

Restoration**Sunday, March 21, 2021 || 5th 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***For the Beauty of the Earth**Melissa Quilitzsch***Announcements****Opening Hymn***Mountains Are All Aglow**UMH 86*

1. Mountains are all aglow with autumn colors so bright;
 Rivers are filled with water, giving life to our days.
 Golden fields wave their praise to God's bountiful harvest;
 Gratefully, skyward rising, hear our joyous songs of praise!

3. Early spring is the time to sow all God's rich seeds of life.
 Working hard, tilling God's earth; making preparation.
 Looking forward to rewards of harvest so plentiful;
 Promised blessings will soon be ours in each revelation.

Refrain: Reaching far as earthly eyes can see, reaching far as humble hands can toil, every harvest is from our Lord; every blessing is from our God. Praise for the harvest, thanks to our God. Praise for the harvest, give praise to God.

2. Every land so abundantly rich the harvest bears;
 Every orchard is filled with luscious, ripened new fruit.
 Sun and rain by the Lord's design shall come at proper time.
 Working hard, God has given us reasons for deep gratitude. Trusting in God's promises, our thanks to God we will show

4. Praise the Lord as we're planting God's word deep in each heart
 God has sent sunshine and the rain so the seedlings may grow
 Desert lands which seem barren, flowers still might bloom
 Working hard, God has given us reasons for deep gratitude. Trusting in God's promises, our thanks to God we will show

Introduction - Marcia McFee

We continue our Lenten "season of recovery" as we focus on health as essential to our spiritual lives. The demands of following Jesus are great. He shows us that sometimes we must make extraordinary efforts to move in a new direction. As we consider the health of humanity, we cannot ignore the need to heal the very planet that sustains us. We live in increasing chaos of a beleaguered environment and the hoarding of resources. We want to be "saved" by something or someone else, but we discover this week that we are in the boat with the One who shows us our power to turn it around, to calm the storm. We protect the jewel that is our home, restoring something beautiful from scars of the past.

Let us acknowledge our need to restore, repair, renew our Holy Vessels, especially this holy container of life on which we live—this very planet. Let us pray: Life-giving God, in the beginning, you created this universe with a phrase, "Let it be..." and the waters and dry land, the sky and the creatures were formed. You set humanity among these wonders and invited us to care and honor all things. We have not successfully answered that call. Seeing the abundance as a feast that would never end, we gorged ourselves, taking more than we could replenish at a rate that could not be sustained. We are beginning to comprehend the magnitude, beginning to see that things cannot just keep going "as usual" and not have dire consequences. We are frightened, which is partly why we are slow to accept it. But we now are witnesses to the forces of a world more broken than when we inherited it: water, wind, and wave, fire, drought, and earthquake that signal it is time to pay attention and to make real change. Too often we think there is nothing we can do—that the change required is too great. It all feels overwhelming and so we look away, sometimes even from the small things that could make a difference for our own community. Help us, Healer. Show us our ability to chart a different course. Forgive our inaction. 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: Jesus asks us to do hard things, to make changes, knowing we are capable. No. Matter. What. We can change in order to heal this jewel planet called home. The calm of Christ in the storm is available. 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 8:23-27

And when Jesus got into the boat, his disciples followed him. A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

Sermon - Pastor Christy Wright

The first time I realized that all of creation was intertwined, that our stories inherently intersected with creation as a whole, was when I was in middle school, on a small motor-powered skiff in the Poquonnock River in Connecticut. I was attending the first of many sessions of "ocean camp," where I learned about marine science with an organization connected to the University of Connecticut. As we slowly powered our way into the different basins of the river, our instructor pointed off into the distance toward some houses built right along the shoreline. The water near the private docks was bright green, filled with algae, and it appeared to be teeming with life. But she told us a different story: overuse of lawn fertilizers made green lawns even more green, but the chemicals ran off into the water during rainstorms. When fertilizers end up in the water column, it invigorates the growth of algae - which is good at first: it provides food for fish and other organisms. But it can quickly turn into a disaster: this growth of algae can rapidly turn into a dangerous and deadly situation for the ecosystem. As the algae continues to bloom, it crowds out light that other plants need, and it uses up the oxygen that fish require. A healthy estuary can quickly become a hypoxic environment, one devoid of oxygen and necessary diverse nutrients to sustain life. All because of some lawn fertilizer.

As we reflect on our role here on earth, it can be easy to read back to Genesis and see that we are called to have "dominion over" the world. But as we refer back to the original language of Hebrew, we recognize that "dominion over" doesn't translate well into English. The original language actually defines humanity's relationship to the earth as a "partnership," that humanity is called to "steward" the earth, to take care of it and all that is within it. How does this change the way we've thought about our own agency in creating a better world?

In this morning's scripture passage, Jesus got into a boat with his disciples, and they began a trek over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Suddenly a great storm arose, and the disciples were afraid; all the while, Jesus was asleep. The men on the boat panicked, and quickly woke Jesus, who responded by noting their lack of faith, then calming the storm himself. The disciples were struck by Jesus' power and marveled at the miracle before them.

