

**Safe Keeping****Sunday, February 28, 2021 || 2nd 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***Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us/He Leadeth Me**Melissa Quilitzsch***Announcements****Opening Hymn***For the Healing of the Nations**UMH 428*

1. For the healing of the nations,  
 Lord, we pray with one accord;  
 For a just and equal sharing  
 Of the things that earth affords;  
 To a life of love in action  
 Help us rise and pledge our word,  
 Help us rise and pledge our word.

3. All that kills abundant living,  
 Let it from the earth be banned;  
 Pride of status, race, and schooling,  
 Dogmas that obscure your plan.  
 In our common quest for justice,  
 May we hallow life's brief span,  
 May we hallow life's brief span.

2. Lead us forward into freedom;  
 From despair your world release,  
 That, redeemed from war and hatred,  
 All may come and go in peace.  
 Show us through care and goodness  
 Fear will die and hope increase,  
 Fear will die and hope increase.

4. You, Creator God, have written  
 Your great name on humankind;  
 For our growing in your likeness  
 Bring the life of Christ to mind,  
 That by our response and service  
 Earth its destiny may find,  
 Earth its destiny may find.

**Introduction - Marcia McFee**

God gathers us as a Beachcomber gathers and marvels at every precious surviving piece of beach glass God finds. We are never alone, we are never lost to the One who seeks humanity's wholeness. We affirm our commitment to be the Body of Christ that knows we cannot be personally healed until we see the interconnected community as part of the process of healing. Jesus has the power to re-vision the family of God in which false boundaries are overcome. In a year of devastating loss of livelihood, we consider the economic health that reimagines status quo.

Let us acknowledge our need to restore, repair, renew our Holy Vessels, which include the communities of which we are a part. Let us pray: God of All, You created us for each other. You set in us a yearning for companionship and an empathy that binds us together, protecting each other and delighting in one another. Yet too often we have broken down our relationships instead of building them up. We have been set against one another with the lie of scarcity. We have built systems and economies that widen the gap of resources rather than safeguarding equitable practices. Too many, and growing numbers, are suffering hardship, food insecurity, joblessness. We cannot fathom the proportions of loss and so we look away, sometimes even from the need in our own community. Help us, Healer. Show us our empathy. Forgive our complacency. Move us to move one step at a time toward greater care for one another. In this silence, we sense and acknowledge our yearning for wholeness.

Know this: This love and security is meant for all people. No. Matter. What. We are capable of sharing our light and not running out of "enough." Christ's hospitality that broke through false boundaries points the way. 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 8:5-13**

When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress." And Jesus said to him, "I will come and cure him." The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he

comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith." And the servant was healed in that hour.

### **Sermon - Pastor Christy Wright**

During my senior year of high school, my grandmother on my mom's side became very sick. She had had several "mini" strokes and potentially heart attacks over the course of many months, but at some point in October of that year, she had a massive stroke, and the prognosis didn't look promising. She lived in Virginia with the majority of my extended family, while our smaller nuclear family of my parents and brother were living in Connecticut. My parents asked my brother and I if we would like to go down to Virginia, as this would probably be the last time we'd see Grandma. I was too scared, and too emotional, so I decided I'd stay home. Our family friends just down the road hosted me for the week, so that I wouldn't be alone, and I recall one night not being able to sleep. I remember sitting up in bed and praying in their guestroom: "God, heal Grandma. Please, if you heal her, if you make her better, I promise I'll do better in school. I promise I'll pay attention in church. I promise I'll be more grateful for what I have. I promise I'll be a better person. Please God, I'll do anything."

The next day, I got word that she had passed away.

Over the next several months, I recall dreaming of Grandma frequently, and the most striking detail was just how beautiful she was. Her skin was glowing, and even her wrinkles, as I remembered her, disappeared into the light. And all she did was smile at me, beaming and proud. In her own way, she was healed. She was free as she had never been before.

This was my first encounter of many when I realized that God *does* answer our prayers, but sometimes in ways we could never imagine, and sometimes not without pain. I realized that as much as we try to bargain with God, as bold as we are with our assumptions and grand questions, as much as we admit our faults and promise to do better, God answers prayers not based on our effort, but rather through grace.

