



the good news is...

rooted in justice, mercy,
& faithfulness

Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 22, 2026

Welcome to

First Presbyterian Church



Welcome to this sanctuary.
Welcome to this time of worship and wonder.
Welcome to this family of faith.

We're glad you're here today and pray that your experience
with us in worship is both challenging and uplifting!

Our ushers are available to assist you as needed.

For more information about First Presbyterian Church, we invite you
to visit our website. There you will find out the ways to keep in touch,
how we live our faith, our different partnerships and so much more.

Our website address is: www.firstpresracine.org

If you're interested in receiving news about the church,
please call 262.632.1686 or email: shelley@firstpresracine.org

Rev. Darren Utley—Church Pastor
pastordarren@firstpresracine.org

TODAY'S SERVICE

WORSHIP LEADER—*Kristin Ansari*

LITURGIST—*Royce Earnest*

POETRY READING & MUSICIAN—*Mark Paffrath*

MUSICIANS—*Alejandro Alumbremos, Pat Badger, Dave Titus, Alan Galle,*
Handbell Choir - directed by Fumi Nakayama

MEDIA TECH SPECIALIST—*Steve Comeau*

*Please stand as you are able.

[Bold type] indicates text to be spoken by the congregation.

[Bold italic type] indicates song to be sung by the congregation.



WE GATHER TO WORSHIP

(As a courtesy to everyone, please mute your mobile device.)

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Royce Earnest

Welcome! May you find God's love, peace, grace, and joy as we worship today.

POEM

The Things That Matter Most | *Sarah A. Speed*

Mark Paffrath

I wrecked the family car, an old gold minivan
that had traveled every inch of I-95. It had worn cushions
and an old school map in the glove box.
It held a folder full of mix CDs under the passenger seat
and every memory of every family trip,
and I wrecked it.
I called the tow truck while the engine
hissed and smoked. I called my dad,
my own apologies tripping over themselves
to get to the front of the line.
I expected to be grounded.
I expected a "How could you?"
But when I got home that night,
my dad held me close and said,
"A car is just a car, but you are my child.
The only thing that matters is that you are okay."
And I knew it for what it was.
It was mercy. It was love.
It was the thing that mattered most.

PRELUDE

*Justice (from Opus Arcana. n.11) | Ian Ring
Alejandro Alumbremos*

*CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome to the weary and the worn.

Welcome to the wiggly and the eager.

Welcome to the skeptical and the seeking.

Welcome to the early risers and those still trying to wake up.

Welcome to the rule followers and the rule breakers.

Welcome to those hungry for justice and those desperate for mercy.

Welcome to the sinners and the saints.

This is God's house.

You can make yourself at home here.

Let us worship our just, merciful, and faithful God!

*OPENING HYMN

Amazing Grace

[GtG Hymn #649]

Alejandro Alumbremos, Mark Paffrath, Pat Badger, Dave Titus, Alan Galle

CALL TO CONFESSION

Jesus once said to a crowd,

“Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.”

Friends, none of us are without sin.

None of us get it right all the time.

None of us can get by without God's grace.

In the Prayer of Confession, we acknowledge this truth.

We put down our stones

and we turn to God for forgiveness.

Join me in this act of transformation.

Let us pray:

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Holy God,
we love to live our lives by the rules.
We love clear answers.
We love right and wrong.
We love swift justice.
We love to pick up stones,
but you show us another way.
You welcome shades of gray and nuanced conversation.
You prioritize mercy over legality.
You prioritize people over tradition.
You prioritize love over everything.
Forgive us for losing sight of what truly matters.
Forgive us for clinging tighter to laws than to each other or to you.
Forgive us. Soften our hearts.
Root us in mercy, justice, and love.
With hope for a better tomorrow, we pray. Amen.

WORDS OF FORGIVENESS

Church family,
Jesus saw a crowd ready to throw stones and
invited them to choose another way.
Jesus offered them grace, mercy, and compassion,
and the same can be said for us.
So hear and believe the good news of the gospel:
Our God is a God of mercy.
Our God is a God of compassion.
Our God is a God of grace.
We are forgiven, loved, and invited to choose another way.
Thanks be to God for yet another second chance.
Amen.

*ACT OF PRAISE

Spirit Divine, Attend Our Prayers

[GtG Hymn #407, v. 5]

*PASSING THE PEACE

As Christ welcomed everyone,
no matter what their background or social standing;
as Christ welcomed enemies & friends,
outcasts & leaders, foreigners & neighbors,
let us open our hearts and homes and lives.
Let us be like Christ to everyone we meet.
Peace be with you.
And also with you.

