

***Unrecognizable: Our Community in Christ*****Sunday, April 25th, 2021 || 4th Sunday of Easter || Pastor Christy Wright*****Yes, we are meeting outdoors 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 - Matthew 5:13-16**

*“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”*

**Sermon**

Back in 2014, I moved to a small town nestled between Worcester and Boston called Hudson. It was a small, tight-knit community that was working through a limited economy and few resources. It was a bedroom community, a town where people would live and settle their lives, but commute out of town for work. We were close to the downtown area, so we had a firsthand view of what was happening (and not happening) in Hudson. We particularly enjoyed a great restaurant that quickly became an anchor for the community. The restaurant itself was only two years old when we first arrived, but its draw was clear: it brought folks from all over the region for their amazing food and great atmosphere. This restaurant's presence in downtown Hudson really truly made all the difference.

Fast forward to a couple of weeks ago when I recently visited, and downtown Hudson is nearly unrecognizable from when I first lived there. From one anchor restaurant were birthed two other sister establishments across the street, plus lively storefronts, coffee shops, breweries, art galleries, salons, and additional restaurants that - rather than being in competition with one another, actually partner together for special events and menu swaps. This incredible movement - from one single restaurant to becoming a destination for folks from across the state - in just seven years. And in the middle of a pandemic to boot.

In this morning's scripture reading, we hear of Jesus' reminder of our call as Christians, as faithful disciples: we are the salt of the earth. And we are the light of the world. If people looking in from the outside cannot see these characteristics, are we truly living into God's will?

But first, it's important to note what it means to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. What does that look like? How can we identify this in our own lives?

When I think of salt, I think of something that enhances our current circumstances, something that lifts up what we have before us and creates a better experience. This might take the form of optimism, of being willing to push through barriers and not accept defeat. Being salt of the earth might also look like courage, courage to right the wrongs in our world. When I season my food with salt, I'm not only enhancing the flavor, but I'm also correcting the blandness - I'm making a change. And as salt of the earth people, as followers of Jesus, we are called to do the same: being unafraid to make changes.

What about being the light of the world? What does that look like? Here's one of my favorite things about light: it spreads. It grows. It shifts and changes. I'm thinking about how the light shifts from one side of the house to the other, as though sweeping across the space to reveal the things I so often miss. As disciples, we are called to be the light of the world, revealing truths and being part of the healing that comes after. As light, we are also called to reach out and spread out all throughout our community, building relationships and being present for one another.

Put together, being the salt of the earth and the light of the world requires us to be visible, to be available, to be partners in and with our community rather than be cloistered in our own building and own circle. I don't think Jesus ever meant for salt to season itself. And I don't think Jesus ever meant for light to light up itself. Rather, salt and light are explicitly designed to be shared.

When I think about that anchor restaurant in that small town of Hudson, their success didn't come about because they cared about numbers and sales and shut themselves off from the community. Rather, they threw open their doors, invested in their community with their time and innovation, invited collaboration with other businesses, and then, stepped back to allow transformation to have its way with the people of Hudson. A slow and quiet downtown area has now been transformed into a thriving, bustling, and life-giving community.

When I think about West Brookfield, I see so many ways that we ourselves have been a thriving, bustling, and life-giving community: we are home to a beautiful town common, a handful of businesses, and three churches. We have the people and the passion to put together our Annual Asparagus Festival (though sadly not this year), weekly Farmers Markets, White Christmas Events, and so much more. With the pandemic, we have had to scale back with our celebrations and gatherings, and we've had to learn how to get creative and think outside the box.

But here's a question for us, here at George Whitefield: how can we participate in this community transformation? How can we become an anchor for our community? What can we do to help this community begin to recover from the pandemic? What is our role?

As we close this morning, may we recognize the unrecognizable possibility in our midst. May we be moved by Jesus' words to be and live as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. And may we partner with God to set things in motion, so we can step back and allow the Holy Spirit to move and grow and thrive, here in our community and beyond. 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**

- **SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT.** Be sure to either join us in person for a special announcement immediately following our church service from our Staff-Parish Relations Committee. In the case of bad weather, be sure to tune in on our website at 12 noon for more information: [georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services](http://georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services)
- **IN-PERSON OUTDOOR WORSHIP RESUMES! Update from the Reopening Advisory Board.** We are meeting **weekly** 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 Quilitsch, or Pastor Christy.
- **Upcoming Meetings.** The Reopening Advisory Board will meet on Monday, April 26th at 7 PM by conference call using our phone number at (978) 990-5000, access code 719365#, as well with a meeting in the building in the next week or two.
- **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.

(508) 867-3667

(860) 908-7531

pastorchristygwumc@gmail.com

- **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 1585

## ***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 26th through Saturday, May 1st || 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 26th, 2021***

**Rev. Megan Stowe, Commonwealth West District Superintendent**

**Read Luke 24:36b-48**

Peace be with you. Peace in the midst of terror. Peace when you are afraid. Peace when your mind is racing. Peace when filled with doubt. Peace when overcome with joy. O God, we need your peace. As COVID numbers creep up again. As we are frustrated with restrictions. As more and more gun violence occurs. As political disagreements arise. As racism, sexism, and xenophobia run rampant. Send us your peace. Help us to be your witnesses. Amen.

