

**Different Pictures****Sunday, March 14, 2021 || 4th 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***Amazing Grace**Melissa Quilitzsch***Announcements****Opening Hymn***Be Thou My Vision**UMH 451*

1. Be thou my vision,  
 O Lord of my heart;  
 Naught be all else to me,  
 Save that thou art.  
 Thou my best thought  
 By day or by night  
 Waking or sleeping,  
 Thy presence my light.

2. Be thou my wisdom,  
 And thou my true word;  
 I ever with thee,  
 And thou with me, Lord;  
 Thou and thou only,  
 First in my heart,  
 Great God of heaven,  
 My treasure thou art.

3. Great God of heaven,  
 My victory won,  
 May I reach heaven's joys  
 O bright heaven's Sun!  
 Heart of my own heart,  
 Whatever befall,  
 Still be my vision,  
 O Ruler of all.

**Introduction - Marcia McFee**

*We continue our Lenten "season of recovery" as we focus on health as essential to our spiritual lives. Prolonged times of difficulty can impede our ability to stay creative. The picture of our lives is dulled and hope for a brighter future can fade. We need a touch of inspiration to awaken us from our sleep, as we hear in one of this week's healing stories. We also awaken to our agency to seek out the Divine Healer, reaching out to touch the power we know can restore our intellect and imagination. We emerge ready to re-engage with the world, seeking and seeing solutions, creating different pictures of life renewed just as a mosaic artist creates beauty from broken pieces of glass. Let us acknowledge our need to restore, repair, renew our Holy Vessels so that we might be able to create and imagine new possibilities, new solutions. Let us pray: God of All Possibilities, made in your image, you have tasked us as co-creators of a better world. You bestowed imagination and the ability to learn and progress. But we are tired. Our energy wanes and enthusiasm wanes. The call for ideas, solutions, work-arounds, and adaptations has been non-stop for us all—whether we are needing to find ways to keep children engaged and well, or figuring out how to maintain a passion for our work in the midst of trying times, or needing desperately to undo systems of oppression too long affecting our lives and the lives of our neighbors. Not only our livelihoods, but our liveliness is at stake. Too often we want to give up, declare it all too hard and simply isolate, waiting out the time for better days. It all feels overwhelming and so we look away, sometimes even from the need in our own community. Help us, Healer. Show us our energy reserves. Forgive our cynicism. 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: We are gifted with agency to affect healing in the world. No. Matter. What. We are not alone and we can join with others to magnify hope. Christ will answer when we call, when we reach out for what we know can help. 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 9:18-26**

*While Jesus was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread throughout that district.*

**Sermon - Pastor Christy Wright**

Several years ago, I attended my first workshop at the United Nations Church Center in New York City, a seminar about climate change and how we could make a difference on individual and communal levels. As we were given a tour of the building at the beginning of the day, I couldn't help but be in awe of all of the work being done there: this particular property is owned by the United Methodist Women Foundation, and it houses dozens of nonprofits and non-governmental agencies that are seeking to build a better world. It is truly a mosaic of faith-filled people from all over the globe doing the work of God. As we look across history, we witness wars, famine, and, in our time, pandemics; this reality can be so gut-wrenching and painful, and it can be easy to fall into hopelessness. But we are called to respond in a way that reflects Jesus' hope, healing, and resurrection: a response of collecting the broken pieces of life and partnering with God to reassemble them, to transform reality into something life-giving and beautiful. This is a true act of healing, healing that we are all empowered to participate in through the power of the Holy Spirit and Jesus' guiding hands.

In this morning's passage, we hear of the stories of a synagogue leader whose daughter had just died and a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. The religious leader ran up to Jesus in a panic - his daughter had just died, but he knew that Jesus would heal her. As Jesus was on his way to visit the girl, a woman with a chronic illness reached out her hand and touched his robes, knowing that she would be healed from just a touch - and she was. Jesus continued on to meet with the girl, took her hand, and she was made well again.

From a historical perspective, much of this passage deals with purity and Jesus' response to it. In this time and place, women who suffered from hemorrhages, like this woman, were declared unclean and defiled. They were cast out from their communities and sent to live in solitude or with other women who were suffering the same fate. This woman, who had been suffering for twelve years, would have had to leave her family, her loved ones. And the girl? She was presumed dead, and dead bodies were also declared unclean. But notice what happened with Jesus in this passage: Jesus was touched by the woman, which by law, would have made him unclean. There were ceremonial rites he would have had to go through in order to be declared clean again. But he went straight to the young girl - who was dead - and took her by the hand - becoming defiled himself, again. Jesus seemingly ignored all of the protocols surrounding purity here, but he did it to make a point: purity and impurity are not the focus; healing is.

