

THE TIMES NEWSLETTER

A publication of the First Congregational Church

of Scarborough, Maine 04074

FEBRUARY-MARCH 2023



PASTOR'S MESSAGE:

Wilderness

The forty days of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. Lent means many things to many people. It is a time of preparation for Easter, when people of faith engage in spiritual rituals and disciplines - such as fasting, prayer, self-examination, and acts of repentance.

The number forty has symbolic meaning. It is connected to our faith stories - including the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness preparing for his ministry by facing the temptations that could lead him to abandon his mission and calling. We also remember how Israel wandered in the desert for forty years before they reached the Promised land. This was a time of wilderness preparation for them. Through those years of wandering, they were tempted to give up on God. But God never gave up on them.



Lent begins with a move into the wilderness. And if we want to receive the gifts of this season, we can do just that. We can move into our own wilderness places. We can go to those inner places of our heart and soul where we are stuck or confused or cluttered by past or present deeds or injuries, and clear them away so that we can be touched by God's grace. It is difficult to do and we may not want to go there. Yet we cannot avoid it - for it is what we find when we decide to go inward and look at ourselves deeply and honestly. Wilderness is hard work.

We do well to remember that God goes with us in this work. When we find ourselves feeling alone and exposed, with feelings we'd prefer to not speak - God is there with us. When we meet ourselves head-on in that unsettling inner place - God is there with us.

You may be wondering how this journey of opening your heart and mind to your inner self during Lent can begin? This is where spiritual practice can be useful. Undoubtedly you will find a practice that works for you. It may include setting aside 5 or 10 minutes a day for regular prayer time. It may include reading scripture and focusing on a phrase or word. It may include daily mindful walks, or serving others, or spiritual expression through art and journaling.

Here is a way you might begin. Try sitting in a solitary place for just a few minutes. Breathe deeply. Relax. Identify the thoughts entering your consciousness. Notice your worries. Notice what feels overwhelming or chaotic. Notice what feels out of balance or blocked. Notice what you resist. These are all parts of your inner self that only you know. You can write them down in a private journal if you wish. This can become the map of your inner wilderness journey.

And rather than doing what we usually try to do with such things...which is to eradicate them...try inviting God into them, to heal and transform them. It can be accomplished with a simple practice of a one sentence prayer, such as this (from Psalm 25): *"Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths."*

My prayers are with you in your Lenten journey – for whatever way it works best for you. I pray it will be a fruitful one, where you experience the refreshment and renewal of God's mercy and grace.

May God's peace be in your heart.

Yours in Christ's service,

Rev. Linda



DON'T MISS THIS SUNDAY'S INFORMATIONAL SESSION ON FINANCES AND LONG RANGE PLANS:

The Ministry of Governing and Finance invites everyone to a special update on **Sunday, February 19**, right after church. We will give our usual year to date financial information. We will discuss what has been completed in and around our buildings so far this year; the state of our buildings; where the parsonage money is; and going forward with our long-range plan. Ask questions and let us know what you think. Please join us.

If you cannot join us on Sunday, please don't hesitate to send questions and concerns to us. We will be placing some of the information in our newsletter. Our ministry meets the 3rd Monday of every month.

Kathy Ross

Chairman Ministry of Governing & Finance

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Stewardship Campaign Launches

As you get this newsletter, you are about to receive our Stewardship Letter from Rev. Linda Hey. Our theme this year for Stewardship is "Growing, Living Building Together". Linda's letter highlights and knits together all the parts of the Ministries conversations about this theme. As part of our Stewardship presentation, one member of the Ministry of Christian Outreach and Stewardship will share with you some thoughts about growing, living, and building and what that has meant and will mean to our church: Together, with God's help, we believe that we are building a church that offers hope, love, faith, service and care to our community. This church has a rich history of offering these and much more to the community for close to 300 years. During all these years members and friends of the Church have contributed generously to keep the Church thriving while ministering to neighbors in need. This is an amazing history to be continued with your support.

