

March 21

Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Psalm 22
Hebrews 10:16-25

The suffering servant
Why have you forsaken me?
The way to God is opened

First UCC in Ebensburg, PA has become involved in ministry to the homeless in three different ways. On the 4th Friday of each month, several members travel 80 miles into Pittsburgh, armed with hot soup, sandwiches, cookies, and blankets. We visit about 4 homeless souls each night, and minister with conversation, prayer, and invitations to “Homeless Church without Walls.” We go up under the bridges, on park benches, back alleys, and church yards in rain, snow, and cold weather to represent Christ to these people. Also, on the 4th Saturday of each month, our members prepare and serve a meal to about 70 homeless people after bible study at one of the areas local churches. Finally, we prepare and serve a meal occasionally at the Johnstown, PA “Homeless Sunday Noon Pastor in the Park” Program. We pray for the homeless and will continue to do our part to feed the hungry.

PRAYER:

Grieving God, on the cross your Son embraced death even as he had embraced life: faithfully and with good courage. Grant that we who have been born out of his wounded side may hold fast to our faith in him and may find mercy in all times of need. Amen.

March 22

Job 14:1-14
Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16
1 Peter 4:1-8
Matthew 27:57-66

Hope for a tree
Take me out of the net
The gospel proclaimed even to the dead
The burial of Jesus

A penny may seem to be pretty insignificant these days. Some people just throw them on the ground when given a bunch of change. But most people of the Pleasant Hill Community Church UCC in Tennessee have a habit of saving every penny possible. Then when the monthly Power of the Penny Sunday comes around they bring their saved pennies to the doors of the church and drop them in one of the giant-sized pickle jars on which there is a large colored picture of the planet Earth.

Ever since the offering was initiated the church people have conscientiously brought ever more of their coins. This past year \$1,408.49 was given, just by encouraging people to bring the smallest of all the coins with them. Such coins may be tiny but when they are put together they can be a very wonderful influence for God's Kingdom.

PRAYER:

Eternal God, rock and refuge: with roots grown old in the earth, river beds run dry, and flowers withered in the field, we wait for revival and release. Abide with us until we come alive in the sunrise of your glory. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 16

S I X T H S U N D A Y I N L E N T



To the Cross

Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
Matthew 27:11-54

The servant submits to suffering
I commend my spirit
Death on a cross
The passion and death of Jesus

Passion Sunday in Schaefferstown, Pennsylvania is a time of coming together and celebration. The three main-line churches in the community along with a few friends from other churches come

together to share a tradition of fellowship and worship. The faith community shares a light breakfast before picking up palms and forming a parade. No floats. No crowds. Just a humble procession of people waving palms, some dressed in Biblical costume, some carrying banners, all walking behind the leader, a donkey.

Unlike most parades this one makes visits along the route. First everyone crowds inside the adult Sunday School Room at St. Paul's United Church of Christ where we are greeted by the pastor, sing a couple of hymns and pray. Then we leave to continue the parade stopping at Zion Methodist and then St. Luke Lutheran, repeating the same ritual at each stop. The final stop is the town square where we sing a hymn and a benediction is given. Following the benediction the parade breaks up and people walk in small groups back to their respective churches. This tradition has done more than usher in Holy Week over the past thirty years. It has given us an opportunity to focus on what we have in common, thus strengthening the bond among our churches while respecting our differences. It has rooted us. It has given us a sense of belonging to something awesome in its strength: a faith community. Some have ties that go back to Luther, some to Calvin, some to Zwingli; all to Christ.

PRAYER:

God of our salvation, we give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord, who came in your name and turned the lonely way of rejection and death into triumph. Grant us the steadfast faith to enter the gates of righteousness, that we may receive grace to become worthy citizens of your holy realm. Amen.

March 17

Isaiah 42:1-9
Psalm 36:5-11
Hebrews 9:11-15
John 12:1-11

**The servant brings forth justice
Refuge under the shadow of your wings
The blood of Christ redeems for eternal life
Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus**

Planting seeds of hope and community, Lancaster Theological seminarian Sue McCoy was the catalyst for creation of a Prayer Garden shared by two UCC affiliated housing programs in Douglassville, Pennsylvania. Amity and Weidner Manors, two housing programs for low to middle income seniors, are managed by Christian Concern and Phoebe Ministries. McCoy began a field education program at the apartments under the supervision of the Rev. Pat Morris, pastor of St. Paul's UCC in Amityville. Conceived as an outreach ministry for the church, the Garden provides a pastoral ministry to the apartment residents, fosters social and spiritual support, and invites residents to participate in shared social activities.

