

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2024

March

No. 3

Lent Stands Alone

This March is an impactful 31 days in the church. It carries us from mid-Lent through Easter. Because I need to prepare for the upcoming month's newsletter during the previous month, I contacted Anita in February about the children's Easter Egg Hunt on March 30th and Matt and Melody, reaching out to them also in February, about the Sunrise Easter Service on March 31st. We had just observed Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, and I already needed to make plans for Easter because the celebration of the resurrection-mystery falls on the last day of March. This month is church in overdrive.

However, while acknowledging this necessity of anticipating Easter, I think it is both liturgically and spiritually important to separate Lent from Easter. This probably sounds strange. It is definitely not common practice. And I understand and appreciate the conventional wisdom that Lent prepares for Easter, but allow me to share a different opinion.

Albert Nolan is a South African biblical scholar. He writes, "Jesus is a much underrated man. To deprive him of his humanity is to deprive him of his greatness." (*Jesus Before Christianity, 1978, p. 117*) It is Jesus' full and authentic human nature that define His foundational position in Christianity. It is God experiencing life as us for us. We encroach on the reality of Jesus' human nature most cautiously because the more Jesus is different than us the less He is us. And that foundational connection of God and us in Jesus defines Christianity.

I think this is why I am drawn to Mark's Gospel. Mark is the least shy of the four Evangelists in sharing the honest humanity of Jesus. This is probably due to the fact that his is the earliest Gospel. As time passed, piety demanded an increased presentation of Jesus' honest divinity. However, as Paul quotes from an extremely early Christian hymn of worship, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness." (Philippians 2:5-7) Jesus' divinity is, accordingly, not threatened by the reality of His

humanity. His humanity is the chosen vehicle of God's self-revelation and intervention in the world.

When Nolan's position is applied to the passion and crucifixion of Jesus, the reality of a torturous death cannot be ameliorated for Jesus. Jesus faces the end of life with His full humanity intact. In Mark, there are no sympathetic followers or family nearby on Golgotha. There are only taunts by those passing by on their way to Passover celebrations at the Temple, from the scribes and from the others being crucified beside Him. (15:29-32) There is confusion (Mark 15:34) and fearful desperation (Mark 15:37) in Jesus' last moments of life. Jesus does not endure the cross with the certainty of an Easter resurrection. God feels distant and Jesus feels lost.

And yet Jesus endured the cross. The cross is the ultimate witness to Jesus' lived ministry and proclamation. It is Jesus' uncompromising commitment to the Good News. It is unthreatened even by the worst of human nature. And the cross shares the harshest reality of human suffering and death with the eternal God. The crucified Jesus is God's at-one-ment with all of us in our most desperate times. This holy and costly empathy is possible only through the uncompromising humanity of Jesus.

This is why I believe that Lent should be separated from Easter. As the mourning women approached Jesus' tomb to complete the burial rites that were prevented by the Sabbath-rest, they were not expecting a risen Saviour. They were expecting to lovingly tend to Jesus' corpse. The resurrection is an unexpected and astounding mystery. Even after 2,000 years, we must try to approach Easter with that same sense of awe and wonderment when we consider the empty tomb. For as scandalous as was the cross, the empty tomb is even more the glorious, unexpected victory.

It is unimaginable, but after meditating upon the authentic human suffering – physical, mental and spiritual – of Jesus, it is joyous to think of Jesus' own wonderment at being raised from the separation of death so as to carry His humanity into the eternal nature of God. And all of this comes to us in the month of March. May this be a holy month for us.

