

WORSHIP SERVICE PLAN**(Traditional & Online Service) (Purple)**

March 1, 2026 • Second Weekend in Lent • Suitcase • Communion

John 3:1-17*"What Do You Bring with You?"**'Light for our path' may have more to do with what we choose to carry than illumination.***(online only) Preparation for Worship**

Gather these items for worship. If an items unavailable, fret not:

- a piece of **purple** cloth
- an end table or stand
- a plate with bread/crackers
- a cup with juice or water
- a glass or bowl with water
- a lighter/match
- a suitcase or carry on bag
- a computer or internet-accessible device
- a thank you card to God for something this week

For each item you have, thank God for the provision. For each piece you do not have, thank God you don't need it. Place the table/stand in the area you plan to worship. If more than one person will be present, place the table in the middle of where you will be seated. Drape the cloth over it. Arrange the cup, plate, glass of water, and other items on the table. Keep the Bible in front of you. Have enough Communion elements for each person in your household.

Questions for the announcement loop*In preparing for Worship, consider the following:*

- How do you prepare for an unfolding life?
- What do you imagine God wants you to carry on your journey of faith?
- What do you imagine God wants you to let go of?
- Which light do you need for your journey of faith: more illumination or less weight?

Opening Sentence**John 3:8 (CEB)**

"God's Spirit blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. It's the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

–Jesus

Welcome ! We are glad you are with us! We have a few Community Notes for you to consider as we worship throughout the week, living that Christian life...

Welcome Visitors!

We are glad you are here! Our nursery is in the Education Building and our restrooms are in the buildings other than this Sanctuary.

**Lighten the Load**

Computers can be amazing tool! No doubt. But for all of their advances they suffer the same ailment that we do: they can only do one thing at a time. Oh, it may seem like they (or we) are multitasking, but ultimately it's just doing one thing at a time really, REALLY quickly, flipping back and forth in priorities as it uses its resources of energy, memory and computational power. God chose to make our human limitations a part of the *original* manufacturing for us. That's how we are designed to work! What are you doing in your life to appreciate your God-given limitations? How are you accounting for the limits to your knowledge, your understanding, your hopes? As you move through this second week in Lent, consider ways to honor this part of the created order in you. In what ways do you thank God for your limits?

Lent 2026: "Light for the Path"

Do you have enough light to see your path? Are you traveling light enough to conserve your strength? Are you moved and moving? Well, with our theme for Lent we want to answer all of that and more. In preparation for the season of Lent and our theme, "Light for the Journey", we're in

need of a few items if you have them to share. First, we still need mirrors of all shapes and sizes. Please mark the back of your mirror with your name and phone number if you share one with us. *As you encounter them in our worship spaces, take 2-3 minutes to consider what GOD sees in you.*

The second thing we need are your thoughts! As you are willing to share, take 5 minutes to gaze at yourself in the mirror (set a timer!) and then write a paragraph of what you think you see in the reflection. Your reflections can, of course, be anonymous and we won't share them without your express permission. Your submissions can come by emailing the church office, texting the pastor, or putting it in an envelope and placing that in an offering plate or giving box. We'll receive these throughout Lent.

Getting a Closer Look

Our Confirmation Class is hard at work evaluating the church for themselves and looking closely at their own lives of faith. You might see them taking pictures, asking you questions, even talking a little in church. Their observations are keen and their insights are marvelous! If you find one of them turning their attention towards you give them yours.

Come Celebrate!

March 8th, is International Gifts of Women Day. It's a time to express and honor the gifts the women in our midst and beyond have provided us all. We will observe some historical contributions and have a reception following the morning worship service. Please come ready to lift up and be lifted up!

An Additional Way to Support the Music

You can support our music program by participating in any of the choirs or the worship team, helping with logistics, hosting out of town guests, keeping up with your tithes and now by also contributing to a savings account devoted to supporting other aspects of the music program. Things like guest musicians, extra music scores, equipment, even water bottles.