In this morning's scripture passage, we hear of a Roman soldier who pleads for the healing of his servant, which can also be translated to "companion." This dear loved one of the soldier is paralyzed and in terrible distress. The soldier knows that Jesus can heal the companion, and asks boldly, assuming Jesus' immediate agreement. And Jesus does agree, immediately! But then the soldier opens up his life to Jesus in honesty and vulnerability. He begins listing all of the reasons why he doesn't deserve the healing; you see, Roman soldiers stood in direct opposition of Jesus' ministry because it was a political threat to the powers that be. For centuries, the name *Son of God* was actually used to refer to the emperor, and when Jesus began taking on that same name, it threw the empire off-kilter, and Jesus quickly became an enemy of the state.

And yet, here's this Roman soldier, faithfully believing that Jesus not only has the ability to heal his companion, but in fact *will* heal the situation. All barriers are broken down, and labels fall away; Jesus will heal out of grace, rather than out of effort. Ultimately, this is a story about having the confidence to know that Jesus will heal, no matter what form it will take; because I believe that God healed not only the companion, but also the soldier, whose life was forever changed by his encounter with Jesus. You see, God is in the business of healing, of reconciliation, of renewal. But sometimes we won't recognize it for what it is until we step back.

As we reflect on this past year, we have prayed desperately for healing in so many ways. I remember when Covid-19 was first brought up as a prayer request in church in late January or early February last year. I remember every single phone call hearing the words that our loved ones are in the hospital, or entering into hospice care. I remember praying over the phone and through letters and in our summer outdoor gatherings for God's healing. I remember the tearful phone calls that brought news of loved ones' passings.

We have lost so many. We have suffered greatly. And we must grieve.

But as time passes, I wonder if something else is going on under the surface. I wonder if God *did* answer our prayers, but healing came in a different way: a way based in grace above all else. As we mourn, may we recognize the beauty that is before us, even in the midst of pain. May we notice the way light fills the cracks of grief, knowing that healing is happening, even if we can't see it. And may we be free as we have never been before, through Jesus Christ our ultimate Healer and our Peace beyond understanding. Amen.

**Hymn of Meditation***The Voice of God is Calling*

UMH 436

1. *The voice of God is calling its summons in our day; Isaiah heard in Zion, and we now hear God say: "Whom shall I send to succor my people in their need? Whom shall I send to loosen the bonds of shame & greed?"*
2. *"I hear my people crying in slum and mine and mill; No field or mart is silent, no city street is still. I see my people falling in darkness and despair. Whom shall I send to shatter the fetters which they bear?"*
3. *We heed, O Lord, your summons, & answer: Here are we! Send us upon your errand, let us your servants be. Our strength is dust and ashes, our years a passing hour; But you can use our weakness to magnify your power.*
4. *From ease and plenty save us; from pride of place absolve; Purge us of low desire; lift us to high resolve; Take us, and make us holy; teach us your will and way. Speak, and behold! We answer; command, and we obey!*

**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 broken pieces scattered and separated, we trust that you are seeking us, gathering us into wholeness, and calling us to join you in the quest. We pray especially for those who have experienced the loss of livelihoods and economic security and are feeling helpless to care for their families. We pray for those whose businesses have gone under or are on the precipice between survival or closure. People who were healed by Jesus were not afraid to ask. And so we come before the Holy One, making our petitions and desires known, trusting the work of the Spirit. We pray for those whose disparity of resources has been made even more pronounced during this pandemic. We pray grateful thanks for the efforts of all who have been searching for solutions and have given generously for months of their time and resources to alleviate the suffering of those they know and do not know. We ask for encouragement and passion to re-evaluate how we as a church can help now and into the future. 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. In this week's story we do not know how his followers reacted to his words, but we can assume that it was hard to hear for some. Jesus makes sure to point out that the belief of this "outsider" and his care for his servant was something he didn't always see from the "insiders"—from the ones who profess to be "faithful." His words no doubt affirmed some and offended others. That's what happens when we get "called out," as we say. Perhaps we are in need of being "called out." Not in a way that shames but in a way that energizes. How could our faith call us out more and more until we cannot stand by as some are suffering? As I said last week, we are working on healing for ourselves in this season, but we are also working toward something communal. 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 that the Holy Beachcomber is gathering us all for "Safe Keeping," recovering our depth of love for all and our joy of living in this world. May the words of Jesus ring in your ears: "I will come." And may the Spirit hover, move, and deliver salve to your soul and a spring in your step. Amen.*

