

With These Hands**Sunday, February 14, 2021 || Transfiguration Sunday || 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.

Prelude

Come, Holy Spirit, Dove Divine

Melissa Quilitzsch

Announcements**Opening Hymn**

Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies

UMH 173

*1. Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true, the only light,
Son of righteousness, arise,
Triumph o'er the shades of night;
Dayspring from on high, be near;
Daystar, in my heart appear.*

*2. Dark and cheerless is the morn
Unaccompanied by thee;
Joyless is the day's return,
Till thy mercy's beams I see;
Till they inward light impart,
Cheer my eyes and warm my heart.*

*3. Visit then this soul of mine;
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me, Radiancy Divine,
Scatter all my unbelief;
More and more thyself display,
Shining to the perfect day.*

Scripture Reading

Matthew 17:1-8

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

Sermon

Something strange happened as I was preparing for this Sunday's service: when I first read this passage, I felt a rush of unexplained sorrow, and I couldn't put my finger on why. This is such a mysterious, moving text, but it doesn't really hint of anything foreboding. As I meditated on the words before me, sifting through my emotions, a small detail stood out: in a moment of fear, the disciples dropped to the ground, and Jesus laid his hand upon them in comfort and peace.

And then I remembered. A year ago I preached from this very same text, and I focused on this tiny detail: Jesus' touch. I talked about how much we need touch because it releases serotonin and dopamine, a cocktail of brain chemistry that helps us feel like we belong, like we have purpose, like we're not alone. From a human perspective, this is all well and good - we know we need touch.

And then, mere weeks after I had preached this sermon, we entered what many would consider to be the darkest season of our lives, when touch became an impossibility. Covid-19, an illness that was sweeping the globe, suddenly shuttered churches and businesses, and we were forced into our homes, distancing ourselves from loved ones, and learning how to quarantine. Over the course of a single year, we ourselves have been transfigured: we've had to put on masks, don gloves, bathe in hand sanitizer. Our glasses fog up, our sight dims, and sometimes we don't even recognize our closest friends and family behind all of the safety gear.

In the midst of uncertainty and the unknown, let's return to our passage this morning, in which the disciples experienced something they had never experienced before: the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountaintop. Filled with fear, the disciples fell to the ground and were calmed by the Divine touch, the touch we need more than anything else. This Divine touch was one that encouraged and empowered the disciples to "get up and not be afraid." Not only was it a sign of compassion from Jesus, but it was also a call to action. And Jesus didn't sugar-coat the situation; he didn't say, "It's okay," or "Everything will be alright." Instead, he acknowledged the current reality and implored the disciples, despite the

circumstances, to arise, to awake, to lift themselves up through the power of the Holy Spirit, and move forward. Rather than be paralyzed by the situation, Jesus called them to a new reality, through his touch. With these hands, Jesus not only comforted the disciples and gave them peace, but his actions also catalyzed the beginning of the worldwide Church, the global movement of Christianity that is still growing and changing. And Jesus continues to empower us to rise, to create something new, to build the church and not be afraid. All this, in just a touch.

Jesus' tangible and heartfelt touch for the disciples has more to do with his Divinity than it does the molecular science of brain chemistry. It is in this human touch that the Divine takes over, providing us with peace that passes all scientific understanding. It is with these same hands that Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead; it is with these same hands that Jesus sowed the seeds of peace and harvested the wheat that satisfies hunger. With these hands, love encapsulates all that Jesus embodies while paying homage to the law and the prophets, the heritage of our Christian movement.

In these moments of Divine touch, we begin to realize that where we stand, and where we encounter God is holy ground. It may be in the halls of the hospital after receiving difficult news. It may be in distanced gatherings outdoors, where only our eyes are visible through the heavy winter coats and medical masks. It may be around the dinner table, though surrounded by empty chairs, we know that we are not alone. It may be in the middle of the night when we can't sleep, and so we pray instead. These ordinary places become holy ground, thin places where God is visible even in the most hopeless and in the most beautiful of moments. It is in the tangible, in the very molecular structure of our world that God's love pours forth, like a hand on our shoulder, reassuring us that we are to rise, and not be afraid.

So, here's a creative exercise for us this week: I invite you to take some time to imagine the day when we ourselves will be transfigured again, in the light of Christ. What will it be like to take off our masks, to hug again, to sing, and to feast together? Can you imagine that day? Because I wonder, I wonder if in fact, Jesus had been shining the entire time - and maybe it's our own eyes that have been transfigured. Maybe it's us. Amen.

Prayer of Meditation - Rev. Gwyneth Arrison, Pastor of Bath United Methodist Church in Bath, Maine

Glorious God, Bright Morning Star, Light of the World, we ask you to shine your glorious light in all our darkness. Why, O Lord, do we so often try to hide from your healing light? We hide behind the veil of fear. We peek around the veil of doubt only to quickly move back out of sight. We put up curtains of protection to prevent anyone, even you, O Lord, from seeing us, really seeing us. We add thick linings to the veil of our sin to hide our shame, lest you see our pride or self-hatred, our addictions which are idolatry, our prejudices and hypocrisy, our judgment and unforgiveness or any other aspect of our brokenness. But God of Glory, you promise, "Whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." We turn to you now, whether for the first time or the thousandth time. We bask in the glory of your Face transfigured before us. We will not turn away, we will no longer hide behind curtains. We will cast those veils aside, we will rip them to shreds. We will no longer cower in fear, but fall into your arms, trusting in you alone. Together, we will gaze into the glory of your love. For through Christ, your "new way gives us such confidence, we can be very bold." Shine in our hearts, Lord, that we might know your glory seen in the face of our Lord, Jesus Christ. May we reflect your light to encourage one another as your church. And let us be mirrors to the world, shining your glorious love into the dark world, so that through us you might lead many others to know your hope, freedom and transformed life as we do. Shine, Jesus Shine. Amen.

