



First Presbyterian Church of New Philadelphia

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Rev. Joseph Svancara, Pastor

Sunday Worship Service

March 15, 2026

*All who are able, please stand.

Announcements & Prayer Concerns

Session will meet this Tuesday (March 17) at 7pm.

Bible Study will be this Wednesday (March 18) at 10am.

AA will meet this Wednesday (March 18) at 8pm.

Our Sunday Morning Study Group will be meeting next Sunday (March 22) at 9:15am.

The Tables of Eight dinner group will be meeting March 28 at 6pm. The cost is \$10 per person, and RSVP can be given to the church office or to Carolyn Berry.

During the Lenten season we are taking up a special collection for the PCUSA. The One Great Hours of Sharing benefits the development ministries of the denomination.

Donation envelopes and information are available on the mission table.

Order forms are available for Easter tulips! Simply fill out the form and drop in the offering plate with your payment, or turn into the church office.

Opening Prayer

LORD, our Creator, you give sight to the blind and wisdom to the ignorant, you restore our souls by means that bring about great joy. Help us to appreciate what it means to have your light, and understand how quickly it is coming into this world. **Amen.**

Prelude *Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us with He Leadeth Me* **Arr. C Berry**

***Call to Worship (Psalm 23)**

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.

The LORD makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.

You restore my soul, O LORD, and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Hymn #278 *Our God, to Whom We Turn

Our God, to whom we turn
When weary with illusion,
Whose stars serenely burn
Above this earth's confusion,
Thine is the mighty plan,
The steadfast order sure,
In which the world began,
Endures, and shall endure.

Thou art Thyself the truth;
Though we, who fain would find Thee,
Have tried, with thoughts uncouth,
In feeble words to bind Thee,
It is because Thou art
We've driven to the quest;
Till truth from falsehood part,
Our souls can find no rest.

All beauty speaks of Thee:
The mountains and the rivers,
The line of lifted sea,
Where spreading moonlight quivers,
The deep toned organ blast
That rolls through arches dim,
Hints of the music vast
Of Thine eternal hymn.

Thou hidden fount of love,
Of peace, and truth, and beauty,
Inspire us from above
With joy and strength for duty;

May Thy fresh light arise
Within each clouded heart,
And give us open eyes
To see Thee as Thou art.

***Prayer of Confession**

We strive to do what is right, and understand what is beneficial, but are blinded by the distractions and superficialities of the world:

LORD, our Creator, we look at a world that sometimes acts so mindlessly and ignorant of what is right. But then we look at ourselves and see we are not too far off, going after distractions and misinformation which take us away from our true goal. We ask your restoration, your healing, your illumination to know where you are and how you make us whole. Amen.

***Silent Confessions and Prayers**

***Assurance of Forgiveness**

Even when the darkness seems to surround us the light of the world breaks through to offer guidance, help, and safety.

Now that we have met Jesus, let us no longer conform to the knowledge of this world. Instead, let us bestow and live what we now know to be true!

Hymn #579 *Gloria Patri

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
World without end. Amen. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

Reading of the Scriptures

All Scripture lessons come from the Revised Common Lectionary. Prescribed lessons are underlined, with pastoral inserts to preserve the integrity of the passage.

Hear the Word of the Lord:

1 Samuel 16:1-23

16 ¹ The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ² Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.'" ³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." ⁴ Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵ He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. ⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." ⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ¹⁰ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." ¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." ¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah. ¹⁴ Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. ¹⁵ And Saul's servants said to him, "See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. ¹⁶ Let our lord now command the servants who attend you to look for someone who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better." ¹⁷ So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me." ¹⁸ One of the young men answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him." ¹⁹ So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, "Send me your son David who is with the sheep." ²⁰ Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them by his son David to Saul. ²¹ And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. ²² Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight." ²³ And whenever the evil spirit

from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

Ephesians 4:17-5:20

4¹⁷ Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds.¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart.¹⁹ They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.²⁰ That is not the way you learned Christ!²¹ For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus.²² You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts,²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,²⁴ and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.²⁵ So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.²⁶ Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,²⁷ and do not make room for the devil.²⁸ Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.²⁹ Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.³¹ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice,³² and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

5¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children,² and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.³ But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints.⁴ Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving.⁵ Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient.⁷ Therefore do not be associated with them.⁸ For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly;¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible,¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”¹⁵ Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise,¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil.¹⁷ So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.¹⁸ Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit,¹⁹ as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts,²⁰ giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

John 9:1-41

9 ¹ As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." ¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." ¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." ²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man

were not from God, he could do nothing.”³⁴ They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.³⁹ Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?”⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Sermon *The Fourth Sunday of Lent*

Part of what it means to ‘see’, to claim that Jesus has healed us of our blindness, is that the obstacles to knowing what is true and right have been removed. In the story of Jesus healing a blind man the Son of God uses literal blindness to describe a reality that plagues all people: that humans get so caught up in their ways, in their particular way of doing things, that they are distracted from what life is about. The rules, policies, institutions are so tantalizing because they offer a type of security, community, and safety unlike anything we have ever been a part of. But there is also the risk they become idols in of themselves, and we mistake their control for the power of God.