What I find interesting about this passage is that Jesus not only rebuked the storm, but in some ways, it felt like he also rebuked the disciples. Rather than taking care of the storm first, Jesus turned to the disciples - as though waiting for *them* to do something about the wind and the waves. Several times throughout Jesus' ministry, we see Jesus putting the ball back in the court of those asking for help: last week we heard about the woman who reached out in faith - and Jesus said that it was *her faith* that had made her well. And when there was no more wine at the wedding at Cana? Jesus empowered the disciples to turn water to wine - *he himself never touched anything*. It was all the disciples' doing. In each of these cases, Jesus highlighted humanity's agency to make things right - to partner with God in righting a wrong, in healing, and in reconciliation. It's as if Jesus is saying, "I believe in you; believe in yourself."

And the good news is that even when we fail (which we will, because we're human), Jesus doesn't leave us on our own to pick up the pieces. Just as Jesus was already in the boat, and he stepped in and calmed the storm, we, too, are not alone in our own storms. If we listen closely, we will hear the Spirit's guidance and Jesus' encouragement to take action. We have a role to play as we partner with God in restoring what has been lost. And when we take action, we recognize that our actions *do in fact* affect others. It's not just about us; it is about all of creation, for we are all intertwined.

As we continue on our path in healing this Lenten season, how is God calling you to take agency in your own life as it relates to creation as a whole? In what ways are you being led to take next steps in your personal healing and in our communal healing? I invite you to reflect prayerfully with God on the actions you can take today, and this week, toward this restoration. It may be using less fertilizer on our lawn (maybe?), or it might be something like reaching out to someone who needs to hear from you. It might be something as small as dropping a card in the mail, or something as big as donating toward a particular organization to support their work in personal and communal healing.

As we prayerfully consider the work before us, may we recognize the energy Jesus has given us and the faith Jesus has *in us* to do good work in his name. May we recognize the stories that intersect with our own as we work to create a better world. And may we always be listening to the still small voice that says, "I believe in you; believe in yourself." Amen.

Hymn of Meditation

Wounded World that Cries for Healing

FWS 2177

<p>1. Wounded world that cries for healing - Here we hold each other's pain, Wounded systems, Bruised and bleeding Bear the load, the scars of strain; Dollars ration out compassion, Hard decisions rule the day, Jesus of the healing Spirit, Free us to another way!</p>	<p>2. Through our nation's Spent frustration Through the corridors of stress May there move a Kindlier wisdom All may feel, and all may bless; Tax and tithe are for a purpose Shared to shield the poor and weak; Past the symptoms of our sickness Let the voice of justice speak.</p>	<p>3. Honor those whose Loving spirit Nurses hope, restores and heals, Towel and basin Used in service Like the Christ who comes and kneels; In the tending, in the mending May we see the right and fair, In our common quest for wholeness Heal each other by our care.</p>
---	--	---

Prayer of Meditation - Marcia McFee

Healer of our every ill, especially our fractured creation, 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 you are in the boat with us in the midst of difficult times. We give you thanks for this path of following you, even when you call us to crossover from one way of life to another. We pray especially for all who are impacted most by dwindling resources. We pray that we will continue to learn and see and know how our actions affect others, not just ourselves. We give thanks for the wake up calls that our young people are sounding and we pray for the fortitude to move this journey forward alongside them. We give thanks for the courage of activists and educators who help us wake up to this storm and to see that we have it within our power to calm that storm, to restore the earth's wholeness. 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), Brad S., 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

This week the reaction of the crowd in the story is amazement at Jesus' connection to the cosmic forces of wind and wave. As scientists now try to teach us, all things are connected. We are part and parcel of all creation. Rather than dominion, we are to be a-tuned to all around us. We see the cry of creation in awakened natural disasters and we must heed the call not to hide in fear, but to work for healing. 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 contributing to the beauty and healing of our environment. 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 can face the storm with Jesus in the boat, recovering our depth of love for all and our joy of living in this world. May the words of Jesus ring in your ears: "follow me." And may the Spirit hover, move, and deliver salve to your soul and a spring in your step. Amen.

Postlude

He's Got the Whole World in His Hands

Melissa Quilitzsch

Community Announcements

- **Sunrise Easter Service!** We're very excited to announce our ecumenical Sunrise Easter Service with First Congregational Church of West Brookfield and Brookfield UCC to take place **outside** at the First Congo in WB at **6:15 AM on Sunday, April 4th**. Masks and social distancing will be observed. More details coming soon!
- **Maundy Thursday Home Worship Service, April 1st.** Be on the lookout for a guided Maundy Thursday Home Worship Service that will be mailed next week along with our regular service. Designed to be a meditation

for dinner time on Thursday, April 1st, we will reflect on Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples. This will be an at-home self-guided meditation.

