

**Treasure****Sunday, February 21, 2021 || 1st Sunday of Lent || Pastor Christy Wright**

We invite you to light a candle at 9:30 AM and join us in prayer ONLINE or over the PHONE

Audio worship, including music, prayers, and the sermon is available at

<https://georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services>

**Audio worship is also available 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.**

*This Lenten Series is adapted from Marcia McFee's Holy Vessels curriculum.*

**Prelude**

*My Life is in You, Lord*

*Melissa Quilitzsch*

**Announcements****Opening Hymn**

*Sacred the Body*

*FWS 2228*

1. Sacred the body God has created,  
Temple of Spirit that dwells deep inside.  
Cherish each person; nurture creation.  
Treat flesh as holy, that love may abide.

3. Love respects persons, bodies and boundaries.  
Love does not batter, neglect, or abuse.  
Love touches gently, never coercing.  
Love leaves the other with power to choose.

2. Bodies are varied, made in all sizes,  
Pale, full of color, both fragile and strong.  
Holy the difference, gift of the Maker,  
So let us honor each story and song.

4. Holy of holies, God ever loving,  
Make us your temples indwell all we do.  
May we be careful, tender and caring,  
So may our bodies give honor to you.

**Introduction - Marcia McFee**

Each of us is created a precious and holy vessel of embodied love. We have been through a harrowing time since last Lent that has shattered our sense of wholeness—body, mind, and spirit—like a glass vessel fractured into pieces. Let us enter a Lenten “season of recovery” as we focus on Jesus, the Healer of our every ill. Beach glass begins as something whole and yet discarded. As it is tumbled by the sea, it is broken and polished until it becomes a treasured “mineral gem.” We do not embrace that suffering is necessary or God-given, but that suffering is a part of life. When pain comes and brokenness enters our lives, Jesus reaches out to touch and remind us of the Treasure that we all are—worthy of new life in the midst of hopelessness. In a year when pandemic has wreaked havoc on our world, we begin by affirming our journey to physical health.

Lent developed into a season of intense inward reflection and confession centuries after the life of Jesus. Yet, as we will see, Jesus encouraged people to open up about their lives—to speak truth—no matter how broken. This is the beginning of compassion for ourselves and others. It is the beginning of healing. The Latin origins of the word “confess” is to “study and acknowledge.” This will be a season of studying how we can be a healing presence in our community. To do this, we acknowledge our need to restore our own Holy Vessels.

Let us pray: Creator God, we are bodies fashioned by your hand in your own image, shapes and colors of diverse and immense beauty. And yet too often we have ignored the sacred nature of our physical lives. The Holy Vessels you have fashioned are tired and suffering, ravaged by months of disrupted rhythms and ailment. Our fragility has come into full view and we are frightened. We cannot fathom the proportions of loss and so we look away, sometimes even from our own needs. Help us, Healer. Show us our strength. Forgive our inertia. Move us to move one step at a time toward greater care. In this silence, we sense and acknowledge our yearning for wholeness.

Know this: God's love and grace surround you... No. Matter. What. You are a precious and holy vessel right now. Christ's light is a treasure given freely. For you, for me, for all. Take a deep breath in to let this truth fill you...and breathe out with the relief of assurance.

Vessels, holy and whole. Broken, needing the One. Open, body and soul. Healer, come.

## **Scripture Reading**

*Matthew 8:1-4, 16-17*

*When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; and there was a leper who came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean." He stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. Then Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."*

## **Sermon - Pastor Christy Wright**

Shortly after I graduated from college, I moved back home and realized that most of my friends from high school had relocated. I wanted to be more proactive in making new friends, but my church didn't have many folks my age, so I joined another church's young adult group. This group immediately welcomed me in, and we got right down to business: they asked how long I had been attending church, if I liked the newest Hillsong worship album, if I followed any influential megachurch pastors on social media. Over the next few months, as I shared more about my life, they began to ask more questions: "You're working in youth ministry? But you're an unmarried woman." Or "You want to go to seminary? But why? Only men go to seminary." "Wait, you want to be a pastor? Women can't be pastors; it says so in the Bible." Over the course of just weeks, I had gone from the newest kid on the block to the ostracized radical liberal who "needed to get right with God." I felt so alienated, simply because I was being myself and exploring my call. I was an outcast, and I quickly realized that this wasn't the right place for me. Instead, I found myself treasuring my relationship with my home church, a church that accepted me for who I was, and I adapted to intergenerational friendships instead, which upheld me in love and peace. I knew I was a child of God, called to ministry in love and faith. It felt like I was coming home. And I'm so glad I did, because I wouldn't have been able to serve you otherwise.

