

March 17, 2024

11 a.m.

Flowers given by: Rosanna Blumenberg, Diane Reed, and George Reed, in loving memory of
George and Dot Reed

PRELUDE

Elegy

Edward Elgar

INVITATION to WORSHIP

One: Here we are, O God, in the middle of March as the season of Lent turns toward the shadow of the cross.

Many: **Here You are, O God, in the middle of our messy, prodigal, lives that we have carried with us.**

One: Here we are together with so much that long for expression.

Many: **We bring our celebrations and concerns; our ordinary moments and times goosebumps danced down our spines.**

One: We bring the beautiful paradox that we are dust and breath, we are human and holy, we are beloved and befuddled.

Many: **And we are here in this moment together!! Alleluia and Amen.**

*OPENING HYMN

Before Your Cross, O Jesus

#191

Before your cross, O Jesus, our lives are judged today; the meaning of our eager strife is tested by your way. Across our restless living the light streams from your cross, and by its clear, revealing beams we measure gain and loss.

The hopes that lead us onward, the fears that hold us back, our will to dare great things for God, the courage that we lack, The faith we keep in goodness, our love, as low or pure, on all, the judgment of the cross falls steady, clear, and sure.

Yet humbly, in our striving, we rise to face its test, We crave the power to do your will as once you did it best. On us let now the healing of Your great Spirit fall, and make us brave and full of joy to answer to your call.

*OPENING PRAYER

God Your love is expansive and elastic. You enfold and hold Mary and Martha; the older and younger prodigal sons; as well as the rich man and Lazarus. We continue to pry open our minds, hearts, and lives to move beyond binary, either or thinking. But honestly God, it is too hard. We deeply desire to rest and reside in places where everything and everyone belongs. Then, we go out of this place and encounter *other* humans. Have You been on social media, God? Have You heard how people dismiss, discount, dehumanize others? Have You seen how much work there is to do to clean up the sharp shattered shards of this world? Of course, You have, O God. We confess that like the unnamed rich one, we have money in the bank, vacations planned for this summer, and food in our fridge. We confess that like Lazarus we have sores physically, emotionally, socially, and religiously. Help us, God, for we long to let loose the image of Your love in our lives. Grant us Your wisdom, vision, and courage to live in these days. Amen.

How can I say thanks for the things you have done for me? Things so undeserved, yet you gave to prove your love for me; the voices of a million angels could not express my gratitude. All that I am, and ever hope to be; I owe it all to you. To God be the glory, to God be the glory, to God be the glory for the things you have done.

Refrain: **With Your blood You have saved me; with Your power You have raised me; to God be the glory for the things you have done.**

Just let me live my life – let it be pleasing unto you; And if I gain any praise, let it go to glorify you. (*Refrain*)

CELEBRATION of NEW MEMBERS

We warmly welcome: Donna Blakey, John Fairweather, Carol Fredrich, Carolyn Habel, Edward Hebert, Linda Leaman, Michael Matles, Sheryl Overheidt-Smith, Lauren Patsos, Mark Patsos, Greg Partridge, Doug Potter, George Taylor, Laura Taylor, and Lydia Ubry.

ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was being tormented, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus in like manner evil things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ ²⁷ He said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ ³⁰ He said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ ³¹ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ ”

SERMON

Gazing through the Window

PASTORAL PRAYER and LORD’S PRAYER (*SUNG*)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

OFFERING/ANTHEM

All Things New

Elaine Hagenberg

Light after darkness, gain after loss, Strength after weakness, crown after cross; Sweet after bitter, hope after fears, Home after wandering, praise after tears. Alpha and Omega, Beginning and the end, He is making all things new. Springs of living water Shall wash away each tear, He is making all things new. Sight after mystery, sun after rain Joy after sorrow, peace after pain; Near after distant, gleam after gloom, Love after lost, life after tomb.

DOXOLOGY/PRAAYER OF DEDICATION

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise God all creatures here below.

Praise God above you heavenly host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. (Repeat)

Alleluia, sing praises to the Lamb, Alleluia, Gloria!

