



**First Church of Christ in Mansfield
(Congregational) United Church of Christ**

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Ministers: All the Members of the Church
The Rev. Charles Ericson, Intentional Interim Minister
Erik Haeger, Organist
Olivia Russell, Worship Circle Coordinator

March 30, 2025 — Fourth Sunday in Lent

Welcome to Our Guests!

*We're delighted you have joined us for worship; the members are the ministers of this church...
if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask us!*

Playing the Chimes

Greeting and Announcements

Prelude

Erik Haeger

Centering in the Spirit

Dave Litrico

One: Our God is a shepherding God.

All: Our God knows us by name.

One: God will never stop searching for us. So if you feel lost,

All: then know that God is seeking you.

One: If you feel found,

All: then know that God will never leave.

One: This is the promise of scripture.

All: This is the promise of God's love.

One: Let us worship our with-us God.

***Opening Hymn**

Come, O Fount of Every Blessing

CH16

Prayer for Transformation

If God is a painter, let us be the brush.

If God is a musician, let us be the song.

If God is an architect, let us be the tools.

Let us be the hands.

Let us be the builders.

But if God is a shepherd, who never stops seeking,

Let us be willing to be found, no matter how lost we feel.

Our God is never far away.

Forgive us for forgetting this good news. Amen.

moment of silence

Words of Grace

Family of faith, we are all a little bit lost and a little bit found. We grumble. We push back. We doubt God. We doubt ourselves. We leave the flock and lose our way. But fortunately for us, our God is a shepherding God who is always by our side. So hear and believe the good news of the gospel: No matter how far we wander, we can never wander from the bounds of God's grace. We are loved. We are forgiven. We are not alone. Thanks be to God! Amen.

*Song of Praise

Glory to God

Paul Vasile

Glo-ry to God, whose good-ness shines on me, and to the Son, whose grace has
end, world with-out end, A - men. World with-out end, world with-out
4 par - doned me, and to the Spir - it, whose love has set me free! As it was in the be-ginning, is
end, A - men. World with-out e - nd, world with-out end, A - men.
8 now and ev - er shall be, A - men World with-out men!

Hebrew Scripture

Joshua 5:9-12

⁹The 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. ¹⁰While 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. ¹¹On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹²The 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.

Gospel

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³So he told them this parable:

¹¹Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The 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. ¹³A 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. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But 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! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰So 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. ²¹Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²But 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. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for 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. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But 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. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' ³¹Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But 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.'"

Reflection "Finding a Way Back" Rev. Chuck Ericson

Hymn *Amazing Grace* CH546

Reading "The Good Shepherd" by Rev. Sarah A. Speed Julie Menard

Jesus said, "Who among you wouldn't leave the 99?
 Who among you wouldn't look for the one?"
 Someone in the crowd probably rolled their eyes.
 Someone squirmed and looked at their palms.
 Someone sighed and thought to themselves,
 "This man doesn't understand the business.
 What fool would leave 99 to look for one?"
 But maybe God was not talking about us.
 Maybe God was talking about
 her own reckless love.
 Maybe God was talking about
 her own willingness
 to turn the world upside down
 for me.

Call to Prayer Hear Us O Lord Don Besig and Nancy Price

9 Hear us, O Lord, as we come now in prayer, shar - ing our joys, our trou-bles, and our cares.
 Help us, O Lord, to be o - pen to your word, and teach us to put our trust in you.

Prayers of the People and the Prayer of Jesus

Please pray with whatever language is comfortable for you. The following are offered as examples...

**Our Father/Mother/Creator,
 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/sins/trespasses,
 as we forgive our debtors/those who sin/trespass against us.
 And lead us not into temptation,**

**but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

Invitation to Generosity

We can look around our community and our world today and see neighbors who face the same challenges as the prodigal in Jesus' parable: hunger, lack of adequate shelter, desperation, feelings of rejection and not being seen. Through the ministries and missions of our church, such needs can be fulfilled and lives can be transformed through the compassion and generosity of our hearts. In this spirit, may our offerings now be given and received.

*Your financial offerings may be placed in the collection plates as they come around,
or mailed to: First Church of Christ in Mansfield UCC, PO Box 36, Mansfield Center, CT 06250,*

Musical Offering

Deep River

Howard Drescher

***Doxology**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise God all creatures here below; Praise
5 God for all that love has done: Cre - a - tor, Christ and Spi - rit, One. A - men!

***Prayer of Dedication**

Gracious God, please accept and bless the gifts and offerings we present to you now, May they help to strengthen and guide the work of our church — so that others in our world today may experience the same feelings as the prodigal in Jesus' parable: hope, hospitality, sufficient nourishment, safe shelter, grace and mercy, and a lasting awareness of being heard and seen. In Jesus' name. Amen.

***Closing Hymn**

There's a Wideness in God's Mercy

CH73

***Benediction**

Now may God bless you and keep you;
May God's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you;
May God's countenance be lifted up upon you and give you peace. Amen.

***Passing the Peace**

The peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, is with you always.

And also with you.

Let us share with one another a sign of that peace.

Postlude

The opening liturgy and poetry reading for today's service are by Rev. Sarah A. Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org.