go with you wherever God may send you; may God guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm; may God bring you home rejoicing at the wonders God has shown you; may God bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors.

Community Announcements

- **IN-PERSON OUTDOOR WORSHIP RESUMES TODAY: Update from the Reopening Advisory Board.** Starting today, we will begin meeting **weekly on Sunday, April 11th** at 9:30 AM on the Charmil Drive Green, weather permitting. Regardless of vaccination status, **masks and social distancing are required** in order to limit our risk factors. Remember to bring your lawn chair and be sure to set yourself up at least six feet from folks who are not part of your household. Should weather become a concern, Pastor Christy will begin a phone chain by Saturday at 4 PM prior to the service. Indoor worship possibilities are still being explored. As always, if you have any questions, suggestions, or concerns about in-person worship, feel free to reach out to anyone on the Reopening Advisory Board: Jane Dolan, Tom McKeon, Diane Mundell, Melissa Quilitsch, or Pastor Christy.
- **LAST CHANCE: Heifer Project Total.** Thank you all so much for donating toward the Heifer Project! We have received a total of \$243.10, \$55 of which has already been donated, which leaves us with \$188.10 to decide on which animals we can support. Here are our options: (1) Goat \$120 (2) Pig \$120 (3) Sheep \$120 (4) Alpaca \$150 (5) Duck \$20 (6) Honeybees \$30 (7) Hope Basket of Rabbits & Chicks \$50 (8) Flock of Chicks \$20. **Please let Pastor Christy know of your preferences by April 15th;** otherwise, we will donate as a monetary donation. Thank you!
- **UPDATE ON MAILINGS.** Beginning **May 2nd**, in order to save on postage, mailings will now be available on Sunday mornings for pickup at our outdoor services. Mailings will no longer automatically be sent out; if you are unable to join us in person, mailings will be dropped in the mail on Monday mornings so all folks can continue to be part of our connection.
- **Upcoming Transition.** We invite you to be in prayer as the Staff Parish Relations Committee works with our District Superintendent Rev. Megan Stowe to discern our next pastor, to be appointed on July 1st, 2021.
- **Prayer Chain.** As a church, we are a wonderful community of prayer. When a need arises, we send it through the prayer chain so we can all meditate together. If you would like to be a part of this prayer chain, reach out to Jane Dolan, who will put you on the list.
- **Pastor Christy's Office Hours: APRIL.** Pastor Christy's office hours have shifted to **Mondays** and **Thursdays** from 8 AM to 4 PM and **Fridays** from 8 AM to 12 noon. If you have an emergency outside of office hours, please call her cell phone, leave a message, and she will get back to you as soon as possible.
- **THANK YOU for your continued generous donations to the work of the church!** We are so grateful for your gifts, for they make an impact near and far. As a reminder, you can mail your offerings to PO Box 576, West Brookfield, MA 01585. Thank you!

Sonshine Phone Calls and Cards List

If you know of anyone who could be added to our Sonshine list, let Pastor Christy know.

Betty Hubbard
47 E Main St.
West Brookfield, MA 01585

Kelly Rice
98 Lake Shore Drive
West Brookfield, MA 01585

Claire Wirf
(508) 791-8131 (mornings)
838 Mill Street
Worcester, MA 01602

Daily Devotionals:
A Community Of Prayer from Around the Connection
The Upper Room Daily Devotionals official magazines are still being distributed.

If you would like a copy, please let Pastor Christy know.

Monday, April 12th through Saturday, April 17th || Written by Various Authors in the Conference
We invite you to light a candle at 9:30 AM daily, meditate on our given scripture, and join us in prayer

Monday, April 12th, 2021

Rev. Taesung Kang, Granite District Superintendent

Read John 1:43-51

Almighty God, You who know us inside and out, our thoughts, secrets, worries, shortcomings, fears, resolutions, hopes and dreams. From the time when we were formed in the womb, to when we wake up with the realization of this ever-disrupted world, to an uncharted future that our journey may bring us, You know everything and are everywhere. You search us, you see us, you call us, you invite us. Even when we are in deep sleep, even when our eyes are dimmed, even when our ears are blocked, even when our hearts and minds are filled with our “false selves.” Even so, Your invitation never excludes or expires, Your love never ends; in our sinful tendency, darkness, ignorance, or arrogance, You keep calling us. O Spirit of the Living God, wake us to realize our own self-centered, self-loving, and self-righteous tendency. Remind us of whose we are and who we are — “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Open our eyes to your vision and our ears to hear when you call our name. Open our hearts and lips, so that we may say, “I am here and ready to follow you again.” May your Spirit help us to worship you with our whole being — our body, mind, and soul. May our transformed identity be known to others by our love, justice, and peace. We are ever grateful to you for making us marvelously, to serve you and others throughout the days of our lives. These are our prayers unto you. Hear our prayers, O Lord. Amen.

