



First Presbyterian Church of New Philadelphia

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Rev. Joseph Svancara, Pastor

Sunday Worship Service

March 30, 2025

*All who are able, please stand.

Announcements & Prayer Concerns

Bible Study will be this Wednesday (April 2) at 10am.

AA will meet this Wednesday (April 2) at 8pm.

Our Sunday Morning Study Group will meet on Sunday (April 6) at 9:15am. We will be covering Chapter 4 "Foxy's Book of Martyrs". See Rev. Joe if you wish to attend!

Next Sunday (April 6) is our monthly church brunch! Join us for good food and fellowship!

During the season of Lent, consider donating toward the PCUSA's "One Great Hour of Sharing"- to benefit the denomination's hunger, disaster, and development ministries.

Donation envelopes and literature are available on the back mission table.

Remember to order your Easter tulips this year! Cost is \$8 per tulip, and order forms are available in your bulletins. Simply fill out and drop in the offering plate, or call the church office. Accepting orders through April 13.

Opening Prayer

LORD, our Father, by your power we are forgiven of our sins and filled with your grace. Help us realize today the depth of your grace and power, and how vast your love can be in all our struggles. **Amen.**

Prelude *Just As I Am, Without One Plea* arr. Southbridge

***Call to Worship (Psalm 32)**

Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away!

Happy are they to whom the LORD imputes no guilt, and in whose spirit there is no guile!

While I held my tongue, my bones withered away, because of my groaning all day long.

**For your hand was heavy upon me day and night; my moisture was dried up as
in the heat of summer.**

Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not conceal my guilt. I said, "I will confess
my transgressions to the LORD." Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.

**Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble; when
the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.**

You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts
of deliverance.

**"I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; I will guide you
with my eye. Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding; who
must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not stay near you."**

Great are the tribulations of the wicked; but mercy embraces those who trust in the
LORD.

**Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD; shout for joy, all who are true of
heart.**

Hymn #277 *O God, Our Faithful God

O God, our faithful God,
O fountain ever flowing,
Without whom nothing is,
All perfect gifts bestowing,
Grant 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,
What ever 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 is bleak and cheerless,
To overcome our foes
With words and actions kind;
O God, Your will disclose,
Your counsel let us find.

***Prayer of Confession**

Sometimes our disobedience is not because of purely evil actions, but mistakes and misunderstandings when we neglect allowing the LORD to guide us:

LORD, our Father, you desire to provide a place where we might live, be accepted, and guided in all we do. But in our naivety, we wander away and become enamored of things which make no sense. Forgive us our distracted minds and thank you for the grace which covers all and reminds of your eternal presence with us. Amen.

***Silent Confessions and Prayers**

***Assurance of Forgiveness**

The LORD promises to teach and instruct in the way we should go. And because of Jesus Christ our sin is put away and our transgressions held against us no more!

By our willingness to trust we know mercy. Let us accept the depth of that mercy for all we do.

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:

Joshua 5:1-12

5 ¹ When all the kings of the Amorites beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the Israelites until they had crossed over, their hearts melted, and there was no longer any spirit in them, because of the Israelites. ² At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites a second time." ³ So Joshua made flint knives, and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath-haaraloth. ⁴ This is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the warriors, had died during the journey through the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt. ⁵ Although all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people born on the journey through the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. ⁶ For the Israelites traveled forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the warriors who came out of Egypt, perished, not having listened to the voice of the Lord. To them the Lord swore that he would not let them see the land that he had sworn to their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁷ So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way. ⁸ When the circumcising of all the nation was done, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. ⁹ The Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal to this day. ¹⁰ While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹² The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

2 Corinthians 5:11-6:13

5 ¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. ¹² We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. ¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. ¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:

everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. **6** ¹ As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³ We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷ truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. ¹¹ We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. ¹² There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. ¹³ In return—I speak as to children—open wide your hearts also.

Luke 15:1-32

15 ¹ Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?" ⁵ When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. ⁸ Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?" ⁹ When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." ¹¹ Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his

fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ' ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. ²⁵ Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' ³¹ Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.' "

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

Sermon *The Fourth Sunday of Lent*

Jesus going to the cross represents the way by which those who seek the divine are to know the love and grace of the LORD. The church speaks about love and grace all the time to people, proclaiming how open and free it is to anyone no matter what their past might be. Because every person has a past, has actions and thoughts which are not in harmony with the LORD, and are in need of assurance they are not alone and abandoned because of them. The LORD is a judge and teacher who declares a particular way for his people, and holds his people accountable, but also makes his way so personable to each of his creations so it can be within their grasp. The LORD visits an intimate salvation so we can know who we are apart from the world. And remind us always where we have come from and how to go forward in the best manner possible.