- **Heifer Project Total.** Thank you all so much for donating toward the Heifer Project! We have received a total of \$243.10, \$55 of which has already been donated, which leaves us with \$188.10 to decide on which animals we can support. Here are our options: (1) Goat \$120 (2) Pig \$120 (3) Sheep \$120 (4) Alpaca \$150 (5) Duck \$20 (6) Honeybees \$30 (7) Hope Basket of Rabbits & Chicks \$50 (8) Flock of Chicks \$20. Please let Pastor Christy know of your preferences by April 15th; otherwise, we will donate as a monetary donation. Thank you!
- **Upcoming Transition.** We invite you to be in prayer as the Staff Parish Relations Committee works with our District Superintendent Rev. Megan Stowe to discern our next pastor, to be appointed on July 1st, 2021.
- **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!

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 22nd through Saturday, March 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, March 22nd, 2021

Read Psalm 143:8

As we step into our fifth Monday of Lent, we return again to the Monday practice of S.H.I.F.T. May this practice shift your heart towards God 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 the first week of Lent when we first did this practice for an example.

Tuesday, March 23rd, 2021

Read Psalm 118:24

Today is truly a day that God has made. Even if it has been (or will be) a dreadful day, I pray you can find something to rejoice and be glad in. In your journal, write down three gratitudes:

- 1) something in general that you are grateful for
- 2) someone you are grateful for
- 3) something you are grateful for about yourself

Wednesday, March 24th, 2021**Read Luke 13:10-17**

As we continue experimenting with the practice of lectio divina, I invite you to let go of any doubts you feel surrounding your ability to read and understand scripture. You do not need a degree in order to read and understand the Bible. God speaks to all of us in different ways. If it helps, say this short prayer from Psalm 19:14. As you read today's scripture, let your intuition flow and listen for the Holy Spirit. To engage in the practice, follow 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 Luke 13:10-17 three times. As you read, rather than trying to dissect the passage intellectually, just experience it. The first time through, simply read through it. The second time, notice what words or phrases catch your eye, intrigue you, or speak to your heart. The third time, underline or circle 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.

Thursday, March 25th, 2021**Read Acts 27:35**

Giving thanks before meals was part of my family's routine growing up. Often it was a simple, "Come Lord Jesus, be our guest, let these gifts to us be blessed." In middle school, a Jewish friend of mine invited me over for a Shabbat dinner and her mom asked if I would pray a prayer from my family tradition. As soon as the words "come, Lord Jesus" left my lips I was mortified! But her mom was so kind and gracious, and told me that "giving thanks is giving thanks" and that is what matters. Today, give thanks. Write a few gratitudes down, then be mindful of offering thanks throughout the day – whether it be for a meal, a conversation with a friend, or for the warmth of your socks. Give thanks.

Friday, March 26th, 2021**Read Jeremiah 31:13**

Considering my nickname is the Dancing Pastor, it is no secret that I love to dance. And, while I am trained professionally, one of my favorite places to dance is in my kitchen. When I am baking cookies or mixing up a smoothie, I often have a song in my head that I am moving my body to as I cook. Today, I invite you to put your pen down and dance. Now, you might be thinking, "no one wants to see that!" or "I am definitely not a dancer." I disagree. The notion that anyone is not a dancer, or that one type of movement is better or worse than another, is false. My friend, all movement is dance. It is not hierarchical. If the only movement you do is tap your toe or wiggle your eyebrows, you are dancing. Because dance is movement! And the way you move is good and beautiful and wonderful. With all of your abilities and all of your limitations, your body and the way it moves is amazing. If you are human, you are a dancer. And, the best part is – dance is one of the oldest forms of worship. Before we could talk, we could move. It is how we express ourselves. So, my friend, unbind your spirit from the untrue expectations of what "dance" is, and bump up some music and move. Sway your hips. Shimmy your shoulders. Tap your toes. Wiggle your eyebrows. Snap your fingers. Do it while brushing your teeth or while driving on the freeway. Turn on your favorite song and move and use your body to worship the God who created you, celebrating your body and all the beauty that is you.

Saturday, March 27th, 2021**Read Romans 2:11**

Well, dang. I was really hoping I was one of God's favorites. One of the sins of western culture, and particularly white western culture, is believing that God indeed as favorites. White folks in particular have believed this about ourselves for a long, long time. If there is anything that history teaches us, it is that this (false) belief in divine superiority and favoritism causes a great deal of harm. It is, perhaps, one of the gravest sins causing some of the darkest stains in the fabric of our human history. One of the things I love most about Jesus is how he works to untangle this harmful narrative of God's favoritism. When John the Baptist proclaims Jesus' coming, he quotes a passage from Isaiah 40, verses 3-4: 3 "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain." Jesus' ministry was all about leveling the playing field – lifting up the lowly, bringing down the proud. Even Mary sings of that in her Magnificat before her beloved son is born – how God will bring down rulers and lift up the humble. The message that Jesus proclaims is that we are all beloved children of God, broken and redeemed. We are all worthy of love and grace, regardless of the forces of the world that may tell us otherwise. No one is above the other; in fact, Jesus tells us that we are to live in service of others and that people will know we are Christians by the ways that we love. We have not done a great job of that. But, if you remember from our reflection on sin a few days ago, not all hope is lost. We can confess and repent. We can name the harm we have done and vow to do better. We can reflect, learn, and grow. Today, friend, I invite you to reflect in your journal. When in your life have you believed in God's favoritism?

What is one way you can learn and grow and do better?