

MARCH NEWS



HOLY WEEK

JOURNEY WITH US!

PALM SUNDAY *March 29* Children's Palm Processional at all services.

EASTER EGG HUNT *March 29 at Noon*
In Gloria Garden
Join us in Gloria Garden for lunch and activities for all ages. Bring a friend!

MAUNDY THURSDAY *April 2 at 7pm*
In the Sanctuary

GOOD FRIDAY *April 3 at 5-6:30pm*
(come & go)

EASTER SUNDAY *April 5*

Sunrise Service 6:30am

Traditional 8:30am & 11am

Contemporary 9am & 11am

Foundry 9am

CHILDCARE PROVIDED *All Worship Services!* Infants thru Age 4

STATE OF THE CHURCH

As your Senior Pastor, my heart is full of gratitude for all God has done through First Methodist Monroe in 2025. Our mission—Becoming People of Christ—is not a slogan on a wall, but the lens through which we celebrate every growth, every service, and every life touched this past year through the message of Jesus Christ. Below is a brief review of 2025, with each milestone connected to how it helps us live out our mission.

MISSION STATEMENT AND MEANING

Becoming People of Christ calls us to grow in faith, love our neighbors, and make disciples who reflect Jesus in word and deed. Every increase in attendance, every baptism, every outreach event, and every volunteer hour is evidence that we are moving together toward our mission.

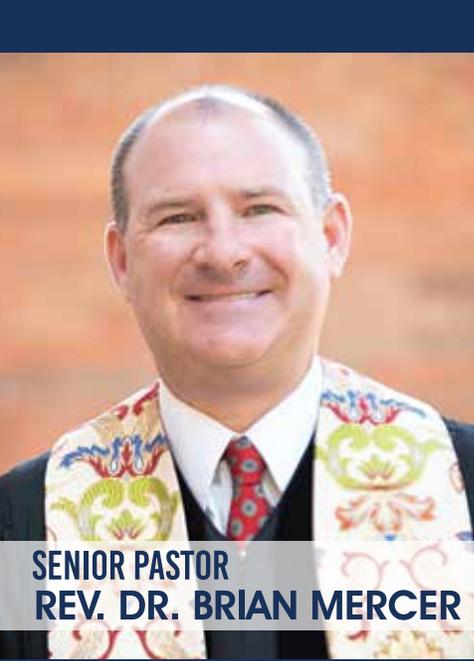
GROWTH AND HEALTH

- Worship attendance grew from 665 (2024) to 775 (2025), showing more people are gathering to encounter Christ—central to Becoming People of Christ.
- We launched a new campus in Sterlington, Foundry—A Campus of First Methodist Monroe—expanding our ability to form disciples and connect neighbors to Jesus.
- The church finished the year with a financial surplus, enabling strategic investments that sustain discipleship, care, and mission.
- We celebrated 20+ baptisms and professions of faith—clear signs of lives being transformed into the likeness of Christ.
- Our Broadcast Ministry now reaches 10,000 households weekly.

WORSHIP CULTURE

We offer two distinct styles of worship, each seeking to bring our very best to the altar of the Lord. Our worship culture and quality continue to deepen encounters with God and invite new people into worship.

- A growing contemporary worship team—expanding in number and deepening in faith.
- Hosting the Monroe Symphony, meaningful Holy Week and Easter services, our 4th of July celebration, and Christmas services, created spaces for people to experience Christ together.
- A growing music ministry—two new choir members, new bell choir members, and many guest soloists—has strengthened our ability to lead others in worship and praise.



**SENIOR PASTOR
REV. DR. BRIAN MERCER**

**PastorBrian@
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM**

**JOYOUSLY CELEBRATING
ALL THAT GOD IS DOING,**

Pastor Brian

CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND THE NEXT GENERATION

Investing in children, youth, and families is investing in the future of discipleship.

- 395 children attended VBS, and increased weekly participation reflects a congregation committed to raising the next generation of Christ-followers.
- Dedicated volunteers poured into the lives of children, and facility updates made our spaces safer and more welcoming practical expressions of our mission.
- A youth ministry approach has engaged faithful volunteer leaders and a strong staff team to meet the needs of a growing youth ministry.