Alleluia, we worship and adore; Alleluia to the Lord! (Repeat)

*CLOSING HYMN

Ask Me What Great Thing I Know

#49

**Ask me what great thing I know that delights and stirs me so,
What the high reward I win, whose the name I glory in: Jesus Christ, the crucified.**

**Who defeats my fiercest foes? Who consoles my saddest woes?
Who revives my fainting heart, healing all that grief imparts? Jesus Christ, the crucified.**

**Who is life in life to me? Who the death of death will be?
Who holds all my days secure, in God's heart where love is sure? Jesus Christ, the
crucified.**

**This is that great thing I know; this delights and stirs me so;
Faith in Christ who died to save, Christ who triumphed o'er the grave, Jesus Christ, the
crucified.**

*BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Toccata Brevis

Daniel Gawthrop

ANNOUNCEMENTS ~ SUNDAY, March 17

The Racial Justice Mission Group invites you to a free, docent-led tour of the art billboards EMBRACING OUR DIFFERENCES in Bayfront Park on **Wednesday, April 3rd from 1:30 - 2:30**. Our church is a co-sponsor of Billboard #30. **The tour is free, but you must register by Monday, March 25th.** To register for the tour, call or text Sheila Gossett at 614-769-4013.

If you do not want to drive yourself, you can register for a seat on the church bus with Sheila at the number above when you register for the tour. The bus will load at the church at 11:45 to leave at 12 noon. We will return to the church by 3:00. At the park, meet at the yellow arch at the entrance at 1:20 to begin the tour at 1:30. Our friends, the Unitarian Universalists, will be joining us on the tour. Lunch options are O'Leary's restaurant on site or you could take your own picnic lunch. For questions other than registration, text or call Lindsey Huddleston at 630-338-9294.

SURE's Nehemiah Action ~ TOMORROW ~ Monday, March 18th @ 6:30 p.m. at First Congregational UCC Let's pack the sanctuary, invite your neighbors ~ show up for justice on **affordable housing**. The following Sarasota business community and commissioners have been invited: William Russell, *CEO Sarasota Housing Authority*; Jon Thaxton, *Gulf Coast Community Foundation*; Scott Eller, *CASL*; Kevin Stiff, *CEO Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness*; Heather Kasten, *CEO Sarasota Chamber of Commerce*; Mike Moran, *County Commissioner*; Mark Smith, *County Commissioner*; Debbie Trice, *City Commissioner*. Free tickets available next Sunday!!

“All Creatures Great & Small Pet Blessing” Saturday, March 23rd, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. (Rain or Shine) Bring your leashed or contained pets to be blessed by Pastor Wes on the lawn of our church. Cremains also blessed. Meet and learn more about local organization and ALSO Youth will be offering cold drinks and information. Have your picture taken with your pet. Please bring donations of dry cat and dog food for the Meals on Wheels Pet Love Program. Please contact Maggie Revere at baypointgirls@comcast.net for details or how you can help! This is a church-wide, family-friendly event hosted by COLLAGE and the Green Team. **All are welcome!**

POSTCARDS TO X-FELONS VOTING PROJECT - INVITATION FROM RACIAL JUSTICE MISSION GROUP and COLLAGE ~ In 2018 more than 64% of Florida citizens voted on an Amendment to have persons with felony convictions able to vote after serving their sentences. However, the Florida legislators added additional stipulations that made it virtually impossible for the Amendment to be enacted. In partnership with the League of Women Voter we will write postcards to ex-felons to help them get their voting rights restored. Please come to Syster Hall on **Sunday, March 24th at 12 noon** for refreshments and address some postcards. For more information, please text or call Gregg Mathews at 973-986-5184 (mobile) or 941-567-4808 (home).

Hunger Walk Sunday, March 24th (before church) Team with us and walk to end summer hunger with All Faiths Food Bank. The Peace & Justice Team along with the Food and Hunger Group are supporting this effort. Choose a one mile or 5k (about 3 miles) walk. The \$25 signup fee includes a t-shirt The walk starts at 8:15 a.m. at Nathan Benderson Park. Please notify Barbara Smith-Bacon or Ellen Marsey that you intend to walk.

Sacred Conversations on Race ~ gathers at 3 pm in the Oasis Center and on Zoom on the following date: March 27: *A Tale of Two Americas, and the Mini-Mart Where They Collided* - TED Talk by Anand Giridharadas. All are welcome. Please see Jim Crumel for more information.

