

Learning to Walk in the Dark: Silencing Our Fear**Sunday, January 31, 2021 || 4th Sunday after Epiphany || 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.*****Opening Hymn - O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing, UMH 57****1. O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of God's grace!**2. Jesus! The name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life, and health, and peace.**3. God speaks, and listening to God's voice,
New life the dead receive;
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
The humble poor believe.**4. In Christ, your head, you then shall know,
Shall feel your sins forgiven;
Anticipate your heaven below,
And own that love is heaven.****Scripture Reading - Mark 1:21-28****They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching - with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.****Sermon***

My work week started off with a bang - and not in a good way. I had my first accident at Lovin' Spoonfuls, the job in which I drive a large refrigerated truck to transport food between grocery stores and food pantries. Thankfully there were no injuries and really almost no damage. I just happened to back into a parked vehicle that I didn't realize was there. The license plate on the car crinkled up a little bit, and the truck itself is a tank, so it sustained no damage. Other than that, everything was fine. Regardless, I was definitely shaken up, and as we filed the report, my hands were trembling so badly that I needed to create a new form because the first one wasn't legible. When we were ready to hit the road again, my co-worker jumped into the driver's seat for the rest of the day. As I debriefed with my supervisor over the phone, he was incredibly understanding. He told me that everyone on staff has had an accident, none of them serious, and in a brotherly way, he told me, "Welcome to the team!"

My supervisor did say, though, that I need to get into the driver's seat on my next shift; I need to conquer the fear and move forward. "Don't let this become a big thing," he said. "Everyone makes mistakes, and that's okay."

Easier said than done, to be honest. The way I normally deal with a situation like this is that I run through it multiple times in my head, beating myself up for not doing the right thing. And when it's time to face that fear, those thoughts become an endless cycle of "what ifs" and worst case scenarios. But is that really the way God would want me to move forward? To entertain those thoughts or engage with them? To give them validity?

This morning's scripture reading from Mark is an unusual one in that we encounter demons - something that is pretty rare within the Bible and even more rare in today's world. Jesus had been teaching in the temple when his lesson was interrupted by a sudden, unpredictable moment: someone wandered in who clearly wasn't well. They began to yell at Jesus, making a commotion and causing a scene. Imagine being in the room at that time. What thoughts would be running through your head? What fears might arise from this situation?

While our human response might be one of fight or flight, Jesus took another approach - silencing the demons. He didn't argue with them, or attempt to intellectually spar with them, or let anything of this moment slide. Instead, he shut it down, and freed this man from his demons, all of those things with which he was wrestling. The man was well again, and all were

amazed at what they had just witnessed. Jesus, this teacher of great authority from God, responded to fear in a way that takes great courage and faith: head on, and without hesitation.

As we reflect on our own struggles, what are some of the demons we are dealing with today? Maybe it's a worry or fear that just keeps cycling through our mind. Maybe it's regret or guilt for something we've done or haven't done. Whatever it is, Jesus doesn't desire us to live lives marred by worry or fear; rather, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can live freely, openly, not even entertaining a thought of negativity. And what a wonderful world that would be.

I'd like to close with the full version of the *Serenity Prayer* written by Elisabeth Sifton. Most of us will recognize the first verse, but the last two may provide greater depth to our prayer.

*God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

*Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as God did, this sinful world
As it is, not as I would have it;*

*Trusting that God will make all things right
If I surrender to God's Will;
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life
And supremely happy with God
Forever and ever in the next.
Amen.*

Hymn of Meditation - Leaning on the Everlasting Arms, UMH 133

*1. What a fellowship, what a joy divine,
Leaning on the everlasting arms;
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,
Leaning on the everlasting arms.*

*Refrain
Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms
Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms*

*2. O how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way,
Leaning on the everlasting arms;
O how bright the path grows from day to day
Leaning on the everlasting arms*

Refrain

*3. What have I to dread, what have I to fear
Leaning on the everlasting arms
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,
Leaning on the everlasting arms*

*Refrain
Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms
Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms*

In Our Prayers. Thanksgiving for: the gifts that make ministry possible, medical professionals and researchers, thanksgiving that Sandy's son and family are doing much better after their Covid illness. 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, those grieving the loss of loved ones (Charlie and family in the loss of Marge; Heidi and family in the loss of Millie), 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.*

