

**Unrecognizable: Our Church in Christ****Sunday, April 18th, 2021 || 3rd Sunday of Easter || Pastor Christy Wright****Yes, we are resuming our outdoor worship services at 9:30 AM, this Sunday in front of the Church!****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****Scripture Reading - Acts 4:32-35**

*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.*

**Sermon**

I remember the first time I talked with Pastor Zach. I was in my first year of seminary, and I was looking for a place to build community, and a place to call my spiritual home. I found out about Simple Church online, and it immediately intrigued me: it was a dinner church, a space where we could sit down together around the table, share in a meal, sing simple hymns, and have deep conversations about faith with one another. There was a phone number to call to let Pastor Zach know you were coming, and when I called, he sounded so excited: "Yes!" he said. "We'll set a place for you!"

Over the last several years, I've been connected to this dinner church in a variety of ways, and it always amazes me how quickly community is built, how fast we grow to love one another, and the impact we have on the surrounding towns. We share grace around the table, and that grace overflows into the community as we tell of the power of resurrection in our own lives and in the life of all those we're connected with. I continue to marvel at how a place like this can feel so much like church, and yet be so unrecognizable from the pews and the organ and the four walls of what church is typically understood to be.

In this morning's scripture reading, we heard of how the first church was formed. It was simply a community of people who shared the deep belief that Jesus' resurrection is the location of all healing, all beauty, all life, all love. It was a group of people whose possessions were held in common trust with one another, much like how we might stop by a neighbor's house to borrow a cup of sugar or a couple of eggs. And the best part is that no one was ever in need - everyone had everything they needed because it was all shared among them.

This description of the first church didn't include measurements for the sanctuary, how many stained glass windows there ought to be, and if the pews should be upholstered in red fabric or dark blue. Rather, this passage from Acts focused on the relationships - for it is the people that make the church, not the building. And when we focus on the heart of the matter, sometimes the idea of church can become unrecognizable.

Even for us, our own church has become unrecognizable in the time of Covid. We worshiped from home for the vast majority of the pandemic, and today, we are worshiping outside in the open air. For sure, things are incredibly different than they were before, but it doesn't mean it's all bad. Perhaps in this time of Covid, we have been given a chance to remember what church really is: a faith community rooted in God that cares deeply for one another and their neighbor. This is church: here, and now, we are the church. We are the people who make up the church. And though I am grieving leaving you all in July, you all have reminded me what church truly is: a group of deeply loving people who care for one another - whether by providing a cup of sugar or donating toward funeral funds, or dropping off meals or making a phone call to check in on someone. I have never felt more loved and more cared for, and I have been so blessed by you, even and especially as you continue to bless all those in our community and beyond.

So may we continue on in our unrecognizable state, even as we make plans to return to the church building. May we continue to love God, love one another, and love our neighbor in the light of Christ. And may we always remember that it's okay to be unrecognizable, just as Jesus was unrecognizable after his resurrection. For this is the location of all healing, all beauty, all life, all love. Amen.

### ***Hymn of Meditation***

**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., Richie B.), 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! Update from the Reopening Advisory Board.** Starting today, we will begin meeting **weekly on Sunday, April 11th** at 9:30 AM **in front of the church**, 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 Quilitzsch, or Pastor Christy.
- **Upcoming Meetings.** Ad Council will meet **in the church building fellowship hall on Wednesday, April 21st** at 10 AM. Please be sure to wear your mask, and do not attend if you have any Covid-like symptoms. SPRC will meet by conference call on **Wednesday, April 21st** at 7 PM using our phone line number at (978) 990-5000, access code 719365# . The Reopening Advisory Board will meet on **Monday, April 26th** at 7 PM by conference call as well with a meeting in the building in the next week or two.
- **Thank you!** Because of your generosity, we were able to donate a total of \$208.10 to the Heifer Project - which was tripled matched through various donors. So our impact was actually \$624.30! 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

Richie Buzzell  
16 Ragged Hill Rd.  
W Brookfield, MA 01585

**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 19th through Saturday, April 24th || 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 19th, 2021**

**Rev. Ted Crass, President, The United Methodist Foundation of New England**

**Read John 20.19-31**

Gracious and loving God, in the early light of this beautiful spring morning, we thank you for this day. We want to hang on to the excitement of Easter and celebration of resurrection together. It has been only a couple of weeks and yet we confess we feel moments when the reality of resurrection can seem to begin wearing off. When the lives of our loved ones, friends, and even ourselves begin to collide with trials, sickness, and suffering – both that which we give and that which comes our way, little doubts can arise. Maybe we missed the meeting. Missed the memo. Could it really be true? As we can begin to feel the gentle clicks of the locks on the door of our innermost heart, we nervously pursue “positivity” or try to ignore the little doubts, but that doesn’t make them go away. Holy One, remind us that we are your Easter people. Help us to acknowledge our own doubts and let them disturb our complacency. Give us the courage to bring even our doubts to you. Breathe on us your Holy Spirit. Transform our doubts into a deeper understanding and assurance of your grace, so that we can more fully empathize with others’ confusion and doubts and be better witnesses to your love and peace. We are your Easter people, rising together. Our new life in you is right here and now. May we be fully present in our new life. In the name of the risen Christ we pray, amen.

