

# GAYLORD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

First Sunday in Lent      February 21, 2021

---



## Morning Meditation

*“Keep all your promises, don’t take what doesn’t belong to you, and always look after those less fortunate than yourself, and you’ll do well in the world.” — Rebecca Rupp*

### Welcome and News of the Church

#### Statement of Welcome

**No matter who I am, No matter where I am on life’s journey, I am welcome here.  
No matter who you are, no matter where you are on life’s journey,  
You are welcome here!**

#### Statement of Purpose

One: Who are you?                      **All: I am a beloved child of God!**  
One: What does that mean?        **All: I am a person of worth to be valued!**  
One: Then what will you do?       **All: I will live a life of Love and Acceptance of  
myself and all God’s people!**

- ❖ We have been having trouble with our streaming equipment and apologize for any inconvenience; hopefully it will be working soon. Recordings of the service are available later in the day even if the live streaming does not work. To view our service on the website click on the link: <https://listen2god.org/weekly-message/>
- ❖ **Our *From the Heart Offering* in February is for Souper Bowl of Caring for the Food Shelf.**

### The Call      Psalm 25:1–10

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness’ sake, O LORD!  
Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.  
He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.  
All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

### Prelude

Stacy Pauly

### Call to Worship

adapted from Ps 25: 1-3

One: To you, O GOD, we lift up the spirit of our whole selves.  
**All: O God, we trust unashamedly in you; seeking that you be not ashamed of us;**  
One: May we begin our Lenten journey together in right relationships;  
**All: Teach us. Show us. Guide us in your paths. Grow us to know your ways more clearly.**  
One: You are the God of our salvation and the Sustainer of good relations.  
**All: For you we wait.**  
One: May integrity, a clean conscience, and upright living preserve us.  
**All: Amen.**

Piano: Play through Hymn

**People: Before your cross, O Jesus, our lives are judged today;  
The meaning of our eager strife is tested by your way.  
Across our restless living the light streams from your cross,  
And by its clear, revealing beams we measure gain and loss.**

Piano: Play stanzas 3, 4

**People: Yet humbly, in our striving, we rise to face its test.  
We crave the power to do your will as once you did it best.  
On us let now the healing of your great Spirit fall,  
And make us brave and full of joy to answer to your call.**

Piano: Play stanzas 3, 4

**Invocation** (*Unison*)

**As in days of old, Creator God,  
we come to look for your signs of covenant promises.  
Like the rainbow days of Noah, we see and know your signs  
and hear your voice again directing us to places of preparation and transformation  
in our lives and in our world.  
Thank you God, for your covenant signs in this season of Lent. Amen.**

**Prayer of Confession**

**Call:**

Sisters and Brothers, in our daily lives  
we need the gift of the season of Lent.  
These 40 days can help us restore right relationships  
with God and with others.  
This is a fine time to focus,  
clear our hearts and minds of distractions,  
and re-orient and restore our whole selves.  
May God be with us. Let us pray:

**Prayer:**

Creating and Renewing God.  
In this Lenten season we each need the opportunity  
to clear our eyes of the glaze of indifference and apathy.  
Help us get our minds off distractions, obsessions and self-pity  
so that we don't feel helpless.  
Help us to start over.  
Re-orient head and heart  
so that we may fill our whole selves  
with life-affirming activities and thoughts.

*(Silence)*

**All: May I be in right relationship with you and all your creation, and join the United  
Church of Christ in overcoming violence, hunger, and injustice.  
May I find courage and clarity to assist me in works of justice and compassion  
which make daily life bearable for many.  
In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.**

## **Assurance of God's Steadfastness**

Brothers and Sisters,

God hears our prayers and, even in our human frailty, promises to be with us in the wilderness times.

Observe, find comfort, and offer with courage to restore and build relationships among God's people. Experience a new and renewed sense of hope.

**Amen.**

## **Piano Doxology**

### **Scripture**

#### **Genesis 9:8-17**

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

#### **Mark 1:9-15**

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

## **Piano Gloria**

### **Sermon**

"The Power to Overcome"

A Father and his son were walking along a canal that ran through the city. "Son," ordered the father, "Don't swim in that canal." "OK, Dad," he answered. But he came home carrying a wet bathing suit that evening. "Where have you been?" demanded the father. "Swimming in the canal," answered the boy. "Didn't I tell you not to swim there?" asked the father. "Yes, Sir," answered the boy. "Why did you?" he asked. "Well, Dad," he explained, "I had my bathing suit with me and I couldn't resist the temptation." "Why did you take your bathing suit with you?" he questioned. "So I'd be prepared to swim, in case I was tempted," he replied.

Temptations can be, well, can be so tempting.

Today we have the scriptural account of three major events in Jesus' life. Baptism, temptation in the wilderness and first preaching in Galilee. These events echo the journey of the Israelites in their journey through the Red Sea, baptism, wandering in the desert for 40 years, temptation, and arrival at the Promised Land, beginning his ministry.

It is a formative time in the beginning of Jesus's ministry. Today I want to focus on the time in the wilderness. 40 days—a long time. Noah, endured 40 days and 40 nights of rain and flooding. Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, and Jesus experienced 40 days in his wilderness journey. It is interesting that it also takes about 40 weeks for a baby to be born. New birth after the journey!

We go through 40 days of Lent from Ash Wednesday until Easter. It is a journey of facing a wilderness, death to an old way of believing and living, and new birth.