MARCH EVENTS

Tue. 5 th	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of the Association Committee on Ministry at 5:45pm.
Wed. 6 th	Lenten Discussion, Rev. Randy at the Whately Church, at 7:00pm.
Sat. 9 th	Rev. Randy will attend the Conference's Super Saturday event. Remember to turn your clocks AHEAD one hour before retiring for the night.
Sun. 10 th	One Great Hour of Sharing offering will be accepted.
Mon. 11 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7 – 8:00pm.
Tue 12 th	Rev. Randy will attend the Hampshire Clergy lunch from 12 – 1:00pm in Hadley.
Wed. 13 th	Lenten Discussion, Rev. Cynthia at the Montague Church at 7:00pm.
Thur. 14 th	Rev. Randy will attend the HEART/HEADS Up meeting at 6:30pm.
Wed. 20 th	Lenten Discussion, closing group discussion at the North Hadley Church at 7:00pm. Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Thur. 21 st	Monthly meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.
Sun. 24 th	Palm Sunday. Distribution of palms, worship Service at 9:30am.
Mon. 25 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7 – 8:00pm.
Thur. 28 th	Maundy Thursday. Shared Worship Service at the Sunderland Church at 7:00pm.
Fri. 29 th	Good Friday. Church will be open from 12 – 3:00pm for private prayer.
Sat. 30 th	Children's Easter Egg Hunt at 10:00am.
Sun 31 st	EASTER SUNDAY. Sunrise Service at Matt and Melody's house at 2 Prospect Street at 6:30am. Easter Worship Service at church at 9:30am.

REGULAR GATHERINGS

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 9:30am online and in person. Sunday School begins after the children's sermon during the worship Service.

Tuesdays: Yoga classes are offered every Tuesday in the church parlor at 5:30pm.

Thursdays: Choir rehearses in the parlor at 7:00pm, except July and August.

ONLINE BIBLE STUDY GROUP

During the Season of Lent, I invite you to join our online Bible study group. We meet on alternate weeks for one hour. We are reading from the Gospel of John. We would love to have you join us. Let's read, study, and discuss the book that literally has changed the world. Send an email to randyc1897@gmail.com for the login.

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING OFFERING



The *One Great Hour of Sharing* offering is one of four special mission offerings of the United Church of Christ. This Lenten Offering is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year. It supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ within Wider Church Ministries. It will be accepted on Sunday, March 10th. Here is a link to just one story that exemplifies the good that your contributions help support:

<https://www.ucc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/y2mate.is-One-Great-Hour-of-Sharing-2024-Promo-Video-Share-The-Light-OIcHXc0kiQM-1080pp-1707180724.mp4>

LENT

The 40 days of Lent mirror the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness after His baptism by John in the Jordan River. During those 40 days, Jesus fasted, prayed and listened for the voice of God. During our 40 days of Lent, we, likewise, search for spiritual guidance and a deeper relationship with Christ.

There are many ways to do this, and each of our paths will be different. Participating in the church's **Lenten worship** is one path I hope we can all share in together. We enter the community to be uplifted, but we also uplift others by our presence. We support each other.

Our congregation participates in the annual **Lenten Discussion Series**. Local clergy share their thoughts on the general theme of "A prescription for loneliness." The full schedule is below.

There are many ways to take the Lenten journey. I hope it is a meaningful one for all of us.

HOLY WEEK

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday. On this day, we remember Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The people were excited that Jesus would be their conquering Messiah who would free them from Roman occupation. Thus, they hailed Him with shouts of *Hosanna (save, we pray)*. Jesus would not be the kind of Saviour they expected. Over the course of the week as this settled in, the political and religious authorities turned the people against Jesus.

Sensing His imminent death, Jesus gathered with His closest followers for the Last Supper, which we remember on Maundy Thursday. At this meal, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Communion for us. He also shared a new *commandment, mandatum* in Latin, which is the basis for the name Maundy Thursday. The commandment is to love one another. We alternate our worship gatherings for this night from year to year with the Sunderland Church. This year’s Service will be at Sunderland.

Jesus is crucified and dies on Good Friday. This is the church’s most solemn of days. Efforts should be made to remember how Jesus suffered and sacrificed everything because of His ineffable love for us all. The church will be open during the hours of noon to 3:00pm. In the Bible we are told that darkness covered Jerusalem in these final few hours of Jesus’ life. Wherever you are, try to keep this day with a holy and solemn seriousness.