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.*

Closing Hymn

He Touched Me

UMH 367

*1. Shackled by a heavy burden,
Neath a load of guilt and shame,
The hand of Jesus touched me,
And now I am no longer the same.*

*Refrain
He touched me, O he touched me,
And O the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened, and now I know,
He touched me and made me whole.*

*2. Since I met this blessed Savior
Since he cleansed and made me whole
I will never cease to praise him
I'll shout it while eternity rolls.*

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

Postlude*God Will Take Care of You**Melissa Quilitzsch***Community Announcements**

- **Provisional Membership.** Pastor Christy went before the Board of Ordained Ministry last week for provisional exams, which are the next step in the ordination process, and she passed! She is so grateful for your support and love, and it is an honor to serve you!
- **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 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. At least four of our members have already gotten appointments! 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.
- **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.
- **Ash Wednesday.** Due to concerns about Covid-19, our Ash Wednesday service will be fully remote, accessible at 7 PM on Wednesday, February 17th. This service will be available on our website at georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services, on our Facebook page, and over the phone at (978) 990-5000, access code 719365#. Be on the lookout for a special Ash Wednesday mailing so we can all participate together, even if from a distance.
- **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, which began last week. As we 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.

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

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 15 through Saturday, February 20th || 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 15th, 2021

Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes, Retired Elder of the New England Annual Conference

Read Mark 1:40-45

God, there is much in me that needs healing. But sometimes I can't bring myself to choose to be changed. Please, O Healing One, choose for me. You have the power I don't have to make me whole, and to choose it. Heal my body; heal my soul; heal my will. For this I trust: that you do choose my blessing, my belovedness, my life. You do choose, and you make me whole. In trust and gratitude I offer myself to you. Amen.

Tuesday, February 16th, 2021

Rev. Raedorah C. Stewart, Director of the Writing Center, Wesley Theological Seminary

Read Isaiah 40:21-31

God of the Heavens and Creator of Time, waiting, for us, is hard. Or at least, we make it hard on ourselves. Sometimes we wait like an impetuous child — fretfully and fidgety. We expend so much energy doing nothing but working ourselves up into a frenzied waiting. But, when we are quiet and still we remember how waiting for you has always been worth it! We remember that there is nothing new under the heavens You created. We remember that because You see all, You know all, and that we have neither to see all nor know all to trust that You have the last word. With this assurance, our waiting is transformed into hopeful expectancy. So, while we wait, bless our words to speak life while facing unprecedented death tolls, our hands to make comfort when pointing fingers slow down solutions, and our hearts to abundantly hope when no end in sight. We lift our eyes to the heavens and wait for the time You will save us, again.

Wednesday, February 17th, 2021 - Ash Wednesday

Rev. Kelsey Beebe, Ordained Minister of the UCC: From her Lenten Series, *Refuge* (Reprinted with Permission)

Read Genesis 1:26-31

I have heard a lot of folks say recently, “We really do not need a reminder that we are mortal this year.” We have been surrounded by so much death and sickness. This year, especially, we know and understand just how human we really are. So instead, may this verse gently remind you of the God who created you. The God of Creation who took dust and breathed life into it. You, my friend, are precious to God. You were created by the hands of a loving God who breathed life into you and called you Beloved. In your journal, write down at least three things you are grateful for about yourself. Offer a note of gratitude to God for creating that part of yourself.

Reminder: Ash Wednesday Service tonight at 7 PM online or over the phone
georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services or (978) 990-5000, access code 719365#

Thursday, February 18th, 2021

**Rev. Kelsey Beebe, Ordained Minister of the UCC: From her Lenten Series, *Refuge* (Reprinted with Permission)
Read Matthew 6:19-24**

Latin for “Divine Reading,” *Lectio Divina* is a way to meditatively engage scripture. One of the most common phrases I hear as a pastor is, “I don’t really know how to read the Bible.” For many folks, *lectio divina* makes reading the Bible feel more accessible. It is centered in the idea that all you need are the words on the page and faith that God has something to say to you. Even if the whole passage leaves you feeling lost and confused, perhaps there is just a word or phrase that stands out to you and speaks to you right where you are. My friend, as you engage this practice and follow the steps outlined here, I invite you to listen for God’s loving, challenging, encouraging word still speaking through these ancient texts. God does indeed have something to say.

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 6:19-24 three times. As you do so, 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.

Friday, February 19th, 2021

**Rev. Kelsey Beebe, Ordained Minister of the UCC: From her Lenten Series, *Refuge* (Reprinted with Permission)
Read Matthew 6:25-34**

We all carry a lot of worries and concerns that weigh on our hearts.
Today, write a letter to God in your journal. Lay down whatever is weighing on you today.
Let God carry it for a while.

Saturday, February 20th, 2021

**Rev. Kelsey Beebe, Ordained Minister of the UCC: From her Lenten Series, *Refuge* (Reprinted with Permission)
Read Ruth 1:15-17**

Sometime today (or tomorrow if you are reading this at night), go outside and go for a walk. If it is too cold or rainy, just walk around your home. As you go, reflect on the people who journey with you in your life. Who are the people who go where you go? Who are those who will be by your side no matter what? With each step, give thanks. If you wish to add a journaling aspect to today, write a letter to God thanking God for those people in your life. Name them, and then perhaps ask God to bless them as they have blessed you.