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.¹

Community Announcements

- **Covid-19 Vaccines.** Massachusetts residents aged 75+ are now eligible to receive the Covid-19 vaccine! Please visit <https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine> to sign up. If you do not have internet access or need help, please call Pastor Christy, and she can walk you through the process. At least two of our members have already gotten appointments for this coming week! And there's a second option: the West Brookfield Health Board is partnering to put together a regional vaccine clinic in Palmer, though it is unclear when it will take place. You can call the WB Senior Center for more information at (508) 867-1407 and to leave your name and proof of eligibility.
- **SPECIAL MUSIC SERVICE.** Pastor Christy will be away from February 3-8 as she prepares for and participates in commissioning exams, the next step in the ordination process. If a need for pastoral care arises, Rev. Amie McCarthy of the Spencer UCC will be available. She can be reached at (508) 272-6437. Instead of a traditional service, we are excited to offer a Special Music Service on Sunday, February 7th at 9:30 AM on our website or through our phonenumber. If you are interested in collaborating with Melissa on music, you can reach out to her at mrsqpiano@gmail.com or (508) 246-8508. We are asking that all music be submitted by Monday, February 1st. Thank you!
- **Pastor Christy's Office Hours: FEBRUARY AND MARCH.** Pastor Christy will be away from February 3-8. When she returns, her 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.
- **January Reopening Advisory Board Update.** Due to the continuing rise in cases of Covid-19, the building remains closed until further notice, and worship will continue to take place online or over the phone. The Board has decided to suspend Reopening meetings until the situation changes (or until the state loosens up on restrictions). Please reach out to any member of the Trustees or Reopening Advisory Board if you have any questions or would like more information about how we can make in-person worship a possibility.
- **Giving Envelopes. Update:** Giving Envelopes for 2021 had been shipped in early 2020 to the parsonage and placed in storage - and subsequently forgotten about by Pastor Christy - oops! So we **will** be using Giving Envelopes for 2021. They will be distributed in the next couple of weeks.
- **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 beginning on February 1st. As we begin to transition leadership, **please mail your offerings directly to the church at PO Box 576, West Brookfield, MA 01585.** Thank you!
- **Do you have an email address?** At this time, we are spending \$12.65 per week on postage to mail out services, which equals over \$50 a month. If you are able to receive mailings through email, we ask that you contact Pastor Christy with your email address so we can save money on postage. It is very much appreciated!
- **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!
- **Is Your Contact Information Up To Date?** Please let Jane Dolan know if your contact information has changed. In case of church cancellation or other circumstances, we would love to be able to get ahold of you.
- **Offerings** are still being encouraged during this time. Please consider mailing your offering to our church PO Box, so that we are able to continue in ministry through Christ for the transformation of the world. Offerings can be mailed to: George Whitefield United Methodist Church, PO Box 576, West Brookfield, MA 01585.9

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

Priscilla Toppin

47 E Main St.

West Brookfield, MA 01585

Kelly Rice

98 Lake Shore Drive

West Brookfield, MA 01585

Claire Wirf

(508) 791-8131

(mornings)

383 Mill Street

Worcester, MA 01602

¹ Book of Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals

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, February 1st through Saturday, February 6th || 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, February 1st, 2021

Rev. Dr. Jacquelyn Brannen, Katahdin District Superintendent

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28

Lord, we come to you in this time of pandemic, looking for miracles. Over the past year, many of our idols have been displayed in front of us and found to be empty stumbling blocks. Our lives have become simplified as we have been forced to put so much of what we once found essential, aside. In this refining fire, we have come to rely only upon you, the One true God. Just as you once sent unclean spirits far from your followers, we ask you to send this virus far from us. We love you, Lord Jesus. Make us clean. Make us whole. Make us well. Amen.

Tuesday, February 2nd, 2021

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

Read Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Almighty and eternal God, we come before you today with a deep desire to know you, and to feel your loving embrace surround us. Calm our minds, and soothe our spirits as we sense your presence. We come as persons who have something to give to others and to you. Each of us are aware of our areas of strength and of our areas of failure. Speak to us through the "Nineveh moments" of life. You have called us to follow you, and your voice has been drowned out with the noise of our lives. Forgive us for not listening. Speak to us again in our moments of quietness, and remind us to slow down, to be silent, and to listen. Make yourself known to us anew. Transform our defeatist attitudes. Give us courage to try new behaviors which are filled with purpose and love. Lift our hearts to you today as the source of our strength and inspiration. We give you thanks for the gift of another day, and we marvel at the many challenges and possibilities that lie within. Give us grateful hearts, O God for work to do, and for the strength with which to do it. Let your spirit push us onward and help us not to become distracted by difficulties. Help us instead to become inspired by what might be. Instill within each of us, a desire to face every challenge in life with the possibility of excelling, and turning adversity into victory. We thank you for your abiding presence as we lift our voices in praise. Amen.