In the wilderness, Jesus faces situations that cause him to think through personal temptations. We often read this passage as just a story of the Bible. "This is where Jesus is tempted by the devil." But it is an account of Jesus' real struggle with issues within himself. Different ways he could go about his ministry as the Son of God.

Dr Fred Craddock says, "There is no need to protect Jesus by saying he only seemed to be tempted in order to set us an example. Anyone who pretends an experience in order to set an example is not setting an example." Jesus' temptations were real inward struggles. "We are not tempted to do what we cannot do but what we can. The testing is one of strength, and the stronger, the more capable, the greater one is, the greater the temptation." Jesus was tempted to do things that were within his capability to do, that is why they were a temptation. But the challenge of a temptation is not the temptation, like the boy in the canal, it is about our response to the temptation.

I have an idea that every one of us here has already been to a wilderness. Maybe it just looked like a hospital waiting room to you, or maybe it was a change in life--you can't do what you once were able to do. Often wildernesses are difficult things that we may go through. Other times wildernesses are things that we carry around from the past. Maybe a broken dream--you realize you aren't going to accomplish everything you thought you would in life, or a broken relationship, or a bad childhood, or someone's hurtful words to us.

The truth is that wilderness comes in so many shapes and sizes. And the question is, "What keeps us going through these times in our lives?" How did Jesus get through his 40-day ordeal in the wilderness?

When I was a pastor in Oklahoma, the church hosted a very active AA program. I had the privilege of working with several of the people working through the twelve steps.

I was always amazed with the message of the first three steps.

- We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
- Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

In their lives, coming to the point that they did not have the power over alcohol, they discover that a greater Power is what can restore their lives. And they made the decision to turn their will and their lives over to that greater Power.

That is the spiritual journey of Lent. It is a time to come to recognize those parts of life that tempt us to journey away from God. The wilderness is not the temptation, it is the time we spend trying to decide what we are going to do with the trial we are facing. We can struggle believing that we can overcome everything that comes our way on our own, or we can admit that we are powerless in the situation and give our body, mind and spirit to God.

Jesus did not try to confront his temptations on his own, in each situation he turned away from himself and to God. He made the decision to turn his will, life, and thus ministry over to God. Once he did, the evil departed, the decision was made--God is going to be the center of my life.

Martin Luther said this: "When the devil comes knocking at the door of my heart, and asks 'Who lives here?' the dear Lord Jesus goes to the door and says, "Martin Luther used to live here, but he has moved out. Now I live here." God becomes our home where we are empowered by the Spirit to overcome all trials.

There is a story I like that I think can give us help in understanding the Lenten journey. It is shared by Charlotte Lohrenz. It seems that she had been asked by a family to conduct a funeral for a gentleman that she was not acquainted with. To prepare for the service, she met with the family beforehand. As they sat around a kitchen table, the family showed her a pile of letters now 70 years old. "POW letters" is what the box had been labeled. The deceased man's daughters thought the letters were personal between their mother and their dad and so they had never read them before. Only now at their father's death had they looked at them.

The daughters also spread out the scrapbook their mother put together which their dad had kept nearby since her death a few years ago. Those now faded pages held every piece of official correspondence she received from the moment his plane went down over Italy until he finally came home.

Spike flew with the Royal Air Force for he was a Canadian citizen first. When his plane was shot down, he and his cohorts survived. They hid out for a while before they were captured, but part of the wonder of his story is that this young man refused to stay imprisoned. For in fact, Spike was captured not once, but three times, escaping twice. Every time he did all he could to make his way to the Allied front line. Trying to make his way towards home. The story goes that he slept in a cornfield during the day, navigating his way through unfamiliar countryside by night. They were captured once more but through it all, he kept trying. For as his daughters said, "**He had someone to come home to.**"

And as I heard this story, I found myself thinking of how it is that we get through our wilderness times. And I wonder if it isn't always by remembering that we have something, we have someone (God) to come home to. And I wonder if that wasn't exactly what sustained Jesus during his sojourn into the wilderness—particularly as he faced down those three temptations.

For the home Jesus had in God, was one where the bread which sustains, is so much more than that with which we nourish our physical bodies. And the Home which Jesus had was one grounded in and shaped by love.

So, I wonder now, how it is that you and I can take this story as a gift for our own times in the wilderness. Perhaps it is that we keep our eyes, our minds, and our hearts on Home and on that Someone (God) who is always there with us and for us. What keeps us going is knowing that we



**Remember in Prayer:** Sandy Wentzloff, Bill and Nancy Cowell, Dick Carlson, Eunice Gasow, Aggie Schue, and Greg Armstrong (Howard's brother). We pray for health and healing for all people. Pray especially for those serving on the front lines caring for those with COVID-19. Pray for the ministries of our church. Pray for those serving in the military and for our local and national leaders.

**If you have a prayer request or would like to receive a call from Pastor Dennis call his office at 237-2595 (leave a private voice mail) or his cell 763-258-3371**

**Pastor Dennis is usually in the office each Tuesday and Wednesday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. He can be reached at the office, 237-2595 (private voice mail) or his cell: 763-258-3371. E-mail: [dmckee545@gmail.com](mailto:dmckee545@gmail.com) • Website at [listen2god.org](http://listen2god.org)**

**Tithes, Offerings and Pledges can be sent to Gaylord United Church of Christ P.O. Box 385 Gaylord, MN 55334. You can also donate on our website or drop off at the church office on Wednesday between 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.**