Time Is Upon Us

Very soon, not only is Daylight Savings upon us (March 8th), but the Primary Election (March 3rd). If

it isn't already clear, elections have great consequences. And aside from the sacrifices our forebears made to ensure we have this privilege, as people of faith, it is our Christian duty to participate as citizens of this nation. If you conscientiously choose not to vote, that is, of course, your choice. But do not let this opportunity pass by you by default. Consider the times in which we live and speak to the values and priorities God has placed in you.

We celebrate our March babies!

(10am only) Greet one another in Christ!

(10am only) Gathering Song

"What Wondrous Love Is This" GTG #215, v. 2

When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down
When I was sinking down, sinking down.

When I was sinking down beneath God's righteous frown,
Christ laid aside his crown for my soul, for my soul.
Christ laid aside his crown for my soul.

(10am only) Prelude:

"Mighty to Save with Jesus Saves" arr. Carol Tornquist

'Light for our path' may have more to do with what we choose to carry than illumination.

In this moment, let us stand, take a deep breath, silence our devices, and continue in worship together. Let us make use of the *Call to Worship* that is before you...

(10am only) Call to Worship

We have so many strengths

We have so many abilities

We have so much knowledge

We have so much wisdom

We have so wealth

We have so much time

We have so much faith

And they are all gifts of God

Sing:

"Saved, Saved!" CEL #500

Prayer of Confession/Preparation

We sometimes live in contradiction, even at war, with our God-given limitations. It's not good that we do that. It's important to talk about our shortcomings so that we're ready to hear what God has to say. Let us begin with silent prayer...

(Please pray silently...)

Pray: Creator God, in what world could we possibly know better than you? How do we live as though our need for rest doesn't matter? How do judge as though the limits of what we can know, what we can see, what we can understand don't matter? How can we hoard as though time ever belonged to us? And yet, by your Grace, O Lord, we live. By your love we stretch into unfamiliar waters. By your faith do we move and act and dream beyond what we thought possible. After all, God, you invented those also. As the season of Lent unfolds, may your Spirit alone light our path. Thank you for listening, God. Amen.

(10am only) Assurance of Pardon

God's love can change everything, even the power of our sins over us. God's will that we have this power:

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

The Peace of Christ be with you

And also with you.

(10am only) Gloria Patri (Glory to God)

Glory be to the Father and to the Son

And to the Holy Ghost

As it was in the beginning

It is now and ever shall be

World without end: Amen, amen.

Reading of Scripture

Say: God's Word is a gift. And good gifts are meant to be opened. Our hearts and minds are gifts. And good gifts are meant to be opened. God offers to help us open our presents by God's own Spirit. Let us take God up on that offer and ask for help to understand. Let us pray...(everyone sings)

Pray/Sing: "Listen to the Word that God Has Spoken" GTG #455

Listen to the word that God has spoken;

Listen to the One who is close at hand;

Listen to the voice that began creation;

Listen even if you don't understand. (x2)

The story of Nicodemus' nighttime visit with Jesus encompasses one of the most quoted passages in the Christian world. What is it both men are carrying into this conversation? Listen closely to the Word of God to us all and our ongoing place in God's story...

Read: John 3:1-17 (CEB)

Jesus and Nicodemus

¹ There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. ² He came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could do these miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him."

³ Jesus answered, "I assure you, unless someone is born anew, it's not possible to see God's kingdom."

⁴ Nicodemus asked, "How is it possible for an adult to be born? It's impossible to enter the mother's womb for a second time and be born, isn't it?"

⁵ Jesus answered, "I assure you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, it's not possible to enter God's kingdom. ⁶ Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Don't be surprised that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' ⁸ God's Spirit blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. It's the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

⁹ Nicodemus said, "How are these things possible?"

¹⁰ "Jesus answered, "You are a teacher of Israel and you don't know these things? ¹¹ I assure you that we speak about what we know and testify about what we have seen, but you don't receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Human One. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so must the Human One be lifted up ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. ¹⁶ God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have

eternal life. ¹⁷ God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

One: For the Word of God in Scripture, for the Word of God among us, for the Word of God within us...

All: Thanks be to God!