PRAYER:

Passion Sunday

Merciful God, your strength and courage pour forth to sustain the witness of your faithful people. Awaken in us the humility to serve wherever creation is broken and in need, that we may follow in the way of our brother, Jesus, die as he did to all that separates us from you, and with him be raised to new life. Amen.

Palm Sunday

God of our salvation, we give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord, who came in your name and turned the lonely way of rejection and death into triumph. Grant us the steadfast faith to enter the gates of righteousness, that we may receive grace to become worthy citizens of your holy realm. Amen.

March 18

Isaiah 49:1-7
Psalm 71:1-14
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
John 12:20-36

**The servant brings salvation to earth's ends
From my mother's womb you have been my strength
The cross of Christ reveals God's power and wisdom
Jesus speaks of his death**

It's amazing what can happen when a church member asks a simple question. For many years the suburban Michigan congregation of First Congregational Church in Muskegon had little to do with community ministries other than a few members who volunteered once a month at other churches' community meals. In November of 2002, one member of First Congregational asked, "Why aren't we doing something like this at our church?"

After finding out that there was a void on weekends for meals, First Congregational decided to start a Saturday Morning Neighborhood Breakfast. They've served more than 10,000 meals since February of 2003 with the help of 30 volunteers who set up, cook, serve and welcome an average of 300 visitors each Saturday. The church also provides blood pressure checks, dental hygiene instruction, games for the children, used books and the fellowship of neighbors who care.

PRAYER:

God of our salvation, we give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord, who came in your name and turned the lonely way of rejection and death into triumph. Grant us the steadfast faith to enter the gates of righteousness, that we may receive grace to become worthy citizens of your holy realm. Amen.

March 19

Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 70
Hebrews 12:1-3
John 13:21-32

**The servant is vindicated by God
Be pleased, O God, to deliver me
Look to Jesus, who endured the cross
Jesus foretells his betrayal**

What surprising ways God uses to reveal things to us!" thought Marla Schrader, a missionary serving in the Middle East. Marla had this revelation observing her six and eight-year old children during an Ash Wednesday ceremony in their living room. The idea of writing down their mistakes and then burning the slips of paper into ash to use for marking their foreheads excited them. After writing several "sins" on pieces of paper and burning them in the fireplace, the children marked their parents' foreheads with the gathered ashes, saying that there was a journey ahead and telling their parents to travel that journey. How incredible that, once again, a child led the way on a journey to release us from destructive patterns and put us on a life-giving path.

PRAYER:

God of our salvation, we give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord, who came in your name and turned the lonely way of rejection and death into triumph. Grant us the steadfast faith to enter the gates of righteousness, that we may receive grace to become worthy citizens of your holy realm. Amen.

March 20

Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14 **The Passover of the Lord**
Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19 **The cup of salvation**
1 Corinthians 11:23-26 **Proclaim the Lord's death**
John 13:1-17, 31b-35 **The service of Christ: foot washing and meal**

From the moment we are called into life, there is a steady rhythm of life, our heartbeat - a tempo not unlike the beat of a drum. Drumming circles are being used by some congregations as a way to connect members on a deeper, spiritual level. Smithfield United Church in Pittsburgh purchased 15 African djembe drums and asked church member, Jim Donovan - founding member of the rock band Rusted Root - to teach them the basics of drumming. Children in the church have drummed during worship, church council members drummed before meetings, and church youth take the drums to summer camp. Drumming has inspired immediate bonding as it transcends intellect and logic, joining people on an almost primal level. Smithfield UCC has provided noontime drum circles for the local corporate community and the church had a special event on the anniversary of 9/11, Drumming for Peace.

PRAYER:

Eternal God, in the sharing of a meal your Son established a new covenant for all people, and in the washing of feet he showed us the dignity of service. Grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit these signs of our life in faith may speak again to our hearts, feed our spirits, and refresh our bodies. Amen.