That is why Jesus alludes to the blindness of the Pharisees, their inability to understand the meaning of divine instruction apart from their interpretation of it. They could not, and possibly did not want, to move past what they knew to be true because it presented a disruption to what made them secure. They were comfortable with a poor blind person stumbling around the narrow streets of the holy city based on the presumption that he HAD to have been sinful to be like that. Jesus does not just cure the literal blindness of the man but challenges the blindness of heart had by those who supposedly represented the LORD. Many might grapple with the idea of why this blind man suffered, Jesus asks the many involved why they allowed the suffering to continue needlessly. They were supposed to be his teachers, family, and community but were too obsessed with a certain system to notice.

St. Paul also points out that idea of spiritual blindness as he speaks to the church in Ephesus. We notice that he uses a certain classification of sin (namely sexual), and which many in modern times jump on to prove some point or another. While St. Paul does address some practices within the historical Gentile world of the time, he sees them more of a symptom than the real cause of why people have done what they have. Fornication, lust, vulgarity, and every other act mentioned is a human attempt to find meaning and security amid insecurity and doubt. But it is the revelation of the LORD, the person of Jesus Christ, who shines light to illumine all situations. His words, teachings, and actions break through the insecurity of our lives so we might

understand what, and who, have been keeping us in the dark. It is an empowerment which the divine gives us to get up and stand with confidence, knowing there is one alone who knows what we need and brings the resources necessary that we might have peace.

That journey is also embodied within the prophet Samuel's journey to find and anoint the new king of Israel, after the LORD disqualified the ruling king, Saul, due to his disobedience and failures to uphold the covenant. Samuel thought the new king would embody strength, resilience, and be the commanding force the army would need. But the LORD instead showed him a young shepherd boy, a poet and musician, saying this is what the LORD's people needed to live and understand his ways. Thus setting up David, whose prayers and songs we still use now, as a teacher to inspire the people within historical uncertainty who they could be by the LORD's leading. And that renewed illumination did not banish or condemn anyone, seen by the fact that David enters into Saul's service and eases his anxieties and fears with his songs. Illumination and understanding always flow toward those who need it the most!

As the journey of Lent starts to come to a close, and lead up to commemorating the Passion of Christ, we are left with an anticipation of what Jesus shows us within this next act. His presence challenges presumptive powers, aids us in looking past the propaganda of our times in all forms, and places truth and understanding within our grasp. Jesus willingly took this journey to give us something by which we can build our hopes on and live in security. To pull us from distraction and worry into what is real and achievable in our midst.

Prayers of the People

Let us remember in prayer:

Mary Ellen Beans, Terry Carpenter, Fritz Chambers, Michelle Chamberlain, Mary Jane Dougherty, Don Eberheart Jr., Allison Folly, Kay France, Jamie Frank, Judy Hass, Alice & Errol Jacobs, Victoria Kasten, Amber Loftis, Will Long, Tom Netting, Ruth Patrick, Bob Pierre, Mark Preusser, Stefani Seth, Josh Shaeffer, Dane & Cindy Smith, Derrick & Mandy Smith, Dean & Heidi Unzicker, Simone Villarruel, Holly Waldenmyer, The Friends of the Homeless of Tuscarawas County & The Homeless of Tuscarawas County.

LORD, our Creator, we give you thanks for the opportunity to sit under your word and with your community. Your holy instruction, your law, was bestowed to the people to teach them love and mercy and to be a light to the nations. There are times we get caught up in the particulars of that instruction, assume what you want, and what we think will make for a better world. But we acknowledge that your law deals with us first and foremost, changing our hearts, attitudes, and priorities so we will desire your mercy, love, and justice. For the times we use your law to label others or drive them away, we ask forgiveness. Help us resist the temptation to assume how you view

others and simply accept them as they are- creatures in need of your mercy and your creative order.

We call upon that mercy and order, that understanding, for all the situations we face as a Church, a nation, and community of believers...*Reading of the Prayer List*...LORD, in your loving mercy, hear our prayer.

Moment of Silence

We crave certainty and security, and you bring all these to us in Jesus Christ. As promised in the prayer you have gifted:

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.

Offering our Gifts

Just as the LORD gives his illumination and enlightenment to us, we have the chance to give again by our gifts and service.

Offertory *Abide with Me* *Arr. J Matthews*

Hymn #592 *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 Dedication**

LORD, our Creator, what we offer and gift to your Church is an imitation of your love and commitment to the betterment of creation. May all we give aid in educating others and letting them experience all the good things you provide. **Amen.**

Hymn #277 *O God, Our Faithful God

O God, our faithful God,
O fountain ever flowing,
Without whom nothing is,
All perfect gifts bestowing:
Give us a faithful life,
And give us, Lord, within,

Commitment free from strife,
A soul unhurt by sin.

God, grant us strength to do
With ready heart and willing
Whatever you command,
Our calling here fulfilling;
And do it when we ought,
With zeal and joyfulness;
And bless the work we've wrought,
For You must give success.

If dangers gather round,
Still keep us calm and fearless;
Help us to bear the cross
When life seems dark and cheerless,
To overcome our foes
With words and actions kind;
O God, Your will disclose,
Your counsel let us find.

***Benediction**

Hear now, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind; you will love your neighbor as yourself.

With the gospel of Jesus Christ guiding you, go into the world to live this sole purpose.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

***Postlude Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing Arr. J Carter**

Be blessed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ wherever you may go!

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