OUTREACH, CARE, AND MISSIONS

Serving others is how we show Christ to our community and the world.

- Ministry of H.O.P.E. now includes 60+ members serving communion, delivering gifts, providing rides, visiting hospitals, and sending cards—tangible acts of Christlike care.
- Devotional communion services at Gardens of Somerset, Azalea Estates, and St. Joseph's Assisted Living bring presence and prayer to those who need it most.
- Adult Vacation Bible School engaged 100+ participants and raised \$6,018 along with medical supplies for our Guatemala mission trip—linking worship, learning, and sacrificial giving.
- Bayou events such as Bluegrass on the Bayou, the 4th of July on the Bayou, and a new Christmas Eve service on the Bayou continue to open doors for relationship and witness.
- We hosted our first Men's Summit, where 70+ men gathered to engage with the Lord.

TEAM, VOLUNTEERS, AND LIFE TOGETHER

Our people are the living proof of our mission in action.

- A growing and spiritually maturing volunteer base across worship, children's ministry, hospitality, and care ministries demonstrates how discipleship produces service.
- New members in the bell choir, guest soloists, and countless volunteers created moments of laughter, fellowship, and Christ-centered community.

LOOKING AHEAD

Because we are Becoming People of Christ, our plans for 2026 focus on deepening discipleship, expanding outreach through Foundry and local events, investing in young adults and young families through our new Minister to Young Adults and Young Families (see the next page), and continuing to strengthen worship and care ministries that draw people into relationship with Jesus. Thank you for your faithful giving, time, and prayers—each contribution helps shape a church that reflects Christ to Monroe and beyond.



We are excited to introduce Nathan and Anna Grace McClain to our church family. Nathan will be serving as our new Minister to Young Adults and Young Families.

Nathan grew up in Sterlington, and Anna Grace is from Ruston. Both are graduates of Louisiana Tech — Nathan earned a degree in Construction Engineering Technology, and Anna Grace earned a degree in Nursing.

They were married in September 2022 and later moved to Fort Worth, Texas. During their time there, Nathan worked for a commercial real estate developer, while Anna Grace worked in labor and delivery and completed her Nurse Practitioner degree. They are joyfully expecting their first child, a baby boy named Shepherd Gray, in May.

Over the past several months, Nathan has been discerning a call to ministry and feels led to First Methodist Monroe, specifically to serve young adults. He has a heart for teaching what it means to love God and how we are called to live that out in our daily lives.

If you are between the ages of 18–40 — or know someone who is — please share Nathan’s contact information with them. He would love to connect and begin building relationships.

NATHAN MCCLAIN | MINISTER TO YOUNG ADULTS & YOUNG FAMILIES | NATHAN@FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM | 318-325-7335

By the time you receive this newsletter, the season of Lent will be in full swing. Lent is one of the most meaningful journeys of the Christian year—a forty-day path of reflection, repentance, and renewal. It invites us to slow down, take inventory of our hearts, and draw nearer to the God who calls each of us into deeper relationship with Him.

Lent is not simply a season of giving things up; it is a season of making room—room for prayer, room for Scripture, room for silence, and room for God’s voice to speak into places we may have neglected or avoided. It is a time to allow the Holy Spirit to gently reveal what is broken so that Christ might restore it.

The forty days of Lent mirror Jesus’ own forty days in the wilderness, when He experienced temptation, hunger, and the heaviness of life. Our hope during this season is that we allow God to shape us, strengthen our faith, and prepare our hearts for the meaning and celebration of Easter.

Even if you have not given up anything during the last couple of weeks, consider choosing a spiritual discipline to guide your journey—fasting, daily Scripture reading, acts of compassion, or simply creating space to listen for God’s voice. Small habits, practiced faithfully, can open the door to profound spiritual growth.

Here are a few practical ideas to help you observe this season:

Read: Before dinner, light a candle, read a short Scripture passage (such as Psalm 51:10–12), offer a brief prayer of confession, and pray for a neighbor or someone in need.

Mercy Jar: As a family, collect spare change or set aside money from items you may be fasting from and donate it to a local ministry.

Screen Sabbath: Choose one or two evenings each week to turn off screens. Read Scripture, sing a hymn, pray together, or simply talk and reflect.