This morning's scripture reading tells us of another individual who was ostracized from the larger community. Those who suffered from leprosy were thrown outside of town limits so they didn't mix with the general population; they often lived in rough terrain, in mountains and caves. And, much like today, they could not get within six feet of other people - we know that figure well. For folks in this time period, they were concerned with cleanliness and purity, and their customs are a testament to this. If someone was diagnosed with leprosy, the town priest was called, and funeral rights were administered; for all intents and purposes, this person was no longer considered to be alive. This is ostracization beyond anything we have ever known.

What's so radical about this morning's passage is that Jesus was already walking the paths of the outcasts; he was in the mountains, near the caves. He was around people with whom he wasn't supposed to interact. But there were other rule breakers in the crowd, too. We hear that this person suffering from leprosy defied all of the rules to be close to Jesus and to walk with this crowd; he knew that Jesus held the key to his well being. Boldly and without hesitation, he asked Jesus for healing. And Jesus, a rabbi who was well aware of purity rules and guidelines - that he could not touch someone suffering with leprosy without he himself being defiled - did the unthinkable and placed his hand on this man's shoulder and healed him of his disease. Jesus' willingness to heal this man wasn't just another miracle, though. Jesus was declaring him to be a beloved treasure and child of God, regardless of disease or status. The crowd around them surely would have seen this happen, but Jesus wanted to protect the man and sent him straight away to the priest, who would examine him and declare him cleansed, ready to be reintegrated back into society.

As we close today, I'm wondering how God is calling us to go where the outcasts are located. Rather than waiting for folks to come to us, how can we ourselves be moved with compassion? How are we called to cross boundaries for the sake of others? And I'm curious, too: How can we ourselves be bold in asking for healing? What is something we've held onto for too long that requires Jesus' healing? And lastly, how has God redeemed us from being the outcasts? Can we think of moments in our lives when we've felt like beloved treasures, beloved children of God?

Because, friends, we are so beloved. We are treasured by God, regardless of disease, or status, or anything else. For we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Hymn of Meditation***Healer of Our Every Ill*

FWS 2213

*Refrain: Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow, give us peace beyond fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.*

1. You who know our fears and sadness,  
 Grace us with your peace and gladness;  
 Spirit of comfort, fill our hearts.

3. Give us strength to love each other,  
 Every sister, every brother;  
 Spirit of all kindness, be our guide.

2. In the pain and joy beholding  
 How your grace is still unfolding,  
 Give us all your vision, God of love.

4. You who know each thought and feeling,  
 Teach us all your way of healing;  
 Spirit of compassion, fill each heart.

**Prayer of Meditation - Marcia McFee**

*Healer of our every ill, especially our malady of separation and fear, we come before you to make our petitions known. Hear our cries for healing of body, mind, and spirit. We know that already you are at work among us, showing us the way to recovery from the toxicities and grief of our time. As demolished pieces that are treasured when found, we trust that beauty from brokenness is possible when we seek to bind together that which is wounded. We pray especially for those who have experienced the physical loss of family and friends in the pandemic and those who are still suffering the consequences of the illness. We pray for each person who suffers in body in other ways—weariness from inactivity or weariness from overactivity in this time. We pray for those whose treatment of maladies have been put on hold and those who suffered isolation in their illness, whatever the cause. We pray grateful thanks for the medical staff everywhere around the world who have shown unbelievable strength and stamina and we mourn the demise of too many caregivers who risked their lives for our sake. We pray this day for...*

**In Our Prayers.** Thanksgiving for: the gifts that make ministry possible, medical professionals and researchers. Holding in our hearts: our nation for peace, those experiencing unemployment, those facing racial injustice and violence and cannot breathe under the weight of oppression, 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 including George, Dave and Karen M. and family, and (for Al (and family as they care for him), Dan D. (Vicki's husband), Kelly R., Lindsey S.), those in nursing homes or extended care facilities (Betty, Claire, Priscilla), those caring for others (Carrie G., Crystal, Rachel), the United Methodist Church. *Note that this list will renew each month.*

**Commissioning and Benediction - Marcia McFee**

*Jesus' healing actions often get "buzz" from onlookers. Some are amazed and in awe and sing praises. Some are bewildered and wonder at this teacher. Some are disgruntled and feel threatened by the boundaries he breaks and the change he invites. We are perhaps prone to all of these at one time or another. Our own work of recovery will sometimes feel immediately refreshing and sometimes it will demand uncomfortable effort. But the rewards are great. We are also working toward something communal in this season. How can we as a church community become a "health hub" through our ministry and mission? The needs are so great, especially now. Throughout this time, I invite you to explore with us the possibilities for a new or renewed commitment to a contribution we can make at George Whitefield United Methodist Church to our larger community's effort to recover from this past year.*