Children's Sermon

Adults, you'll need:

- a cane or hiking stick and a full suitcase (with a few rocks hidden among the clothes)
- Make space for questions if you get them
"Check Your Bags"
- So, do you know what a hike is?...it's a walk where you're not just trying to get somewhere, but you're also looking around as you go. That's why hiking in the woods or on a mountain path or along a river is so great! But hiking can take a long time. You might get tired, thirsty, even hungry.
- So what do you think you should bring on a hike?...good shoes, good clothes, maybe a flashlight, a hiking stick...what about this suitcase? Wouldn't it be great? When I'm climbing the mountain or swimming in the river, I would all of my stuff with me!...
- It turns out we really need to be careful what we take with us on a hike. Sometimes people (find a rock and take it out) put rocks in our suitcase. Sometimes we do. Sometimes something happens to make our suitcase heavy. Too heavy for hiking.
- But God helps us have what we need. God makes sure we have water, food, a flashlight, a map, a compass, and no rocks. God even gives us the suitcase to carry.
- So when you're around the people who care about you, ask them about the rocks God had to take out of their suitcases. They may not want to, but tell them it's important to teach you.
- Don't forget to pray!

(10am only) Anthem:

"Blessed by the Bread, Graced by the Wine" by Mary Kay Beall

"What Do You Bring with You?"

'Light for our path' may have more to do with what we choose to carry than illumination.

Well, you made the decision: you're going! You are taking that trip! You're going on the cruise, flying the flight, taking the train, driving the car (or RV!). You're going. Maybe it's a spur of the moment thing, like going to the American Museum of the House Cat in Sylva, NC. Maybe it's a lifelong dream like visiting the Grand Canyon or the Great Wall or seeing the stone churches of Europe. Maybe it's visiting a long lost relative or friend. Maybe it's taking a dog to a new home, even in the middle of a blizzard (like a few of our folks just did). We have all kinds of reasons to travel, to journey, to go. We have all kinds of destinations. We have all kinds of modes of transportation. But whether you're talking about a Wright-brothers-style plane, a submarine, or a pull behind wagon, the same challenge besets us all.

What do you bring with you?

Take a moment and list the two or three of the most important factors in deciding what to pack, what to take with you on a trip. (If you're participating with other people in worship, take a moment to share your answers with each other. If you're alone, stop the video and call someone and have that conversation.)

How long you'll be away? What you anticipate at your destination in terms of weather, occasions, what you'll be doing? I mean, is it a relaxing trip or a work trip? Maybe your health? Mode of transportation? Do I need to bring food or can I buy some there? Do I need cash? Do I need a book, a crossword, a computer?

So what do you imagine Nicodemus was carrying the night he journeyed to visit with *Jesus*? What did he factor in when he decided what he would be carrying? I promise you it was more than just his questions...

Read: John 3:1-17 (CEB)
Jesus and Nicodemus

I know of folks who prefer driving at night. There's fewer obstacles, fewer drivers, fewer distractions.

Do you think any of these went into Nicodemus' decision to visit Jesus at night? Or do you think it had more to do with the weight of his position? The baggage of his status. In one circumstance being a teacher of the nation affords grand privileges and regard. Not for this.

And I imagine he also carried his doubts about what he and fellow leaders were doing. I can only imagine the pressures he must have felt from not only his fellow Pharisees, but rival groups, even the Romans. Add to that all he must have heard already about this Rabbi from Nazareth.

But like any person, he also goes in with himself. Ask the risk of sounding like that's stating the obvious, consider Nicodemus' life. He's grown up in a world that is unfamiliar to us and inaccessible. None of us are going back there to experience it. And even if we could, even if it were possible to jump into a time machine and go back to that moment, or even all the moments, we could never experience life like Nicodemus did because WE AREN'T NICODEMUS! We are limited by virtue of the fact that God made us all individuals.

This is true for us with every encounter. The journeys we take with each other, no matter how far we go, how far we take them together, how much we agree or even do things the same, we do them individually.