The Wayless Way ~ Your Life as a Curriculum ~ The March book is the **Return of the Prodigal Son** by Henri Nouwen, a **must-read Christian classic** on the parable from Luke 15. Sessions on Nouwen's book are March 25 at 4 p.m. in the Oasis Center/Zoom.

Please join the UCC Women for their monthly lunch and program on **Tuesday, April 2, at 11:30 am** in Fellowship Hall. We will hear from yoga instructor Michelle Winton, who will enlighten us and lead us in chair yoga before lunch. Please wear comfortable clothing and footwear. We ask each attendee to bring a child size umbrella to benefit SCHOOL ATTENDANCE SUPPORT, INC., or “S.A.S.” Children living in poverty are much more likely to stay home from school if it's raining because they don't have umbrellas. Otherwise, they are teased for arriving

soaking wet. Luncheon costs \$12. Sign up after either Sunday service or call the church office at 941-953-7044. Questions? Call Lucy Hedrick, 203-561-9590, or lucy@lucyhedrick.com.

SUNDAY, APRIL 14th 7pm Evening Choral Artists presents a performance **CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPERD**. In the expansive landscape of the American West, a young student named Matthew Shepard was brutally beaten and left to die on a fence in Wyoming. In the aftermath of this heinous act, a national conversation regarding bullying and homophobia took center stage. What is so terrifying about ‘the other’ that creates such division and hatred? Craig Hella Johnson takes us on a musical journey that tells the story of Matt, a young man whose rather ordinary and typical life has left an extraordinary legacy for us to consider. Combining a variety of musical styles from country to gospel to chant and oratorio, the experience is powerful and moving for audiences. **Location: Church of the Palms, 3224 Bee Ridge Rd.** Advance discounted tickets at \$35 will be available for purchase in front of Syster Hall **Cash or checks to be made payable to Choral Artists**. Duration is 105 minutes without intermission.

Handbells invitation ~ beginning on **April 4 at 6 p.m. in the chapel**, you are invited to be part of our Handbell choir. We are looking for people of all levels ~ we especially welcome beginners who want to learn more. The Handbells will be part of our Mother’s Day service. Please see Pastor Wes for more information.

Looking Ahead – mark your calendars for **April 21, the date of our 2nd Annual Chili Cookoff!** We are recruiting Chili Chefs to offer your best batch chili on that Sunday, at 12:15 in Syster Hall. The congregation will vote on their favorite, and the winner will receive a **modest** prize and lots of praise! If you would like to participate as a chef, please contact Sandy Smith at sandysmithvi@gmail.com or 240-227-5121 (text or call).

CALENDAR

Sunday, March 17 Endowment Sunday and New Members Joining!

Early Worship, 8:45 a.m., Chapel
Sunday Worship, 11 a.m., in Sanctuary and online
Fellowship, Noon, Syster Hall

Monday, March 18

Growing and Caring meeting, 12 p.m., Oasis Center
Food and Hunger Group, 2 p.m., Oasis Center
Nehemiah Action, 6:30 p.m., Sanctuary

Tuesday, March 19

Spiritual Education and Growth, 2 p.m., Oasis Center and Zoom
Church Council, 6:30 p.m., Zoom Only

Wednesday, March 20

Wednesday Morning Bible Study, 11 a.m., Oasis Center and Zoom
Chancel Choir, 7 p.m., Chapel

Thursday, March 21

Green Team, 10 a.m., Oasis Center and Zoom
Manasota Racial Justice Group, Walk in My Shoes Event, 5 p.m., Syster Hall

Friday, March 22

Minister of Music Search Team, Oasis Center

Saturday, March 23

Pet Blessings, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Front driveway/lawn

Sunday, March 24 ~ Palm Sunday Worship!!

Early Worship, 9:00 a.m., Sanctuary

Sunday Worship, 11 a.m., in Sanctuary and online

Postcard Project Sponsored by Racial Justice, Noon, Syster Hall

Upcoming Dates at-a-glance:

Maundy Thursday Service ~ Thursday, March 28, 6 p.m. ~ Syster Hall

Good Friday Service ~ Friday, March 29, noon ~ Sanctuary

Easter Sunday Celebration ~ Sunday, March 31 ~ 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. ~ Sanctuary

Celebration for Greg Chestnut ~ Sunday, April 7 at 8:45 a.m. and 11 a.m.