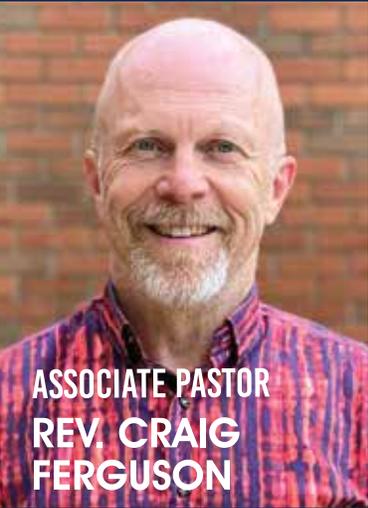
Lent ultimately points us toward the cross—and beyond it, to the empty tomb. It reminds us that whatever feels broken, lost, or heavy is held in the hands of our Savior. May this season draw us deeper into the love of Christ and prepare our hearts to celebrate the victory of Easter with renewed joy.



EXECUTIVE PASTOR
REV. JOHN O’LEARY

John@FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

**MAKING
ROOM
THIS LENT**



ASSOCIATE PASTOR
REV. CRAIG
FERGUSON

Craig@
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM



ASK PASTOR CRAIG!

Welcome to our new column, a place where your real questions meet honest, biblical answers for everyday faith.

Question: What should I make of recent findings about the Shroud of Turin? Does it prove the Resurrection?

Easter's coming, and this year there's fresh buzz about the Shroud of Turin: that 14-foot linen cloth in Italy bearing the image of a crucified man. What's different now is that some scholars who previously dismissed it as a medieval forgery are reconsidering. When skeptics start hedging, it gets interesting.

The 1988 radiocarbon test dated the cloth to 1260-1390 AD, seemingly settling the matter. But recent studies suggest that sample may have been contaminated or came from a medieval repair patch. Meanwhile, forensic pathologists note the

image shows medically accurate crucifixion details: scourge marks, nail placement through the wrists (not palms, as medieval art depicted), blood flow patterns consistent with hanging on a cross. The weave matches first-century Syrian textiles. And nobody can explain how the image was created. There's no pigment. It's like a photographic negative burned into fabric, which is odd considering photography didn't exist in the Middle Ages.

So former skeptics are asking: If it's a forgery, it's extraordinarily sophisticated.

But here's the crucial question: What does this mean for Easter?

Even if the Shroud wrapped Jesus' body, it wouldn't prove the Resurrection. It would prove a body was there. The Resurrection isn't about what stayed in the tomb; it's about what walked out. The real evidence isn't a cloth. It's what happened next. Terrified disciples became fearless. A movement that should've died with its leader exploded across the Roman Empire. People chose torture over recanting what they'd seen.

Still, evidence matters. Christianity makes historical claims about a real person who died under Pontius Pilate. Paul said, "We saw him. Ask the five hundred witnesses; most are still alive" (1 Corinthians 15:6).

The Shroud engages this tension between faith and evidence. It says, "Investigate. Look closely. God isn't threatened by your questions."

Whether the Shroud is authentic doesn't determine whether Easter is true. Peter and John didn't travel Judea with burial cloths saying, "See? Proof!" They proclaimed a living Christ they'd encountered personally.

This Easter, explore the evidence if it helps. But don't miss the Risen Christ while examining the burial clothes he left behind.

If you have a question you would like your pastors to address, email it to me at Craig@firstmethodistmonroe.com