**Postlude***Fading**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

- **Upcoming Meetings.** SPRC will meet by conference call on Wednesday, March 3rd at 7 PM on our phonenumber at (978) 990-5000, access code 719365#. Ad Council will also meet by conference call using the same number on Wednesday, March 10th at 10 AM.
- **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 - THANK YOU!** 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. MANY THANKS to an anonymous donation - we are fully funded to continue our ministry!
- **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 soon. 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, March 1st through Saturday, March 6th || 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, March 1st, 2021**

**Read Hebrews 6:19**

We have come to our second Monday of Lent and are thus returning to my favorite Monday spiritual practice: S.H.I.F.T. This will be our practice every Monday of this season. I pray it shifts you into a healthy, spiritual gear as you begin your week: In your journal, reflect on 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, refer back to February 22nd when we first did this practice for an example.

***Tuesday, March 2nd, 2021***

**Read Deuteronomy 6:4-8**

Every time I teach a yoga class, I always end it the same way: I have people put their palms together as if in prayer. I invite them to keep their palms together and lift their hands so their thumbs rest on their forehead as a reminder to think from a place of love and compassion towards others and toward themselves. Then, we lower our hands, keeping our palms together, so our thumbs rest on our lips as a reminder to speak from a place of love and compassion towards others and towards ourselves. Lastly, we bring our hands down to rest our thumbs in the center of our chest at the heart as a reminder to act from a place of love and compassion towards others and towards ourselves. I close my classes this way because one of the things I think we struggle with most in thinking, speaking, and acting from a place of love. Not just towards other people, but especially towards ourselves. It is a helpful check-in: Am I thinking kind thoughts? Are my words rooted in compassion? Am I acting out of love? If we truly believe that God lives within each and every one of us, that part of the practice of loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and might includes the practice of loving others and ourselves.

I use the word “practice” intentionally here because we rarely get it perfect. There are days I struggle to think kind thoughts about myself or speak in loving ways towards others. But I practice it. Today I invite you to place your palms together and touch your thumbs to your forehead, your lips, and your heart. May it ground and center you, and remind you to practice loving the God who lives in you and in me – and doing so when you are home, when you are away, when you lie down, and when you rise.

***Wednesday, March 3rd, 2021***

**Read Ecclesiastes 8:1**

One of my yoga teachers in college used to always remind us to release our tongue from the roof of our mouth. That’s now one of my favorite cues to use with my students. I never realized quite how often I tended to clench the muscles of my face & press the tongue against the roof of my mouth. I notice it now most frequently when I am driving – especially if there is traffic. It is as if my body thinks, “If I just scrunch my forehead a little more & press my tongue a little harder, I can get through this.” ..but that’s not really how things work. Now, releasing my tongue from the roof of my mouth has been a way for me to also consider what else I need to release. What else am I grasping onto tightly? What do I need to loosen my grip on? What can I release? How can I find ease? There is a lot of wisdom in understanding that there are many things beyond our control in the world. Holding tension in our face muscles is not going to make things better or change the world. If anything, it mostly just leads to a headache & tension in our lower back. So today, I invite you to practice softening your face. As you do so, let the wisdom of your body seep in & help you loosen your grip on things beyond your control. Let the softness of your face also soften your heart & mind. In your journal, write down one or two things beyond your control that you can give to God today. As you write, remember to release your tongue off the roof of your mouth.

***Thursday, March 4th, 2021***

**Read Galatians 5:6**

I invite you to read this morning’s passage & reflect. Then flip your Bible open to a random page & read a few paragraphs. If nothing stands out to you, flip to a different page. Once you find a passage that feels meaningful, write a sentence or two from it in your journal. Write why it stood out to you, and what you feel God might be saying to you through it.

***Friday, March 5th, 2021***

**Read Psalm 136:1**

Every time the youth at my church met for confirmation, we always did a check-in. One of their favorites was about gratitude. I asked them: What is something you are not grateful for this week? And what is something you are grateful for this week? It was a low-risk way for them to share some of the struggles they were facing – whether it was a tough grade on a math test or a strained friendship – and also some of the joys of their lives. In your journal today, I invite you to answer those same questions. What are you not grateful for, and what are you grateful for?

***Saturday, March 6th, 2021***

**Read Jeremiah 31:1-6**

As we did last week, I invite you to continue experimenting with the practice of lectio divina:

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 Jeremiah 31:1-6 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.