**Tuesday, April 20th, 2021**

**Erica Robinson-Johnson, Director of Connectional Ministries/Assistant to the Bishop**

**Read Acts 4:32-35**

“... everything they owned was held in common ... They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.” God, what an image! How ideal it would be if it could only be. When I had less, I dreamed of such a distribution of wealth. Now that I have enough, forgive my selfishness for wanting what I assume is my own. Help us to be generous but more than that, to receive all that you have entrusted to us as yours before it is ours. To understand we are all beneficiaries of your abundant grace. To ensure that none of your children have to struggle for the gifts you meant for all. Open our eyes to inequities. Open our ears to hear the disinherited. Open our hands to give freely. Open our hearts to love unconditionally. In gratitude for all the blessings, amen.

**Wednesday, April 21th, 2021**

**Beth DiCocco, Director of Communications**

**Read Matthew 6:25-34**

Gracious God, in these troubled days we may be finding comfort and security in our possessions. Living so much online, we may find it hard not to covet a picture-perfect Instagram life of plenty. But the unity of heart and soul that we crave comes only when we share what we have — even if our only abundance is that of grace. Help us remember and let that be at work among us all. Amen.

**Thursday, April 22nd, 2021**

**Mary E. Miller, Retired, Mars Hill UMC and United Parish Church, Fort Fairfield**

**Read Romans 7:15-25**

God of our lives, thank you for each new day you give us -- for the chance to love others, for the chance to do some good, for the chance to find joy and beauty. We are grateful, and humbled by your gifts. But we confess, merciful God, that we do not always use those gifts -- each day, each opportunity -- in ways that bring glory to you and hope to your people. We ask your forgiveness for the times we fall short: too often, we forget needs we should remember, and let fester feelings we should release; too often, we ignore truth when it becomes uncomfortable, and lack courage to do what is called for, and allow weariness and excuses to get the better of us; too often, we fail in prayer, in compassion, in doing justice. Accept our repentance, we pray, and grant to us new life. Thank you for our salvation in Jesus, who died to set us free from the power of our sin, and who lives within us, loving us through each day. We know, holy God, that you have formed us in your image, and that our spirits are guided by your Spirit, and that as your children we are called to love and minister in your

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name. And so we seek to walk with Jesus in this new day, embracing whatever gifts and work you set before us, holding to your light all in need of healing, peace, grace, hope, and offering to you our grateful hearts. In Christ's name, Amen.

***Friday, April 23rd, 2021***

**Rev. Gwyneth Arrison**

**Read Matthew 11: 25-30**

We praise you, Abba Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have revealed yourself to us through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. And that you have spoken to us through the Advocate whom you sent, the Holy Spirit. We long to hear your words of hope but we confess we often look first to the world instead. We look to the world for love, but instead find anger and hatred; We look to the world for comfort, but instead find backbiting and panic. We look to the world for healing, but instead find a raging pandemic; We look to the world for provision but instead find systemic racism and poverty; We look to the world for wholeness but instead find brokenness and violence; We look to the world for mercy, but instead find slander and resentment. We look to the world for unity, but instead find bitterness and division; We look to the world for leadership, but instead find corruption and deception; We look to the world for justice, but instead find our children of color gunned down by those sworn to protect them. O Lord our God, we confess that we are weary and burdened. To whom else can we go than you, you who claim to be the Way and the Truth and the Life? Raise up our heads so we can see your face. Unstop our ears so we hear your call, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Let us be yoked, not with the world, but with you, Jesus, so we can know your love, comfort, healing, provision, wholeness, mercy, unity, leadership and justice. Let us be yoked with you, Jesus, so we can join you in your work to bring love, comfort, healing, provision, wholeness, mercy, unity, leadership and justice into this broken world. We declare we are utterly dependent on you, Jesus. We trust not in the freedom the world offers, but rather we trust in the ransom you paid for us on the cross so we can know your true freedom and new life as we are raised together with you and all your children. For it is for freedom that Christ has set us free, to God be the glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

***Saturday, April 24th, 2021***

**Sharon Merrill, Many Waters District Lay Leader and Member of the Many Waters District Committee on Lay  
Servant Ministries. Member of the Bolster's Mills UMC**

**Read Isaiah 55:10-13**

Dear Lord, I pray that, like the rains coming down from heaven, that I may be used to nourish life on earth while I am here. Guide me to quench the thirst for freedom, justice, and peace for all people of the earth. Teach me to replenish the earth, rather than destroy it and leave it striving to survive. Give me the courage to speak up for those who cannot speak; be they human or animal or environmental. Remind me to care for those who cannot care for themselves due to physical, mental, economic, or any other obstacles they may be facing. When I have finished this role on earth, only then may I be allowed to dwell in your house, Lord, in peace and comfort. In your name, Amen.