*Now go with confidence as "Treasures of God," recovering your depth of love for all and our joy of living in this world. May the words of Jesus ring in your ears: "I do choose you." And may the Spirit hover, move, and deliver salve to your soul and a spring in your step. Amen.*

**Postlude***Second Time Around*

Melissa Quilitsch

**Community Announcements**

- **Important Announcement - A Letter From Pastor Christy.** Dear Beloved Community of George Whitefield UMC, as I reflect over the past two years, I have absolutely fallen in love with this community. We have walked together through some of the most joyous and most painful circumstances, but all the while, we have held fast to God's great love. Your warmth has been such a blessing, and I have felt so welcomed from day one. This is why it is with a heavy heart and a trusting spirit that I announce that Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar intends to appoint me to the First United Methodist Church of Stoughton, MA effective July 1, 2021 subject to fulfilling all the requirements needed for a successful transition by the pastor and the respective churches affected by the

appointment. The appointment will be finalized at the 2021 Annual Conference Session of the New England Conference. The Staff Parish Relations Committee will be working with our District Superintendent, Rev. Megan Stowe, on discerning our next pastor. Please be in prayer during this process. I trust that your next pastor will be an incredible blessing to you as you have been an incredible blessing to me. Beloved community, know that I continue to hold you all in prayer during this transition, and that you will always remain in my heart. If you have any questions or input as we discern our next pastor, please reach out to Crystal Armitage at (413) 364-9709. In Christ's love and trust, Pastor Christy Wright

- **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.
- **Music Licensing.** Last year, as we entered a time of Covid and needed to worship from a distance, we learned how to be creative with our resources to put together audio worship, accessible by our website and over the phone. In order to do so, we needed to obtain a music license for our worship services to be shared. We received an anonymous donation last year to cover the cost of this license, but it is coming up for renewal on April 1st. Because we are uncertain about the future of Covid and in-person worship, we will need to continue this license. If you feel led to making a donation toward this cause, which costs \$200 for the year, please mail your donation to the church at PO Box 576, West Brookfield, MA 01585, with "Music License" in the memo line of the check. We are thankful for your gifts as we continue to make worshiping from a distance possible - thank you!
- **Covid-19 Vaccines.** Several groups of folks are now eligible to receive the Covid-19 vaccine in Massachusetts! Please visit <https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine> to sign up or call 2-1-1 for over-the-phone assistance with scheduling. If you need help signing up, please call Pastor Christy, and she can walk you through the process.
- **Pastor Christy's Office Hours: FEBRUARY AND MARCH.** Pastor Christy's office hours will shift to **Mondays** and **Wednesdays** from 8 AM to 4 PM and **Thursdays** 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.
- **Reopening Advisory Board Update.** Board members, Pastor Christy will be in touch early next week to set up a meeting so we can discuss next steps.
- **NEW Financial Secretaries. THANK YOU** to Gail for your tremendous commitment and dedication as our Financial Secretary over the past several years! We are so grateful to Betty Sue and Heidi for your giving spirits as our new Financial Secretaries, which began on February 1st. As we transition leadership, **please remember to mail your offerings directly to the church at PO Box 576, West Brookfield, MA 01585.** Thank you!
- **Heifer Project.** Once we have a count of how much we raised, we'll include a list of animals/projects we could support, and we'll make decisions in January. Thank you for your support!

### 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

Priscilla Toppin

Kelly Rice

Claire Wirf

47 E Main St.

47 E Main St.

98 Lake Shore Drive

(508) 791-8131

West Brookfield, MA 01585

West Brookfield, MA 01585

West Brookfield, MA 01585

(mornings)

383 Mill Street

Worcester, MA 01602

## Daily Devotionals

### **Refuge: A Guided Lent Devotional by Rev. Kelsey Beebe**

*The Upper Room Daily Devotionals official magazines are still being distributed.*

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

**Monday, February 22 through Saturday, February 27th || Written by Rev. Kelsey Beebe**

*We invite you to light a candle at 9:30 AM daily, meditate on our given scripture, and join us in prayer*

### **Monday, February 22nd, 2021**

#### **Read Zephaniah 3:17**

Every Monday morning, I reflect on where I am finding the Sacred, what is giving me Hope, what is Inspiring me and Filling my cup, and what I am Thankful for. I call it my Monday Morning Shift. It is a way for me to shift into a positive gear, centering my spirit in God's love as I enter my week. My prayer is that it does the same for you. In your journal, I invite you to answer the following questions:

- Where are you finding the SACRED in your life? Or in other words, where do you see God at work in your life?
  - What is giving you HOPE?
  - What has INSPIRED you lately?
  - What FILLED your cup last week?
  - What are you THANKFUL for?