All of this made me wonder: what if these stories were intertwined? What if these relationships were actually closer than we realized? What if the girl in this story was actually *the bleeding woman's* daughter? Perhaps twelve years ago, this woman was cast out by the leader of the synagogue. Maybe instead of two healings - the healing of the woman and of the daughter - what if there were actually three? I'm thinking that a relational healing took place here as well, one in which a family was reunited through Jesus' touch. When read through this lens, the broken pieces of this situation - the hopelessness, the fear, the isolation - were all healed in this moment, becoming a sacred mosaic through Jesus' touch.

As a church, we've been living through a pandemic for exactly one full year. Our last gathering together in the building for "normal church" was on March 8th, 2020. And it's felt like it's been a decade, hasn't it? We have had to endure so much as a church family, and now we are beginning to see newness springing about. This past year, our lives have intertwined through phone calls and letters, through prayer chains and newly imagined worship services. The mosaic of our community, the many facets of who we are and the saints who have gone before us, are continually reinforced and recreated each and every day. Grace has touched our lives even before we've reached out to Jesus, and Jesus has taken our hand. Thanks be to God that as we continue to collect the broken pieces of life, we are invited to partner with God to reassemble them, to transform reality into something life-giving and beautiful. May we recognize Jesus' healing power in our brokenness and in our wholeness. May we be empowered to heal as Jesus heals, trusting in faith and grace that God's great love will fill in the cracks. And may we always remember the Love that will not let us go, always bound in our sacred mosaic through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the healing touch of Jesus, and with God's never ending presence. Amen.

**Hymn of Meditation***O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go*

UMH 480

1. *O Love that wilt not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in thee;  
I give thee back the life I owe,  
That in thine ocean depths  
Its flow may richer, fuller be.*

2. *O Light that followest all my way,  
I yield my flickering torch to thee;  
My heart restores its borrowed ray,  
That in thy sunshine's blaze  
Its day may brighter, fairer be.*

3. *O Joy that seekest me through pain,  
I cannot close my heart to thee;  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
And feel the promise is not vain,  
That morn shall tearless be.*

4. *O Cross that liftest up my head,  
I dare not ask to fly from thee;  
I lay in dust life's glory dead,  
And from the ground there  
Blossoms red life that shall endless be.*

**Prayer of Meditation - Marcia McFee**

*Healer of our every ill, especially our malady of exhausted spirits, 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. You remind us that we do not have to shoulder everything alone. We give you thanks that all we must do is orient ourselves toward your divine spirit to accompany us, touch us, inspire us, heal us. 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 especially for all who feel opportunity and possibility is cut off to them. Whose spirit is continually dampened and damaged by those who fail to see value in their contributions, who steal away rights to the fullness of expression. We give thanks for communities, churches, non-profits, and businesses that are supporting the flourishing of all voices, especially voices that have been silenced. We give thanks for the courage of innovators who use their resources and creativity to make more good in the world, making this a priority over profit. We ask for courage and encouragement to re-evaluate how we as a church can join this effort 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: 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 (particularly for the Armitage family and loved ones of Mandy, who entered eternal life last week; and for John and the Toppin family and loved ones in the loss of Priscilla), those experiencing illness or health issues - especially those who are ill with Covid-19, and (for Al (and family as they care for him), Dan D. (Vicki's husband), Kelly R., Lindsey S., Peter M.), 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.*

**Commissioning and Benediction - Marcia McFee**

*Each week we look at the reaction of the crowd in the healing story. This week there is an interesting reaction at Jesus' notion that the girl was not dead. They laughed. Full-blown funeral rites had begun, flutes and all. And yet Jesus said, this is not the end of this story. The idea that we could come back to life better than before, that we could find some way to bring life back to what feels dead, may seem preposterous to some at this point. Laughable. But, like Jesus, we need not be deterred. Can we forge ahead, enter the "house" of sorrow and dare to proclaim that can still exist? And so in our communal discerning about how this church community could become a "health hub" through our ministry and mission, let us put our minds to imagining how we can learn about innovative ways that are being created to revive our communities. Who are the bright spots of life among us, among our civic, political, neighborhood organizing leaders that are working passionately to alleviate the devastating effects of the pandemics that have raged among us? 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 we will awaken, we will seek out and reach for the healing solutions that our neighbors, our communities, our world needs, recovering our depth of love for all and our joy of living in this world. May the words of Jesus ring in your ears: "You are not dead, you are sleeping." And may the Spirit hover, move, and deliver salve to your soul and a spring in your step. Amen.*