CHORAL ANTHEM

Leaning on the Everlasting Arms | *A. J. Showalter, arr. J. W. Krug*
Handbell Choir, directed by Fumi Nakayama

PROCLAIMING THE WORD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Holy One,
when you speak, we don't want to miss it.
When you bend down and write in the dirt,
when you move through the trees,
when you wake with the dawn,
when you tug on our heart,
or whisper into our dreams,
we don't want to miss it.
So today we pray, clear out the cobwebs in our ears.
Quiet the steady stream of thoughts marching through our minds.
Open up space in our hearts so that we can receive your word for us today.
With hope we pray.
Amen.

SCRIPTURE

John 8:2-11
Matthew 23:23

[NT 100-101]
[NT 26]

SERMON

the good news is.....rooted in justice, mercy, and faith
Kristin Ansari, Worship Leader

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

What Does the Lord Require of You?

*SONG OF RESPONSE

There's a Wideness in God's Mercy
[GtG Hymn #435]

*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

**I believe in the good news of Jesus Christ.
It sounds like welcome
and feels like home.
It sounds like laughter
and feels like mercy.
It sounds like love
and feels like a seat at the table,
so I believe in the good news of Jesus Christ.
I have seen it alive in the world.
And even when my heart aches,
even when wars rage,
even when mercy feels out of reach,
I remember the one who
welcomed the children
and led with nonviolence.
I remember the one who
cared for the vulnerable
and inspired those around him.**

**I remember that the good news really is good news,
for I have seen it alive in the world.
Thanks be to God! Amen.**

OFFERTORY

God, How Can We Forgive

*DOXOLOGY

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host.
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen*

PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE/THE LORD'S PRAYER

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.

GOING FORTH TO MINISTER

*CLOSING HYMN

Arise, Your Light Is Come!
[GtG Hymn #744]

*BENEDICTION

*SUNG BLESSING

There Is Now a New Creation
[GtG Hymn #774, v v. 4 & 5]

POSTLUDE

Mercy, Mercy, Mercy | *Josef Zawinul, arr. Brent Edstrom*

The flowers in the sanctuary are from Mac & Marilyn MacCaughey—
in memory of their mothers.

Prayer Matters

Heartfelt thoughts & prayers for all who have recently experienced the loss of a friend or family member. May they know peace and comfort during these difficult times.

Prayers of comfort & healing for Steve Simpson, Evelyn Vanderheyden, Don Tobias, Peggy Taylor, Vi Shufelt, Sheila Lawrence, Peggy Wagner, Ed Lehmann, Austin Moulds, Mac & Marilyn MacCaughey, Ellen Easley, Sandra Hopkins, Kay Mahl, Mary Johnson, Leah Fisher, Barb Stevenson, and an unspoken prayer for a church member..

As they deal with physical, emotional and/or spiritual issues, please pray for John—husband of Sandy Hawley; Johan—brother of Cecilia Andersson; Dan—father of Shelley Maurer; Chad—son of Sheila Lawrence; David—brother and Lynn—sister-in-law of Ed Lehmann; Mark—son of Sharon Campbell; Mary Ann—mother of Cheryl Nitz; Jack Flynn and Mary—sister of Gretchen Hermann; the paternal grandfather of Autumn Eifert; Amy—daughter of Jim & Bonnie Eastman and sister of Jenny Eastman; Elena & Ezequiel Romero—parents of Deb Uteley; Masako—mother of Fumi Nakayama; Nancy—mother of Gloria Zember; John—son of Mac & Marilyn MacCaughey; Chuck—husband of Sue Pehlivanian; Ramona, Steve, Susan, Sandra, John, Liz and Gabby—friends & family of the Galles; Meyer Schaal; Scott Mohn—friends of the Paffrath family.

Prayers for those in the service — Evan Humphreys, Col. Jay Brooke, Jared Smith, Jordan Smith, Nicholas Hansen.

Thank you for your continued prayers for everyone. They are powerful!



What's happening this week?