Wednesday, February 3rd, 2021

Rev. Rick McKinley, Director of Congregational Development

Read Mark 1:14 - 20

Jesus, like Andrew and his brother, and James and his sibling, you invite me to follow and in so doing, you will make us "fishers." Fishers of people. Truth be told, I'm not a big fan of fish-people. Have you seen them? Have you smelled them? Fishy people, Jesus. Doesn't sound like a good idea to me. And truth be told, I'm pretty happy with the nets I'm using. I like what shows up in my nets right now. I know what to expect. I can count on what is going to be in those nets. I'm comfortable with the net-intake. Not to mention: they are good nets. Why would I leave good nets? Perfectly good nets! Your mother would tell you, "Don't waste good nets, Jesus!" (Well, at least my mother would.) Following you means leaving my nets? Following you means maybe no nets at all? Are you crazy Jesus? But maybe you're up to something, something I didn't catch at first (get it, Jesus?) Maybe what you are inviting us to do is not catch people AT something, but fish people OUT of something. Out of despair. Out of hunger. Out of thirst. Out of loneliness. Out of darkness. I'd like to be caught like that. I guess that I'd like to be part of something like that. But also I know this: I've never fished like that before. So Jesus, if you'll be my teacher, I'll be your follower. I'll leave my nets and my need for comfort and security and control ... I will follow you. Help me be your follower. Amen.

Thursday, February 4th, 2021**Rev. Ted Crass, President, The United Methodist Foundation of New England****Read Psalm 62:5-12**

O Holy One, this morning we come before you with hope, relief, and disquiet. We celebrate our human-made institutions and a new opportunity. We long to breathe and be the Beloved Community. You call us to love one another, to reject violence, and to listen. Our hope is in you, our rock and refuge, the Source of all that is good and never-ending. Your Truth makes us free. And yet, we mourn division with sisters and brothers. We have made media, coin, and systems our gods and sing *My Country 'tis of Thee*. Forgive us. For so long, we have lived in our normal routines at less than our best and we can no longer recognize our need for your healing. Puncture our delusions of privilege and status, and deliver us from greed and favoritism. O God, awaken us to the life-taking fear and lies that separate us from one another. Disturb our self-righteousness, and reveal your grace where it is needed and not wanted. Remind us to be life-giving, to wish the best for one another, to have compassion for one another, and to acknowledge our own brokenness. Our hope is in you, our rock and refuge, the Source of all that is good and never-ending. Your Truth makes us free. Today we gather together – at a distance, feeling that we are all turning the page together. Feeling our hope passed from one to another. God of love, we thank you for leaders who wear the joys and sorrows of life for all to see: Triumph, disappointment, loss and grief, joy, courage, and service. May our leaders recognize your Divine Spirit in all people, especially the poor and marginalized and serve them. Awaken us to the tangible reality of our holy web of interdependence and inspire us to act in our oneness. Lead us to work for justice and equity, and let justice roll down like waters with righteousness a mighty stream. Give us the strength to sustain our spirits and will in this sacred work. Let us rise together, go up together. Our hope is in you, our rock and refuge, the Source of all that is good and never-ending. Your Truth makes us free. Guide us each day to embrace your grace and to bring your love and justice into the world. On this day of hope, gird us for the difficult challenges and holy opportunities ahead. Help us to be true to you, O God, and true to our native land. Amen.

Friday, February 5th, 2021**Pastor Minchang (MC) Lee of Tilton-Northfield UMC and Franklin UM, Granite District****Read Philippians 1:21-30**

This is another day that YOU have made! We do not know what it will bring forth, but make us ready to live the gospel and eager to do your will. Mold us, shape us until we think, act, and love like you, Lord. Loving God, help us to recognize the sacredness of ALL of your creatures as signs of your unending love. Through your grace and mercy, open our eyes to see the dignity and beauty of all. Let us love you and serve you with heads, hearts, and hands so that the whole world knows that love never fails and our hope is not defined by circumstances. Our hope is eternal. Christ Jesus, hear our cries; cries because of climate change, systemic racism, and Covid-19. Open our hearts to your word and imitate your example. Fill us with courage and faith that we may seek to heal wounds, build bridges, and establish peace and justice for all in our communities. Remind us again of how to pray these days and witness the power of prayer in this troubling time. Holy Spirit, fill us with the spirit of prayer, praise, and worship. Empower your churches and people of faith to proclaim your love and hope courageously. Help us always move in the Spirit. Guide our life into life and truth and let your will and promises always be a meditation of our heart. In the name of your son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Saturday, February 6th, 2021**Rev. Dr. Vickie Wood Parrish, Coordinating Pastor of Ashland UMC, Granite District****Read Exodus 16:1-15**

God, it has been a long eleven months and there is more to come. Sometimes we feel like the Israelites as they wandered through the wilderness, remembering the past as safety and not as slavery. We feel like we have lost our direction just when we want to see the end most. And our complaining is poisoning relationships. We ask you for peace, justice, and hope. Yet we let our complaints sour us and prevent just what we are looking for. Could it be that you have offered us just what we need to move forward, but we don't recognize it? Help us to ask the questions that will lead to change. Help us to listen to uncomfortable answers. Help us to have the courage to put questions and answers into actions. Help us to recognize the people who are traveling with us on this journey and give us the strength to support one another. May we come out of the wilderness stronger than before – strong in patience, love, faith, and the ability to make changes so that all the world will know that we are family, together.