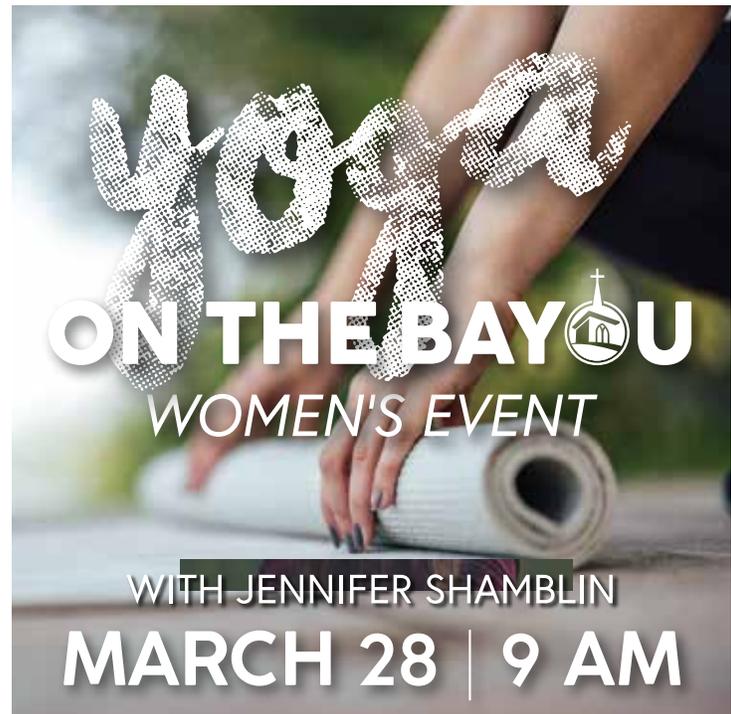


SUNDAY
MARCH 15
NOON
GARDEN ROOM

If you are new to First Methodist Monroe and would like to meet some other new folks we would love for you to join us. Contact Emily Martin to RSVP. Emily@firstmethodistmonroe.com

Text "LUNCH" to 318-217-8383

or call the church office 318-325-7335 to reserve your spot.
Childcare available upon request.



ON THE BAY U
WOMEN'S EVENT

WITH JENNIFER SHAMBLIN
MARCH 28 | 9 AM

50+ ADULTS

LENT IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN

*"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me."
Psalm 51:10*

As I've aged, I've come to realize that biblical practices (fasting, Scripture memorization, prayer, Sabbath, solitude) are more crucial for transformation than mere information. While information—learning new things about God—is important, the Bible demonstrates God shaping people through wilderness experiences and spiritual practices.

Lent, a significant season for Christians, allows us to give something up, symbolizing our entry into the wilderness with Jesus. The purpose isn't just to feel the absence but to be molded into something new—the image of Jesus—through addition rather than subtraction.

Want to give it a try? Enhance your Lenten experience with these practices:

1. Commit to regular morning or evening prayer.
2. Reflect on how the Spirit is convicting you of sin and opening your eyes to your need for repentance.
3. Spend Holy Week fasting and focusing on Jesus.
4. If you are already fasting, consider how denying yourself in this way adds to your life, such as by using newfound energy for positive activities, engaging in meaningful conversations, cultivating family time, or immersing yourself in community.

May these Lenten practices help in "Becoming People of Christ"!



50+ ADULT MINISTRIES
NANNETTE FLOWERS

NFlowers@
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

50+ Adult Happenings at the church

50+ ADULT FALL RISK & SAFETY WORKSHOP - Wednesday, March 4 | 11:00 AM | Fellowship Hall.

Join us for a helpful workshop presented by a Physical Therapist. Learn practical ways to prevent falls and discover simple at-home exercises to improve your balance, strength, and stamina. Please RSVP to reserve your spot! Nannette Flowers: nflowers@firstmethodistmonroe.com

50+ Adult Happenings outside the church

HOLLAND & BELGIUM SPRINGTIME RIVER CRUISE - April 20-28, 2027

Savor the enchantment of spring in Holland and Belgium on an elegant river cruise curated around blooming tulip fields, iconic windmills, and Europe's most romantic cities. Glide through Amsterdam on a private canal cruise, taking in the refined beauty of its historic center. In Arnhem, uncover a rich tapestry of culture and heritage before stepping into the medieval splendor of Bruges on a guided walk through its timeless streets. Stand in awe before the legendary windmills of Kinderdijk, proudly silhouetted against the Dutch sky. Delight in the breathtaking artistry of Keukenhof Gardens, where more than seven million tulips create a dazzling symphony of color. Throughout your journey, relax in luxurious comfort as serene waterways and picturesque landscapes unfold in effortless style—an unforgettable springtime experience in beloved destinations like Amsterdam and Bruges.