Sun., Mar. 22 nd	9:30 ^{AM} 10:40 ^{AM}	Fifth Sunday in Lent Worship Fellowship
Mon., Mar. 23 rd	9:00 ^{AM}	Staff Meeting via Zoom
Tues., Mar. 24 th	10:00 ^{AM}	Delivery for the Food Pantry
Wed., Mar. 25 th	4:00 ^{PM}	Food Pantry
Sun., Mar. 29 th	9:30 ^{AM} 10:40 ^{AM}	Palm Sunday Worship Fellowship



the good news is...

even Judas gets
his feet washed

Please join us in Ihrman Hall on
Mauddy Thursday—April 2nd at 5:30^{PM},
for this special service and light dinner.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

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John 8:2-11 (*Jesus refuses to condemn a woman caught in adultery*)

Matthew 23:23 (*“You have neglected the more important matters of the law— justice, mercy, and faithfulness.”*)

As we move toward Holy Week, we acknowledge the ways Jesus’ ministry was increasingly at odds with the religious leaders who prioritized loyalty to legality and perceived Jesus’ teachings as a threat. While Jesus is teaching in the temple, some scribes and Pharisees interrupt to put both him and a woman caught in adultery on trial. Their questioning intensifies as they cite Mosaic Law and put the woman’s fate in Jesus’ hands. Instead of focusing on punishment, Jesus flips the script and invites each person to consider their own sin; Jesus defuses the spectacle by condemning no one. Much of Jesus’ teachings were grounded in his understanding of the Torah; however, many of his actions called for reinterpreting the law. As we wrestle with our own rules, we should ask, “What is the most just, merciful, and faithful interpretation?”



Weekly good news mantra ...
I am rooted in what matters most



SUNDAY

Question:

Jesus tells the Pharisees that the most important part of the law is not simply following the rules, but enacting justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23). What does this interpretation teach you about our faith?

Prayer:

Reforming God, I can get fixated on following the rules. I can get fixated on purity. But instead of emphasizing retribution, you emphasize mercy. Instead of emphasizing religious perfection, you emphasize justice. Instead of emphasizing rigidity, you emphasize faithfulness. Help me to hear the truth in this message. Help me release the pressure to be perfect, and to trust that faithful effort in the direction of mercy, justice, and love is the call you place on my life. In all things, I hope to move closer to you. Amen.

MONDAY

Questions:

Have you ever been on the receiving end of someone's mercy? How did it impact you? How can you pay that forward?

Prayer:

Merciful God, I can think of times when someone extended grace to me—when I was met with understanding instead of judgment, compassion instead of criticism. That mercy stayed with me. It softened something in me. It taught me about your heart. As I move through this week, let that memory shape the way I treat others. Make me quick to offer mercy, generous in compassion, and willing to extend the same grace I have received. Amen.

TUESDAY

Question:

What rhythms and rituals help you cultivate a life of faithfulness?

Prayer:

Faithful God, you meet me in the small and steady rhythms of my days. You meet me in quiet moments, in simple prayers, and in the choices I make again and again. Teach me to notice the rituals that root me in your love. Help me lean into practices that make my heart softer, my spirit steadier, and my life more aligned with you. Shape my days so that faithfulness becomes the quiet pattern of my life. Amen.

WEDNESDAY

Questions:

We often think of justice on a macro scale.

Are there ways to practice justice through small, daily acts?

What comes to mind?

Prayer:

God of justice, you care about the small choices I make each day. You care about how I speak, how I listen, how I treat the people right in front of me. Show me where I can choose what is right and just in the ordinary moments of my life. Help me act with honesty, kindness, and courage, trusting that these simple choices matter. Let my daily living reflect the justice you desire. Amen.

THURSDAY

Questions:

When you think about justice, mercy, and faithfulness, which one feels hardest for you to live out?

Why might that be?

Prayer:

Gracious God, you know the places where my heart resists your way. Sometimes mercy feels costly, justice feels overwhelming, and faithfulness feels like slow work. Meet me gently in those places. Help me name the fears and habits that hold me back, and teach me to grow with patience instead of shame. Show me how to take one small step toward the life you're calling me to live. Amen.

FRIDAY

Questions:

What does it mean to you that Jesus protected someone others were ready to condemn? (John 8:2-11)

How might that shape the way you live today?

Prayer:

Jesus, you stood beside a woman when everyone else stepped back. You quieted the voices of accusation and made room for her to breathe again. Let that story transform me. When I am tempted to judge too quickly or overlook someone's dignity, slow me down. And when I am the one who feels surrounded by shame or accusation, remind me that you stand beside me too. Teach me to choose mercy even when it costs me something. Amen.

SATURDAY

Questions:

What area of your life feels complicated right now?

Could justice, faithfulness, or mercy help you find your way forward?

Prayer:

Holy God, you walk with me in the places where life feels uncertain. When my thoughts are tangled or the path ahead feels unclear, steady my spirit. Anchor me in the things that matter most to you—justice that restores, mercy that softens, and faithfulness that keeps me near your heart. Lead me in your way, so that my choices bear witness to your love. Amen.



Epilogue | T. Denise Anderson
Acrylic on canvas



There Is Goodness | Hannah Garrity

Hand-dyed and collaged newspaper with lace overlay