Mark your calendars! On March 5th, immediately following the service kicking off the Stewardship Campaign, you are invited to come downstairs for our annual brunch and take part in this tradition. You will receive your pledge packets while enjoying a feast of egg casseroles, fresh fruit, a variety of breakfast breads, coffee and fruit juice. We hope you will enjoy this time of fellowship and in this act of eating together begin the work of growing and building as we move our church into the future. Your prayerful financial pledges and service will strengthen that forward motion. Those unable to attend on March 5th will receive their pledge packets by mail.

Join us in making a generous pledge on Stewardship Sunday, March 19th. That day we will gather to hear a Stewardship message and as part of the service that morning, return your Pledge Cards. Those unable to attend can return their cards by mail or drop them off at the church office.

Matthew 7:24-25

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."

From your Ministry of Christian Outreach and Stewardship

HELP US SAY GODSPEED AND GOOD FORTUNE TO BETHANY KIRKPATRICK

There will be a special Neighboring after the worship service on **February 26**, to celebrate and thank Bethany Kirkpatrick for her 18 years of service to the church as its Music Director. There will be a basket in the Vestry to drop cards and tokens of thanks as you wish.

FROM THE WOMENS FELLOWSHIP

Women's Fellowship will be meeting on Tuesday, **February 28** at 2:00 PM in the parlor downstairs at the Parish Hall. Hostesses will be Gail Dobriko and Lorraine Taylor. Speaker will be Suze Kelly with a short presentation on "Mindfulness"

ECUMENICAL LENTEN SERVICES WITH SOUP LUNCHEON



This year we will be joining together with our fellow Christians from other churches in Scarborough on two Wednesdays in Lent for a time of worship, reflection, prayer, and soup. The services will be held at St. Maximilian Kolbe Church on 150 Black Point Road, on Wednesday **March 1** and Wednesday **March 15**. Services to start at 11:30 A.M. and will be followed immediately by a soup lunch (around noon).

Rev. Hey will be leading the worship service on **March 15th**. We ask that anyone willing to bring a crockpot of soup on the 15th to please let Elaine know. Members of the Blue Point Congregational Church will be sharing "soup" responsibilities with us on March 15th, so we'll only need to provide a total of 5 soups.

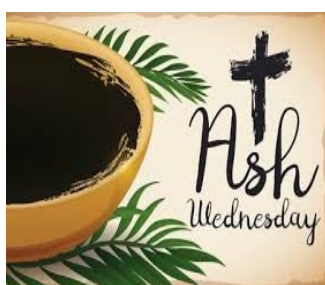
SPECIAL PROGRAM ON SUNDAY, MARCH 12 DURING NEIGHBORING

Lauren Dempsey-Martin, "Community Services Navigator" with the Scarborough Police Department, will speak to those attending Neighboring following the Church Service on Sunday, **March 12** on the general topic of "Understanding the needs and complexities of the homeless in our community, and welcoming and working with them when they come to church services."

What is Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. It is always exactly 40 days (excluding Sundays) before Easter. Many Christians observe Ash Wednesday with prayers of repentance and fasting. The rubbing of a cross with ashes on a person's forehead or back of the hand, connects with our origin and symbolizes our desire to be penitential and reflective about our actions during this Lenten time of waiting for Christ's resurrection.

This year on Ash Wednesday, which is February 22nd, you are invited to come to the church any time between 12:00 and 2:00 PM to receive ashes from Reverend Linda. We would love to have you join us. All are welcome.



Lenten Devotionals

"We are simultaneously running from empty while running on empty. Jesus might ask us: "Beloved, is empty the worst thing that can happen to you? Is stillness and doing nothing so awful? Perhaps the thing you are running from is the very thing you most need." Enter Lent, which is all about surrender, emptying, and letting go of everything that leads away from the cross. Running from Empty is a daily invitation to embrace the empty places we might prefer to avoid; to breathe deeply, love fully, act justly; and to find Jesus in the stillness and the storm. (Running from Empty 2023. The Stillspeaking Writer's Group.)

