



Our Christmas Eve candlelight service from 2020: *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

Pastor's Note

As we begin 2021, I keep returning to one word: *Pray*.

I know that the word *prayer* can sometimes be used too casually. Unfortunately, it's used as a substitute for *action*. I also know that prayer catapults us, as Richard Foster once said, on to the frontier of our spiritual lives. When we feel overwhelmed and powerless, prayer binds us together and offers hope. Prayer is where we can offer our despair without judgement and have our burdens lightened. I've watched so many people this past year grow in their prayer lives, and I live with the assurance that you are praying for the leaders of our congregation, including myself. I'd like to offer you the assurance that you, too, are being offered to God in prayer. People praying for you before meetings and meals. You have likely been prayed for in our staff meeting. Our deacons keep going deeper and deeper into the a life of prayer. Our elders pray for you without ceasing.

But here is the best part: the Spirit is praying for us, too.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

If you need a new year's resolution, try this one: Pray.

-Michael

Prayers for our Nation

Please join in offering this prayer:

O Lord, your glory shines throughout the world. We commend our nation to your merciful care. Now when our land is troubled, be near to save us. Let your healing balm flow across our nation. Bestow upon us your peace.

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, that the barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease, and that, with our divisions healed, we might live in justice and peace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

COVID-19 Reminders

Please continue to be diligent about wearing a mask and social distancing during in-person worship. It is important as ever not to let our guards down in dealing with this public health crisis that it affecting the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of so many people. Continue to pray for our healthcare workers, patients, families, and public servants, as well as for each life that has been lost. - Michael

Christian Education Notes

Purple Table

Beginning this month, The Purple Table is offering resources for you to share Godly Play stories at home! Email Lisa (lisa@fpcmiddletown.com) to sign up to borrow a story kit. Story videos will also be available and easily accessible online.

Stay connected! Join our online gathering via Zoom at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, January 13, for a time of fellowship and activities. (Zoom Meeting ID: 357 756 9746)

The Purple Table is a pop-up welcome space, online and in-person, that builds community, affirms, and supports healing. Let us encourage one another as we play, share stories, listen, and find a way through, together! Connect instantly with The Purple Table by visiting the website: <https://the-purple-table.mn.com>

In Memoriam

We give thanks to God for the life of...

- Ron Williams, who died on December 18.
- Pat Hathaway, who died on December 22.

Tuesday Morning Bible Study for Advent

Some of the most compelling narratives from the Hebrew Bible were composed during the Post-Exilic, Persian period. We will study together the books of Ruth, Esther, and Jonah through March of this year. Our study on Jonah will connect with our Lenten Sermon series on the same book.

Bible Study meets at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday.
Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/j/3577569746>
Here is the January Schedule for Bible Study:

January 5 - Ruth 1 & 2
January 12 - Ruth 3 & 4
January 19 - Esther 1 & 2
January 26 - Esther 3 - 5

Weekly Online Gathering

Join us on Wednesdays at 10:00 a.m. on Zoom. In honor of the Java Johnny Knitters, we gather weekly via Zoom to share a time of fellowship and creativity.

Worship Notes

Upcoming Worship

We will be reading Mark 1 until the beginning of Lent. Here are the readings for January.

January 10 - Mark 1:4-11
January 17 - Mark 1:40-45
January 24 - Mark 1:14-20
January 31 - Mark 1:21-28

Note from the Director of Music

It is such a joy to serve God and this congregation through our music. Thank you so much to everyone: musicians, staff, and support people, who created such beautiful and inspiring music during Advent and Christmas. Janet, Lara, Brian, and myself had the privilege and joy of creating and sharing our "Christmas Worship Through Music" video. It has been very rewarding to see how God has used our music to reach so many, not just in our church, but so many outside of our congregation. Hearing God's word and feeling His presence through music is very special. Thank you for sharing the video with so many of your friends. We are looking forward to the time when we can all enjoy making music with our choirs and hear the congregation singing God's praises once again. I wish everyone a very happy, healthy and blessed New Year!!