And so Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus was not ever going to be like anyone else's. That journey of understanding he would undertake was always going to be colored by whatever he and Jesus carried with them. Every death. Every sports team win. Every childhood accident. Every good and bad grade in school. Every job. Everything that happened and didn't happen at home. All of those come into play whether they actually mention them or not.

How many times have you found yourself reacting to something much more strongly than you intended because you weren't even *aware* that something else was bothering you?

So when Jesus tells Nicodemus "I assure you, unless someone is born anew, it's not possible to

see God's kingdom", it's no wonder Nicodemus took it literally. One of the remarkable things about John's Gospel is the lengths that it goes to show women getting the way Jesus talks about things far quicker than the men do. Read chapter 4 as a great example of that. But here Jesus is talking about something fundamental to all of us. He's talking about broadening the scope of human experience by accepting that what we think we know, what we think is conventional, what we think we even see, might have to be set aside for the journey of faith. We can't just see them differently. We have to experience them differently. We have to be born again.

Then Jesus says the most important part of the entire exchange. It's tempting to think it's verse 16 or even 17, but it's actually verse 8. Our Confirmands are studying right now the idea of God's Sovereignty. The quality of God to do whatever God wants, when ever God wants, how ever God wants. CS Lewis uses a different metaphor than wind. He says God, Jesus, really, is like a lion. Good, powerful, and we're glad he's on our side. But God is not a tame lion. God's not going to do tricks or fetch. God still lives and acts on God's terms not ours.

And whether we care to admit it or not, we are all living on some kind of agenda. We all are carrying the weight of what we prioritize, what we hold as important. What do we do when challenged to let go? Do hold all the more tightly? Do we simply refuse? Or do we embrace what Jesus invites us to hold instead?

One thing that's clear from this encounter, Jesus isn't giving Nicodemus at all what he expected. But what DID he expect? Someone who would connect the dots in some conventional way? Someone who would give Nicodemus a version of faith that fit with what he already knew? We realize Nicodemus didn't come ready for this trip to nighttime Jesus because he carrying a bag full of presumptions. He had presumed he had a handle on faith and how that was supposed to work. He presumed he knew enough Bible to go toe to toe with the Living Word. He presumed he was ready for this conversation.

And maybe he was. Just not in the way he thought. Maybe we are. Just not in the way we were taught. We enter our prayers, enter into our conversations with each other, unaware of the bags we carry. The weight, the inertia, of years of seeing God one way or another. Seeing each other one way or another. Not stopping to realize that the illumination we really need for our faith might not be more light but less weight. Less weight given to what we think we understand. Less weight given to what we think we know. Less weight given to ideas about faith that served us remarkably well but didn't grow up with us. Less weight to theology and practice that doesn't leave room for the Holy Spirit to change things up. Y'all, 'Light for our Path' may have more to do with what we choose to carry than illumination.

Take the way we approach John 3:16. I've seen it quoted on bumper stickers and t-shirts. It's been on bookmarks and posters and needlepoints. I've seen it on tattoos and on fence posts. I've seen the reference on banners on a football or baseball field. I've seen it on a church sign. And why not? The verse is a bedrock understanding of what God is trying to accomplish in this world. What is much more rare, is seeing people quote 3:17 nearly as much.

God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

It colors my understanding differently. That verse reshapes how I grew up believing God's salvation works. The whole of Jesus' life retools my priorities and causes me to see my fellow humanity, to myself, differently. Not because we don't all need Jesus. As the meme says, "Bruh, you need Jesus to go to WalMart." But knowing God's goal is NOT condemnation moves me to act differently. To approach my faith differently. To see life itself and God's design differently.

Let us be mindful of how we travel. Let us be mindful of what we are carrying into our journeys with God and each other. And, if I may offer some advice, please, pack light. We have a long way to go.

Song of Reflection

"Though I May Speak (The Gift of Love)" GTG #693

Offering

God chooses to love us, abundantly. We should respond by choosing to be loving, abundantly. This is why we should give and share what we have and who we are. Let us reflect together on what has been given...