If you are feeling stuck, here is an example of how I have answered these questions:

- The SACRED showed up for me this week when I was looking out at the snow on a clear night with a full moon. There is something about the beauty of creation that makes me feel more connected to God.
- Seeing so many people receive their COVID vaccines is filling me with HOPE. It has been such a long road and it gives me so much hope to see a little bit of a light at the end of the tunnel.
- I have been working a lot lately on some visioning projects for different aspects of my ministry, and it has been leaving me so INSPIRED. It is such a privilege to do this work.
  - I have been eating a lot of blueberry waffles lately and that has been FILLING my cup lately. So delicious.
- I am so THANKFUL for phone calls and all the ways we have been able to stay in touch with folks near and far. It stinks to not be able to see people in person, but I am so grateful I can at least connect with them in other ways!

### ***Tuesday, February 23rd, 2021***

**“Lament is the space between despair and faith.” – unknown**

This past fall, when Ruth Bader Ginsberg died, I was not prepared for the depth of despair I felt. A friend of mine wrote a reflection and in it said, “Lament is the space between despair and faith.” It is a phrase that has stayed with me ever since. When we lament, we are grieving. We are allowing ourselves to feel all aspects of loss – the grief, the despair, but also the gratitude for what was and perhaps even a hope of what will be. Lamentation is that space in between – a space of “both/and.” Both sorrow and joy. Both despair and hope. Both rage and gratitude. My friend, we have all experienced a lot of loss in the past year. There is a lot to lament. Take a moment in your journal this evening to write down some of the both/ands that you feel. Maybe even get specific. For example, I am heartbroken by how many people have died this year; and I am grateful for the ways that grief has brought some of us closer together.

### ***Wednesday, February 24th, 2021***

**Read Psalm 25:6-7**

There is a lot of confusion on how it is best to read the Bible. Do we read it cover to cover? Do we read the Gospels first? Do we really need to read all that law stuff in Leviticus? Is there a correct order that we should read it all in? I am sure a lot of people have varying opinions on this. But, my favorite way to read the Bible is just to flip it open to a random page. Nine times out of ten, I end up opening to a verse or passage that speaks exactly to what I am going through in that moment. Take this passage from Psalm 25. I read flipped my Bible open to it on a night when I had been dwelling a lot on my past mistakes. I am not a perfect person and I know I have hurt people. Some I have apologized for, and others too much time passed before I realized the harm I had done. It weighs heavily on me. On a day when I was really feeling its weight, I sat down to read the Bible before bed and flipped it open to Psalm 25. It reminded me that I am not alone – people all throughout history have felt sorrow and regret about passed transgressions. Thankfully, this verse offered me a little bit of grace in that moment, reminding me of God’s great mercy and steadfast love. I can give thanks that God knows my heart – knows that I have learned and grown from past mistakes – and sees me with eyes of mercy and grace. It was just what I needed. Today I invite you to flip your Bible open to a random page. Read a few passages and listen for what you might need to hear. If nothing speaks to you, flip to a different page. Once you find a passage that feels meaningful for you, write it down in your journal so you can come back to it when you need to.

### ***Thursday, February 25th, 2021***

**Read Lamentations 3:22-23**

How has God been faithful in your life? When have you felt God’s steadfast love in your heart? As you reflect on these questions, write a list of at least 5 things for which you are grateful today.

### ***Friday, February 26th, 2021***

**Read Psalm 139:1-18**

As we did last week, I encourage you to experiment with the practice of *lectio divina*, following the steps outlined below:

1. Prepare: Take a moment and close your eyes. Breathe deeply through your nose. Pray for God to open your heart, ears, and mind. Ask God to speak to you and help you listen for whatever it is God needs you to hear.
2. Read: Read Psalm 139:1-18 three times. As you read, rather than trying to dissect the passage intellectually, just experience it. The first time through, simply read it. The second time, notice what words or phrases catch your eye, intrigue you, or speak to your heart. The third time, underline, circle, or star the words or phrases that stood out to you.
3. Meditate/Pray: In your journal, write down the word or phrase that stood out to you the most. Take a moment to close your eyes and repeat that word or phrase to yourself a few times. Maybe ask what God is saying to you through this passage. Notice what comes up as you do this: thoughts, memories, feelings. Listen for the Holy Spirit.
4. Contemplate: In your journal, write down what came up for you during your prayer and meditation. Note what you hear God saying to you through this scripture.

### ***Saturday, February 27th, 2021***

**Read Ephesians 2:8**

In your journal today, write a letter to God. It might feel strange at first but try to think of it as if you are writing to a friend who loves you fully and completely, and in whom you deeply trust. If it helps to have a prompt, I find that the phrase “Dear God, help...” or “Dear God, thank you...” can get me started when I am not sure what to write.