It may seem like a step backward to speak about such human rituals like circumcision in Joshua 5:1-12. How can cutting and marking the flesh make one more in tune with the LORD, and a better follower? Living under the renewed covenant of Christ we have the hindsight of questioning such practices knowing that divine grace is not dependent

on human efforts. But there was a time in the LORD's history where circumcision played a bigger role for the people. History also shows us that circumcision was not unique to that time or to the Israelite people. It was practiced by many people groups for many different reasons, and archeologically speaking the Egyptians were the first to ritualize this practice. Yet in those instances it was meant as a mark of initiation, a sign of status and nobility, and marked certain people out from the rest in terms of devotion and worship. The LORD ordered, first through Abraham, that ALL males among the people undergo this ritual. This was the LORD marking everyone regardless of their wealth or status in the nation, and a sign to every household through their clan head that they were different. To receive such an intimate mark signals that every part of life is governed by the creator, and life itself comes from his decision. One does not have to worry about how they might live up to those divine expectations, it will happen because the LORD signals he is with them.

The reason we see such signs of devotion of less importance now is because of the human tendency to take grace-filled signs and make them subservient to human demands. Circumcision soon became synonymous with the Israelites, and with Jews, and because an uncontested symbol of national identity. But if it fails to remind people of their true devotion and loyalty, and fails to stir them toward better behavior, does it serve any use? That is what St. Paul teaches the people when Jewish-background believers attempted to enforce circumcision onto Gentile believers and place a barrier of entry around the church. In 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:11 St. Paul urges the fellowship not to see the grace of Christ as just another teaching handed down by those who claim excellence or special status. Not just to see Christ as another teacher giving another interpretation to the people, but as a source of knowing and understanding what the LORD wants. It is there to define and make grace known through all actions and has no limitations. But the people must work together in order to understand this, to live it in front of and with others they come across, so as to not misunderstand or misrepresent what it is. Human means can help make it known, but do not define what it can do and for whom.

When Jesus teaches in Luke 15:1-31 he presents a contrasting grace to the known practices espoused by the religious authorities. Those ones saw sinners as violators of the national identity of Israel, their transgressions cutting themselves off from the covenant community. But Jesus assures them that what has been lost can be found again, that a child of the LORD will always be such no matter how far they might wander away. All of us at one point have had this divine grace, and by our naiveté and thoughtlessness misplaced it- giving validity to the saying, "You never know what you have until its gone." But those memories of what we had are the grace which reminds us of who we are and brings us back again. That is the LORD reminding how close he is to help us understand our place within actions of our own, and others', making. We rejoice over a lost sheep, a lost coin, or a lost child not because their coming back means we did anything extraordinary to make it happen. But that together we

recognize a life and potential we can all live in and can help others realize without it seeming impossible.

The grace of the LORD cannot be separated from his proximity to us, that intimate connection with all we do, and his knowledge of what we can be. Grace can often be explained as something so flippant and distant, that it is just the LORD giving us something we do not deserve. But it is more than just receiving a gift, it is the LORD knowing how and when to give it. What the most opportune time is to remind us of who we are and what waits for us. How we can come back and realize we have never been left on our own to begin with in our wanderings. Jesus' journey to the cross is the acknowledgement that there is something within us worth saving, and if just given that chance by an act of divine selflessness come to see what true grace is apart from how a few choose to broadcast it.

Prayers of the People

Let us remember in prayer:

Dominic Aquino, Tom & Amy Aquino, 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, Barry Jacobs, Victoria Kasten, Amber Loftis, David Mackey, Breanne Mathias, Peg McIntire, Will Long, Tom Netting, Ruth Patrick, Bob Pierre, Carol Phillips, Porter Family, Mark Preusser, Stefani Seth, Josh Shaeffer, Marlene Singhaus, Cindy Smith, Derrick & Mandy Smith, Janis Stover, Bill Titley, Dean & Heidi Unzicker, Ruth Joyce Zimmerly, Simone Villarruel, Jay Watt, The Friends of the Homeless of Tuscarawas County & The Homeless of Tuscarawas County.

LORD, our Father, for most of our lives we have been told of, and been focused on, the grace you give. Once we were lost, and you found us. We wandered away, and you pulled us back. We were ignorant, and you filled us with your wisdom. All that you have is ours to enjoy and take delight in, to celebrate with you what this reality can be and contain. But in our naivety, we underestimate your grace and power. We believe something more awaits us, and retreat from the garden you have created. But no matter where we go or what we do you are with us and use all experiences to explain and reveal yourself. You fill us with a new expectation and definition of grace, a kind which allows a more authentic way of living than ever before. Even though we have struggled so much with the mistakes of our past you help us to learn and become better for the sake of others. Let us no longer put obstacles in each other's ways, place conditions on what it means to be your people, and see what your Spirit reveals to all.

Even with the celebrations and concerns we hold, the situations we have no idea how to handle, you are there to guide and build up for the better...*Reading the Prayer List...*Let us glimpse and experience your renewed creation within our weaknesses and uncertainties.

Moment of Silence

Your grace repairs and creates something beautiful by which we might signal your wonder and power to the world. Give us the courage to always articulate this news, and to live the words of your prayer to those who might still be wandering aimlessly:

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

In thankfulness and gratitude to all that the LORD has done for us, let us honor his loving character by the sharing of our personal bounties.

Offertory *Hiding in Thee*—Gospel Hymn arr. Whitsett

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 Father, all that is in creation is yours and nothing can separate us from your love. Accept all that we give as we recognize what you are capable of, and how close you can be even without realizing. **Amen.**

Hymn #280 *Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;

'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

***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 *Balm in Gilead* arr. Whitsett**

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

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