Tuesday, April 13th, 2021

Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar

Read Genesis 1: 1-5, Mark 1:4-11

Holy and gracious God: You created when the earth was formless. You brought light from darkness into the void. Let that light that is from the beginning shine in our chaos, fear, and trouble. Let that light shine in us and through us, to be and to bring healing and hope. Powerful and amazing God: At his baptism you claimed Jesus as your beloved Son. At our baptism you claim us as your beloved children. Now you send the same Spirit that was with Jesus to descend upon us. Now you are well pleased to name, claim, and call us and we rise from the waters ready to live and serve. Blessed and merciful God: Your Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to wrestle with evil. Your Spirit accompanied him in his time of desolation and trial. Be with us in the wilderness places. Save us from our time of trial, and so equip us to serve not led not by polls and popular opinion but by your Spirit who stays with us in the wilderness. May we blossom for your glory, filled with the amazing love of Christ, and moved by the power of the Holy Spirit! We ask this in the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Wednesday, April 14th, 2021

Dr. Steven Smith (Bangor First UMC, Corinth UMC)

Read Ephesians 1:15-23

Faithful God, each day blessings are sprinkled into our being and living. Too often, our complacency has replaced our gratitude, as we have taken for granted these simple yet profound gifts. Clean water, a roof overhead, food to eat, beauty to witness, have all become expectations rather than gifts to be celebrated and shared.

May the reception of these daily gifts transform our thanksgiving to thanks-living,
 as we embrace loving you and neighbor this day and in the days ahead. Amen.

Thursday, April 15th, 2021**Virginia Ray, Chair of Trinity Church, Shelburne Falls, MA, Leadership Team****Read Psalm 123**

God of salvation, may we always come to You as people who know we are not in darkness, despite what may happen in our world that seems more shadowed and frightening than we would like it to be, but rather as people of faith who trust that we live always in Your light of hope. Help us to celebrate our days, build one another up, and appreciate and keep faith in Your everlasting mercy. Help us to see beyond any cloud of contempt, arrogance, or even foolishness that may pass before us, or in us, knowing it will, indeed, pass, by Your grace. Help us to know, deep in our souls and spirits, that our best armor is that of faith in Your love, Your goodness, and Your everlasting care for each of us. Give all of us, we pray, forgiving and forgiveness as we greet each day. Help us to pray for those who have not yet understood Your grace, Your abundant and magnificent mercy. May we always lift our eyes to You in faith and thank You for Your love and our salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Friday, April 16th, 2021**Stacey Hartford, Laity, First UMC Hudson, MA****Read Thessalonians 5:1-11**

Oh God of mercy and comfort, help us to keep our eyes on you. Help us to remember you are in control. May we remain patient and faithful, knowing you are there to comfort us at all times. Calm our hearts and minds when we are facing trouble and fear. As our eyes look to you, remind us we are light not darkness. We must put on our faith and love as a shield to our hearts, our hope and salvation to protect our minds. With this we know you are there to protect us in times of trouble and fear. Be our courage and strength when things become too heavy for us to bear. You are greater than all our burdens, you are sovereign over all things. May you comfort us and have mercy on us all. Amen.

Saturday, April 17th, 2021**Rev. Dr. Cristian De La Rosa, Director of Contextual Theology and Community Partnerships, Assistant Professor of Contextual Theology and Practice, Boston University School of Theology, UMC elder****Read Matthew 15:21-28**

We thank you, God, for the hope and faith that nurtures us at these complex and uncertain times. As we face two identifiable pandemics in the context of the US, Covid 19 and Racism, we ask that your spirit of courage finds us at the crossroads. As we encounter the dangers of the intersections, we ask for your guidance and wisdom to help us not be afraid and to accompany others in the processes of survival as we all seek new life and new ways of being in your grace and love. We ask, at these times of ambiguity, that you help us identify the endurance, courage and wisdom of the Canaanite woman who makes herself visible and finds a place and space to be included in the mission and ministry of Jesus and the disciples. She finds the courage to ask more of Jesus and the vision to see the power of life and possibilities of new life for a better future. In her insistence and encounter with the disciples and Jesus at the marketplace/in the public plaza she appropriates life for her daughter and vision of a future for all foreigners and marginalized, for all who are made invisible and are excluded. We pray today for the understanding that we need to be of great courage, and with great wisdom, to continue claiming and reclaiming our own spaces and ministries in the manner of the Canaanite women in Matthew. We are in need of something that is built on the encounters of great consequence in the marketplace, something that interrupts and makes new spaces and places in public spaces where the excluded and invisible become included and visible and find their place at the table of creation. Help us to accept the challenge to engage in encounters of great consequence today, encounters that bring about justice. Help me, as a person, to know that I am not I, without encountering you, and that I am not I complete, without encountering God. Help us collectively to know that we are not we, without encountering each other and God. Amen.