



CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
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WORSHIP FOR FEBRUARY 18, 2026  
A SERVICE FOR THE BEGINNING OF LENT

“What if the whole Bible is less a book of certainties than it is a book of encounters, in which a staggeringly long parade of people run into God, each other, *life*—and are never the same again? I mean, what *don't* people run into in the Bible?”

Barbara Brown Taylor

PRELUDE “

**\*CALL TO WORSHIP**

Return to God who is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

**For God will comfort the people,  
and will have compassion on those who suffer.**

**\*HYMN 298** “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy”

**There’s a wideness in God’s mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea;  
There’s a kindness in God’s justice,  
Which is more than liberty.  
There is no place where earth’s sorrows  
Are more felt than up in heaven;  
There is no place where earth’s failings  
Have such kindly judgment given.**

**For the love of God is broader  
Than the measures of the mind;  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.  
If our love were but more faithful,  
We would gladly trust God's word;  
And our lives reflect thanksgiving  
For the goodness of our Lord.**

**\*OPENING PRAYER**

**God of grace, through love you have made us, and for love you call us to turn toward new life. Your forgiveness is fresh every day. Strengthen our prayers and our acts of tenderness. Help us to face our mortality, that we may reach with confidence for your mercy. Restore to us the joy of your salvation and give us your Holy Spirit that we may serve you with willing hearts, bearing witness to your abundant compassion in all the world. Amen.**

**OPENING WORDS**

**SCRIPTURE LESSON      Isaiah 58:3-12**

**‘Why do we fast, but you do not see?**

**Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?’**

**Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day,  
and oppress all your workers.**

**Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight  
and to strike with a wicked fist.**

**Such fasting as you do today  
will not make your voice heard on high.**

**Is such the fast that I choose,  
a day to humble oneself?**

**Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,  
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?**

**Will you call this a fast,  
a day acceptable to the Lord?**

**Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?**

**Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them,  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?**

**Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up quickly;  
your vindicator shall go before you,**

the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard.  
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;  
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you,  
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,  
if you offer your food to the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,  
then your light shall rise in the darkness  
and your gloom be like the noonday.  
The Lord will guide you continually,  
and satisfy your needs in parched places,  
and make your bones strong;  
and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water,  
whose waters never fail.  
Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;  
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,  
the restorer of streets to live in.

\*PSALM HYMN 223 (Psalm 103) “O My Soul, Bless Your Redeemer” (vs. 1, 2, 4, & 6)

**O my soul, bless your Redeemer;  
All within me, bless God's Name;  
Bless the Savior, and forget not  
All God's mercies to proclaim;**

**God forgives all your transgressions,  
All diseases gently heals;  
God redeems you from destruction,  
And with you so kindly deals.**

**As it was without beginning,  
So it lasts without an end;  
To their children's children ever  
Shall God's righteousness extend.**

**Bless your Maker, all you creatures,  
Ever under God's control,  
All throughout God's vast dominion;  
Bless the Lord of all, my soul!**

SCRIPTURE LESSON Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

‘Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.



**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.**

#### INVITATION TO THE OPPORTUNITY AND JOY OF LENT

##### **\*CALL TO CONFESSION**

##### **\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Merciful God, we bear the marks of a bitter and broken world. What a gentle and healing balm it is to come to you with our secret thoughts, our sad discouragements, and our noblest dreams, and find you here to listen, to forgive, and to renew us! Slow to trust, afraid of the unknown, we are cautious to follow in the way of Jesus Christ. We pray for ears to hear the cries of our neighbors and for hearts which resonate with your Spirit. Make us patient with our mistakes and frailties, even as we are patient with those of others. And remind us that we are precious, not because we are good but because you have accepted us and called us to be your very own. Amen.**

##### **\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

##### **\*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE (#457, vs. 1, 3, & 5)**

**We greet you, sure Redeemer from all strife,  
Our only trust and Savior of our life,  
Who pain did undergo for our poor sake;  
We pray you from our hearts all cares to take.**

**You are the life, by which alone we live,  
And all our substance and our strength receive;  
Sustain us by your faith and by your power,  
And give us strength in every trying hour.**

**Our hope is in no other save in you;  
Our faith is built upon your promise true;  
Lord, give us peace, and make us calm and sure,  
That in your strength we evermore endure.**

##### **\*PASSING THE PEACE**

As a sign of our reconciliation, let us greet one another. The peace of Christ be with you.  
**And also with you.**

##### RECEIVING ASHES

Those who wish may come forward to receive ashes. They will be placed on your forehead, or, if you prefer, extend your hand and the ashes will be placed on the top of your hand. The ashes are from palm branches used in last year's Palm Sunday worship, mixed with oil.

**\*PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

**We remember Jesus' compassionate searching for the outcasts of society, and pray for a similar compassion;**

**We remember Jesus' conflict with the powers of evil, and pray for the same courage to stand against what is wrong;**

**We remember Jesus' refusal to be bound by the past, and pray that we may use this freedom for ourselves and honor it in others;**

**We remember the way Jesus showed God's love for all creation, and pray that we may mediate his love and power in our own time. Amen.**

**\*HYMN 85 "What Wondrous Love Is This"**

**What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!**

**What wondrous love is this, O my soul!**

**What wondrous love is this, That caused the Lord of bliss,**

**To bear the heavy cross,**

**For my soul, for my soul,**

**To bear the heavy cross for my soul.**

**To God and to the Lamb, I will sing, I will sing!**

**To God and to the Lamb, I will sing, I will sing!**

**To God and to the Lamb, Who is the great "I AM, "**

**While millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing!**

**While millions join the theme, I will sing.**

**And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on!**

**And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on,**

**And when from death I'm free, I'll sing and joyful be,**

**And through eternity, I'll sing on, I'll sing on,**

**And through eternity, I'll sing on.**

**\*BENEDICTION**

Sisters and brothers, let us claim the freedom Christ gives us by his self-giving on the cross.

**May Christ enable us to serve together in faith, hope, and love.**

Go in peace and serve the Lord.

Go in peace and serve the people.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**POSTLUDE**

Minister:

Director of Christian Education:

Organist:

Choir Director

The Rev. Bill Lovin

Hope Spragg

Bill Crouch

Dr. Chris Nakielski

Children's Choir Director  
Office Manager

Rachel Burchett  
Nancy Leavessuer

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### **IMPORTANT DATES IN LENT AND EASTER**

**February 18—Ash Wednesday;** Soup Supper in Rockwood Hall from 5:30-7:00; Worship Service at 7:00 p.m.

**February 22—First Sunday in Lent**

**March 1—Second Sunday in Lent; Communion Sunday**

**March 29—Palm Sunday—**Worship with Distribution of Palms; One Great Hour of Sharing Offering

**April 2—Maundy Thursday—**Worship in the Sanctuary at 7:00 p.m.; Communion and Service of Tenebrae

**April 3—Good Friday—**Worship in the Sanctuary at Noon

**April 5—Easter Sunday—**Easter Sunrise Service led by the Confirmation Class at 7:30 a.m. Breakfast follows in Rockwood Hall; Festival Easter Service in the Sanctuary at 10:15 a.m.