HOLLAND & BELGIUM SPRINGTIME RIVER CRUISE: SLIDE PRESENTATION - Monday, March 16 | 5:30 PM | Classroom #6

This special gathering is open to members, family, and friends who are interested in this faith-based church river cruise. Come learn more about the itinerary, travel details, and what makes this springtime journey so meaningful and memorable. For more information or to register online, visit: <https://gateway.gocollette.com/link/1329277>



VALENTINE'S DAY LUNCHEON FOR WIDOWS & WIDOWERS



RISE YOUTH MINISTRY (6TH -12TH GRADE)

As we prepare for the arrival of Easter and celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior through the season of Lent, I am reminded of the provision of God. In a world so full of darkness, there is still joy and peace that the Lord provides. Philippians 4:7 says "Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." The "then" in Philippians 4:7 refers directly to the instruction in Philippians 4:6, where we are reminded not to worry about anything, but instead to pray about everything. Then we reap the beautiful benefit of God's peace. During this season of prayer and fasting, may we remember that we do not have to carry worry. Through prayer, we can experience the peace of God that guards our hearts and minds.

I love that Lent always follows the month we celebrate love — how fitting that as we reflect on Christ's sacrifice, we are reminded of the greatest love of all.

- SAVE THE DATE** CONFIRMATION SUNDAY – April 26
- YOUTH STOCK SALE & SENIOR SUNDAY – May 3
- ONE WAY CAMPS:
 - Middle School (Grades 7-9) – June 8-12
 - High School (Grades 9-12) – June 15-19



INTERIM YOUTH DIRECTOR
MACKENZIE MILLER



KINGDOM KIDS MINISTRY (K-5TH GRADE)

At the time I am writing this, we are just days away from Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the Lenten season. As I've prepared my own heart for this time, I've found myself thinking back to my years as a student in a Catholic high school, when classmates would often talk about what they were "giving up" for Lent.

In the Methodist church where I was raised, we didn't focus as much on giving something up. Instead, I remember concentrating on Jesus' journey to the cross and what that sacrifice meant for me. As we enter this Lenten season, I am once again choosing to focus on what Jesus' journey continues to mean for me and to me.

Through Sunday School and Kids' Church, your child will gain a deeper understanding of what the Lenten season is and how we can prepare our hearts for what is to come. As you continue these conversations at home, I encourage you to use the Lenten activity calendar that was sent to you. It includes simple activities and meaningful talking points to help your family prepare your hearts during this sacred season.

I look forward to walking through this beautiful season with you and your family.



CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES
JACKIE KITCHINGHAM

Jackie@
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

EASTER EGG HUNT!
MARCH 29
AT NOON

EASTER EGGS & CANDY

We need eggs & candy/goodies
(no chocolate, nuts or peanut butter, please)
Drop-off locations will be at the main entrances.



40 DAYS OF LENT



<p>Read about kindness to others Luke 10:25-37</p> 	<p>Help with chores around the house</p>	<p>Have a family prayer night</p>	<p>Tell someone "Thank you!"</p>	<p>Bake a treat to share with someone</p> 	<p>Read about repentance Luke 18:9-14</p>	<p>Share with someone</p>
<p>Pick up your stuff without being asked</p>	<p>Read about Jesus entering Jerusalem Mark 11:1-10</p> 	<p>Give someone a compliment</p>	<p>Sing church worship songs</p>	<p>Read the Great Commandment Matthew 22:34-40</p>	<p>Hold the door for someone</p> 	<p>Set the table</p>
<p>Surprise someone with your artwork</p>	<p>Pick up litter on the ground</p>	<p>Read about helping others Matthew 25:31-40</p>	<p>Donate toys or clothes to help others</p> 	<p>Pray for those who need help</p>	<p>Help make dinner</p>	<p>Read sacrifice for Jesus Matthew 16:24-28</p>
<p>Give up tv or video games today</p> 	<p>Read about forgiveness Matthew 18:21-35</p>	<p>Ask God for forgiveness</p>	<p>Say hello to someone who looks lonely</p>	<p>Read about serving others John 13:1-17</p>	<p>Make a card for someone</p> 	<p>Give someone special a hug</p>
<p>No complaining today!</p>	<p>Play a game with family or friends</p>	<p>Read about prayer Mark 14:32-42</p> 	<p>Pray for someone to know Jesus</p>	<p>Give up sweets and treats today</p>	<p>Read about committing to God Psalm 51:10</p>	<p>Smile at people you see today</p>
<p>Tell someone why they're special to you</p>	<p>Forgive someone who hurt your feelings</p>	<p>Write a list of things you're grateful for</p>	<p>Thank God for sending Jesus!</p>	<p>Read about God's Love for us John 3:16</p>		

WELCOME 2026 NEW MEMBERS!