**Postlude***Sky's the Limit**Melissa Quilitzsch***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

- **Sunrise Easter Service!** We're very excited to announce our ecumenical Sunrise Easter Service with First Congregational Church of West Brookfield and Brookfield UCC will take place **outside** at the First Congregational Church in WB at **6:15 AM on Sunday, April 4th**. Masks and social distancing will be observed. More details coming soon!
- **Upcoming Meetings.** The Reopening Advisory Board will meet on Monday, March 15th at 7 PM, by conference call using our phonenumber at (978) 990-5000, access code 719365#.
- **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.
- **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: MARCH.** Pastor Christy's office hours have shifted to **Mondays** and Wednesdays from 8 AM to 4 PM and Thursdays from 8 AM to 12 noon in March. 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.
- **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

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

## 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 15th through Saturday, March 20th || 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 15th, 2021**

#### **Read Proverbs 3:3**

It is Monday again, which means we begin our week with the S.H.I.F.T. practice. I started this practice partially because of the negativity I sense around Mondays. We tend to really dislike them. Back when I was in college, I decided at some point to start thinking of Mondays like they were the sunrise for the week ahead. It shifted my perspective and allowed me to enter the week with gratitude, hope, and excitement – rather than dread. Maybe this practice can help make that shift for you as well. 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 the first week of Lent when we first did this practice for an example.

### **Tuesday, March 16th, 2021**

#### **Read Matthew 6:5-14**

We return again to the practice of lectio divina – the spiritual act of reading of scripture and prayerfully listening to how God is still speaking to us through these ancient texts.

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 Matthew 6:5-14 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.

***Wednesday, March 17th, 2021***  
**Read Proverbs 28:13**

Sin is a really tricky concept. In many of our faith institutions, the concept of sin has been yielded as a weapon. From our LGBTQ+ siblings being told their being and existence is sinful to women being told leaving abusive marriages is sinful, you can see our theology around sin has created a great deal of harm. Perhaps if you are someone who has had sin weaponized against you, or if you have struggled with sin as a concept, a reframing might be helpful. My favorite definition of sin is “missing the mark.” When I talk about this with kids, I usually use a ball and try to get the ball in the basket, purposefully missing on my first few tries. Then I ask them: what do you do when you miss the mark? Their responses include: ask for help, try again, get a little closer, it’s okay if you miss, don’t give up. In life and in games, we all miss the mark and make mistakes. We all sin. It does not mean we are a bad person, or a failure, or that we will always miss the mark. It means we are human. But, as this passage from Proverbs reminds us, it does us no good to conceal our sin or pretend it never happened. A ball player who cannot admit that their three-pointers stink cannot get better at hitting them. We must be able to admit when we have done wrong (confession), work to do better (repentance), and trust that God loves us and forgives us as we learn (mercy). Now that feels far less damning, and a lot more hopeful. In your journal, reflect: what are some moments this past week or month when you have missed the mark? What would it look like to confess those sins and work to do better?

***Thursday, March 18th, 2021***  
**Read Romans 8:26-27**

Sometimes there just are no words. Today, rather than writing in your journal, I invite you to set a timer, maybe on a watch or your phone, for two minutes. Close your eyes and just focus on your breath. Notice the cool air as you breathe in through your nostrils, and how it is just a little bit warmer as you exhale. Feel the rise and fall of your shoulders as you breathe. Notice how your lungs expand your ribcage on the inhale, and how it all retracts with your exhale. When your mind wanders, just come back to your breath. Know this is a practice you can come back to any time the words for a prayer are not coming. Just breathe and the Spirit will intercede.

***Friday, March 19th, 2021***  
**Read Luke 6:36**

When I was a senior in college, I got incredibly angry at my parents. I told them not to come to graduation (not one of my prouder moments, but I was feeling hurt). My beloved older sister called me and said, “That was really spiteful. And you’re not a spiteful person.” She reminded me of this passage from Luke and encouraged me to approach my parents with compassion. This was a lesson that has stayed with me. It is okay for us to be hurt and to name that hurt. But it is not okay to act out of spite or cause harm in the wake of our hurt and anger. As you write in your journal today, reflect on this question: who am I harboring anger towards? Can I be merciful, just as God is merciful? (I want to name here that being merciful does not always mean going to the person who caused harm and saying you forgive them; sometimes mercy is just done in the safety of your own heart).

***Saturday, March 20th, 2021***  
**Read Nehemiah 9:6**

Maybe flipping the Bible open to a random page feels a bit unorthodox for you. I can definitely understand that, especially if you are someone who prefers order and structure. But, the reason I encourage folks to open their Bibles to random pages is because it can help remove the paralyzing belief that perhaps you are doing it wrong, which leads to you not doing it at all. So rather than saying “You should do it this way, or you must start here,” I simply say just open it. That’s it. Just open your Bible and start reading. So today I invite you to do just that. Open your Bible and read. When you find a word, phrase, or couple sentences that strike a chord in you, write them down in your journal.