Beginning on Ash Wednesday, Rev. Linda will be holding a series of 1 hour Lenten Devotionals, utilizing the collection of brief daily devotionals for Lent, "Running from Empty." If you want to share in a Lenten practice of reflection and prayer to help refill your spiritual "tank," this may be just what you are looking for.

The meetings will be held at the Annex on the following days: Ash Wednesday, February 22, 2:30 PM; Wednesday March 1, 2:00 PM; Wednesday March 8, 11:00 AM; Wednesday March 15, 2:00 PM; Wednesday March 22, 2:00 PM; Wednesday March 29, 2:00 PM. There is a sign-up sheet in the Vestry. You can also call Rev. Linda or Elaine at the church office to sign-up and have a booklet set aside for you. Donations to cover the cost of the booklets are welcome but not required.

GOT WARM COATS.....and SWEATERS AND MITTENS AND SCARVES?

The State Street Church in downtown Portland is in need of warm clothing to help needy people withstand the winter.. The Church's Clothes Closet has reopened after a long pandemic hiatus, and needs to restock .

If you have any warm clothing in good condition that you can donate, please bring it to Sunday service (there will be a collection box in the coat closet) OR drop it by the office OR leave it in the breezeway of the Office if after hours.

IT's TIME FOR POTLUCK

Our Ministry of Members, Friends and Church Life is hosting a Potluck "luncheon" on Saturday, **March 25**, from 3:00—6:00 pm in the Vestry. We hope to bring our members and friends together for a sociable and sustaining afternoon. AS the date approaches we will post a sign up sheet in the Vestry and release details. In the meantime, if you would like to participate, please notify Elaine in the office and let her know if you will be bringing a menu item.

A NOTE FROM LEN GIAMBALVO

Dear Friends,

I am recovering well from my pelvis fracture but am non-weight bearing until the end of March, so it will be a while before I get to join you in church. Thank you for all the cards and prayers you have given me. I am growing to appreciate what a loving church we have.

Thank you,

Len Giambalvo

CALL FOR USHERS AND FLOWERS

We still need ushers for Sunday services and funerals in the church. It is not a daunting task and we can "train" you individually or in a group. Arriving at 9:00 you would greet, pass out Bulletins and help with the Offering and Communion. There is the added benefit of getting to meet worshippers as they arrive and make new acquaintances. Usher sign-up sheets are posted on the bulletin board downstairs in the Vestry.

ORDERING FLOWERS FOR EASTER SUNDAY

As is our tradition, we will be decorating the Sanctuary with Lilies and Spring flowers for Easter. Please stay tuned for more information and order forms that will be due back at the end of March.

FCC SUGGESTION CORNER

My name is Brenda Harrison - one of my positions at the church is Member-At-Large on the Church Council. The Church Council meets once a month, the first Tuesday of the month. If anyone has a question or a concern concerning anything at the church and you would like it brought to the Church Council, please email me.

If you would like to talk to me in person, please email your phone number and the best time to get in touch with you.

Thank you. Email address: FCCSuggestions@gmail.com

OUR CHURCH'S INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

If there was a significant storm on Saturday night or it is storming on Sunday morning, make sure you check to see if the service has been cancelled. The First Congregational Church of Scarborough is now registered with WCSH and WGME TV, and a cancellation notice will run on both of those stations by 7 a.m. You can also call the office at 883-2342 to find out if the parking lot has been plowed and safe to walk on and the church building is accessible. The Admin Assistant will either be in the office or leave a message on the answering machine by 7:30 a.m. if the service has been cancelled. If the answering machine message hasn't been changed, it means there will be a service of some kind (although it may be an abbreviated one). Please use discretion in deciding whether to come to church in bad weather.

NEXT NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

Articles for the April Newsletter must be submitted to the office by March 13. Thank you.

We are always looking for "reporters"!

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