AMBER COONS



SUZONNE EVANS



BRIAN BARBER



THE HINTON FAMILY



THE TONEY FAMILY



DYLAN SCHILLAGE



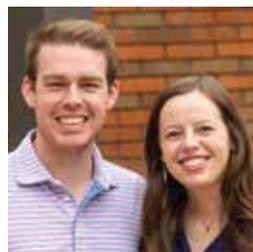
BARBARA ANN HOLLADAY



REGGIE & VIRGINIA ILGENFRITZ



JOHN & BETSY GARRETT



NATHAN & ANNA GRACE MCCLAIN



DR. TOM AND KIM LOLLEY



JEAN SHAW

REPORTING OUR FAITHFULNESS

01/04/26

EPIPHANY SUNDAY

Here 800

Online 1193

TV Area Wide

WE GAVE

\$56,428

01/11/26

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Here 801

Online 1054

TV Area Wide

WE GAVE

\$35,912

01/18/26

2ND SUN AFTER EPIPHANY

Here 724

Online 1592

TV Area Wide

WE GAVE

\$66,138

01/25/26

3RD SUN AFTER EPIPHANY

Here 0 (ICE STORM)

Online 1125

TV Area Wide

ONLINE GIVING

\$62,182

TEXT "GIVE" TO

318.217.8383

MEMORIALS & HONORARIUMS

In memory of Bill Kelly given by David & Becky Stith

In honor of our 20 Aldersgate Teachers in 2025 given by Aldersgate Sunday School Class

In memory of Claudette Bartlett given by Janet & Jim Bean

In honor of Karen LeBeau for her kindness and concern given by Patricia Thompson

In memory of Sue LaBorde given by Aldersgate Class

In memory of Sue LaBorde given by Nancy Meinel

In memory of Sue LaBorde given by Ann Bellue

In memory of Mother of Nancy Sutton Mary Jo Newell given by Nancy Meinel

In memory of Bill Kelly given by Ann & Paul Farr

In memory of Rev. Stone Caraway given by Paul & Ann Farr

In memory of Flip Spooner given by Paul & Ann Farr

In memory of Nike Anderson given by Paul & Ann Farr

In memory of Claudette Bartlett given by Paul & Ann Farr

In memory of Carolyn Thomson Patterson given by Sue Butler

In memory of Sue Laborde given by David & Debbie McLemore

MARCH 2026

4 50+ ADULT FALL RISK/SAFETY
11AM

8 DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME
SPRING FORWARD

11 50+ ADULT BRIDGE - 1PM

12 -14
CHARIS MEN'S RETREAT
AT CAMP CANEY



15 NEWCOMERS LUNCH - NOON
MAKE A RESERVATION BY
TEXTING "LUNCH" TO
318-217-8383

15 FOUNDRY POKENO NIGHT - 5PM

16 SLIDE PRESENTATION - 5:30PM
FOR HOLLAND & BELGIUM
SPRINGTIME RIVER CRUISE

17 FMW CIRCLE 2 - 11:30AM

28 HOLY YOGA ON THE BAYOU - 9AM

29 PALM SUNDAY

29 EASTER EGG HUNT
& LUNCH - NOON

50+ ADULT BE FIT AT 10AM
MON., MARCH 2, 9, 16, 23, 30
WED., MARCH 4, 11, 18, 25

J-FORCE - 3:15-5:15pm
WEDS., MARCH 4, 11, 18, 25

MEN'S & WOMEN'S
BIBLE STUDIES 10AM
TUES., MARCH 3, 10, 17, 24, 31

WED. SUPPER & STUDY 5-7pm
WED., MARCH 4, 11, 18, 25

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WALKING IN THE WILDERNESS

LENTEN SERMON SERIES

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