(10am only) Offertory

"Come, Share the Lord" arr. Lloyd Larson;
Duet: Noah and Lora Melton

(10am only) Doxology

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise God all creatures here below.
Praise God above ye heavenly hosts;
Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

Blessing

(text is for the ONLINE service)

Let there be no doubt, Great God: you love us. And we are grateful. Let there be no doubt, Great God: we should be loving in turn. As we receive the gifts you provide, may the gifts we are meant to be emerge. In the great name of Jesus Christ, we pray this together. Amen.

Service of Communion

- Say: Let us first show we belong to a faith larger than ourselves. Let us say what we believe:

I believe in God—

That God created us for a reason,

That God chose people for a reason

That God fought for us for a reason

That God fought against us for a reason

That God called us out on our sins for a reason

That God made us partners with God for the building of the kingdom

That God created us for a purpose.

That God's already called us to be prophets, priests, teachers, students,

companions, travelers, historians, parents,

grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings and most importantly children

All on a journey

that God designed

and for which God equips

because God's love really does

**change everything
and makes us people of God
thanks to the life, death and resurrection
of Jesus Christ**

Who was, who is, and is to come.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

- Say: The Lord be with you...and also with you. God invites us to the Table as we are, given who we are! God invites us to the Table even though we may think we don't belong. Yet God invites us, does NOT force us, because God still loves us. So let us answer together as one Church across time, across our homes, across our various situations, and eat and drink of what the Lord offers. Let us pray...
- "Jesus, Remember Me" GTG #227
**Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.
Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.**
- Holy God, First and foremost, thank you. Thank you for making us a part of what you're doing. Thank you for ensuring that we not only get the benefit of your Spirit, but the sense of mission that comes with you. Jesus came that the world might be saved. Let every action, thought, and breath we have be turned to that goal. Help us stop writing off, shunning away, giving up. Help us adopt your attitude and example and turn our attention to the sometimes surprising way your salvation works. Not just for us, but for all of us.
- As we mark our losses, hand wring over resources, worry over scenarios, and allow our fears to drive our decisions, remind, Holy God, that we carry you. For all of the baggage we can point to and are burdened by, we carry you. You carry us. You have not only shared the burden of salvation of the world with us, but you have shared yourself. Help us not take that for granted. Help us not forget that when times, the pressures, the circumstances, seem impossible. Remind us, O God, that with your love, all things are possible.
- Thus, let us be Godly people. Let us make a harvest of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Teach us to live lives weeding out apathy, selfishness, cravenness, callousness, and evil. We pray this not only for

ourselves, but for so many that we can name...

(take time to name your own prayers)

- Thank you for believing in us, Thank you for transforming us. Thank you for teaching us, even how to pray when words fail us, saying,
- **Pray: 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.**
- (take the bread in your hands) On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread and having blessed it he broke it, gave it to his disciples and said, "This is my Body given for you. As often as you eat of it, do this in remembrance of me." (break and eat some of the bread)
- (take the cup with juice in your hands) In the same manner he took the cup, and, having blessed it, he gave it to his disciples and said, "This cup represents the new covenant sealed by my blood for the forgiveness of many. All of you drink of it." (drink some of the juice)
- Say: As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim the Lord's saving death until He comes. These are the gifts of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.
- The only proper response to the grace of God is gratitude. Let us pray together with the whole Church:
- **Pray: Thank you, God, for making us your kingdom. Help us live out that thanks by being a refuge to all you call us to. Thank you for including us at your Table. Help us do the same with ours. In the great name of Jesus Christ we pray this together. Amen.**

Hymn of Sending

(10am) "God, Be the Love to Search and Keep Me"
GTG# 543

Sending & Benediction

Let us say together our benediction...

'Light for our path' may have more to do with what we choose to carry than illumination.

(raise your hands and say) "Get up, take heart,
Jesus is still calling you..."; Go, and the peace of
God which surpasses all understanding guide your
hearts and minds this day and forever more. Amen!

Sing: "God Lights Our Way"

(to the tune for "God Is So Good")

God lights our way

God lights our way

God lights our way

To fulfill God's dreams

(10am only) Postlude

"In the Cross of Christ I Glory:" arr. Victor Labenske