On Holy Saturday, the church waits in anticipation, hoping that Jesus will conquer the grave. This day brings the Season of Lent to a close.

EASTER

The women followers of Jesus were unable to complete the burial rites on Good Friday. They follow the law of Sabbath rest on Saturday. Early on Sunday morning they venture out to the grave expecting only death. Instead, the tomb is open and empty. Jesus has resurrected! This is Christianity’s greatest day. In remembrance of this holy discovery at dawn, we will gather for a Sunrise Service at 6:30am across from the American Legion. If the weather permits, we will watch the sun rise over the steeple of our church. We will gather again at church at 9:30 to joyously proclaim and celebrate the mystery that Jesus lives.

APRIL TAG SALE

The church is planning for an April tag sale. Please try to price your donations at home. We do not have sufficient storage at the church so please keep your donations at home until a couple of days before the tag sale. We are not accepting televisions, electronics, or encyclopedias. Please bring in only items that will sell. Thank you.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Don’t forget to check in at our website and FaceBook page. The links are directly below. They are updated several times each week and often share information from the larger church that we may not know of otherwise. Please like our pages and posts and share them as you choose.

GROCERY CARDS

Big Y grocery card sales are a continuing fundraiser of our congregation. Please contact Linda M. if you would like to purchase any. The church earns 5% on all sales. Thank you.

JOYFUL RINGERS BELL CHOIR

Anyone who is interested in joining The Joyful Ringers is welcome to become a part of the Bell Choir. They will be playing on Palm Sunday and Easter. They rehearse on Sunday afternoons at 1:00pm. Younger or older, church member or bell enthusiast, experienced or novice, we would love it if you would come forward and add the gift of more music to our sanctuary. If you may be interested, please reach out to Sue M., the Music Committee Chair.

CONTACT INFO: HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Website: www.hatfieldchurch.org Facebook: www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC

Pastor: Rev. Randy Calvo 413-824-1630 randyc1897@gmail.com

Music Minister: Anthony Tracia anthonytracia@gmail.com

Committee Chairpersons:

<i>Benevolence, Amy N.</i>	<i>Music Committee, Sue M.</i>
<i>Christian Education, Anita W.</i>	<i>Real Folks Society, Martha Z.</i>
<i>Church Moderator, Jonathan B.</i>	<i>Trustees, Ed M.</i>
<i>Deacons, Jeff F.</i>	

2024 - 27th Annual Lenten Discussion Series - 2024

A **Rx** for loneliness

February 14th - Ash Wednesday

All are invited to join the Montague Congregational Church for a worship Service at 7PM.

February 21st

First session at the Sunderland Congregational Church at 7PM.

Offered by Rev. James Koyama, pastor of the Montague Congregational Church, UCC

Session Title: Why have you abandoned me?

February 28th

Second session hosted by the Hatfield Congregational Church at 7PM.

Offered by Rev. Sherril Willis and Rev. Linda Rhinehart Neas.

Session Title: The Marginalized Many

March 6th

Third session at the Whately Congregational Church at 7PM.

Offered by Rev. Randy Calvo, pastor of the Hatfield and Sunderland Congregational Churches, UCC

Session Title: “[Jesus’] death was a consequence of what he was doing, but not his purpose.”

March 13th

Fourth session at the Montague Congregational Church at 7PM.

Offered by Rev. Dr. Cynthia Crosson-Harrington, pastor of the Whately Congregational Church, UCC

Session Title: Through the Mirror Darkly

March 20th

Fifth session at the North Hadley Congregational Church at 7PM.

Closing group discussion and potluck supper.

All sessions will be offered live-streamed and in person. Please send an email to your pastor or church office for **EACH** week’s unique Zoom login link. We are returning to a light collation following each evening’s gathering.