#### ***Tuesday, April 27th, 2021***

**Rev. Dr. David V. Calhoun, Seacoast District Superintendent**

**Read Come and Find the Quiet Center: TFWS 2128**

“Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead, find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed: Clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes that we can see all the things that really matter, be at peace and simply be.” Eternal God, we approach you today in a spirit of celebration and joy. We thank you for instilling within us the desire to enjoy life as well as the impulse to call upon your name. We give thanks for the longer days of sunlight and for the time to rest in your spirit. We humbly ask you to be a part of this day. Speak to us again today and offer us your gentle words of peace. Walk with each of us, assist us in our tasks; and keep us ever under the canopy of your care. We ask not to be separated from the stresses and strains of this life, nor kept from problems and pain, but to be guarded by your grace amid all sunshine and shadows. Instill within each of us a desire to face every challenge in life with the possibility of excelling and turning adversity into victory. As we seek to fulfill our responsibilities, we pray for courage in our daily endeavors, wisdom in our decisions and love in our connection. When we call upon your name and seek your goodness and mercy, remind us of our identity. Lead us to be people of victory as we embrace the Christ. Calm our minds, and soothe our spirits. It is in the spirit of the one who showed us the great value and power in love that we offer this prayer together. Amen.

***Wednesday, April 28th, 2021*****Rev. Jill Colley Robinson, Green Mountain District Superintendent****Read Acts 3:12-19**

God of our ancestors, God of all who have gone before us, God of Sarah and Hagar, God of Rebekah, God of Leah and Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah, God of Dinah, God of those whose names are lost or forgotten but whom you remember, we have faith in your name, and this faith makes us strong. Holy and Righteous One, Author of life, Messiah, we have faith in your name, and this faith makes us strong. Spirit, Breath of peace, we have faith in your name, and this faith makes us strong. You open our minds to understand your story — Miriam’s liberation song, and Zipporah’s enduring devotion, Ruth’s loyal loving-kindness, and Deborah’s courageous power, Hannah’s silent prayer, and Huldah’s honest prophecy, Abigail’s faithful foresight, and Esther’s saving authority. You open our minds to understand your story, and we remember — we are your children, your beloved children. This is your name for us now. God of (insert your own name and the names of faithful people you know), we are part of the fulfillment of your story. We are the witnesses. We remember. We are strong. Let it be so. Amen.

***Thursday, April 29th, 2021*****Rev. Allen Ewing-Merrill, Executive Director, The BTS Center, Portland, ME****Read Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

God of gardens and goodness and grace, till the soil of our hearts. Make it ready to receive all that you wish to plant in us. Root out rocks of prejudice and pettiness and pride. Prune away every thorny branch and bramble, every briar of selfishness, greed, and indifference, that threatens to choke out your new growth. Steer us away from well-worn paths, away from old grudges, tired traditions, and rootbound systems of oppression, toward habitats of healing, landscapes of liberation. Scatter among us seeds of solidarity and song. Ground us in gratitude and gladness. Cultivate in us courage and compassion. Nourish in us every seedling of repentance and reconciliation. And produce within us your good harvest, abundant and flourishing, your labor of love in us, ever yielding more fruit, a bumper crop of justice and joy, which we pledge to share in the name of Jesus, tender of gardens. Amen.

***Friday, April 30th, 2021*****Rev. Taeseob Cho, Pastor of Rainbow UMC and Coordinating Pastor of Old Orchard Beach UMC****Read Psalm 119:105-112**

The Word of God is a lamp unto our feet, O Lord, and a light unto our path. The Word of God became flesh who is Christ, our Savior and the healer of our souls. The Word of God is the guidance of the Holy Spirit leading us toward the restoration and transformation. O Lord, we pray, in this confusing and fearful time, protect us from being deluded by false voices; voices which do not come from you; voices which lead us into conflict, to do injustice, and to cause pain among us. Shine Your light and eliminate the darkness that surrounds us, awaken us from our spiritual sleep, and lead us in the footsteps of Jesus today and always. In his holy name we pray. Amen.

***Saturday, May 1st, 2021*****Jude and Steve Bascom, United Methodist Church of Auburn (ME), Many Waters District****Read Matthew 11:28**

Creator and sustainer of all that was, is, and ever will be — you who move mountains and cause the earth to tremble — who spin planets in orbit and ignite stars in the sky, hear our prayer today. Your beloved creatures, sheltering on this planet we call home, need your loving care and renewal. You formed us in the womb, breathing into our lungs, spirit, life and love. Protect us now, we ask. Guide us with wisdom as we navigate the waters of these trying times, comfort us with the knowledge that you have all things in your benevolent care. Be with us in these times of solitude, guide us into new expressions of community, and renew our hope for better days to come. Help us recognize your unfailing provision in good times and in days of challenge. We rest and find peace, trusting in your love. Amen.