

**First Congregational
United Church of Christ
River Falls, Wisconsin**

March 16, 2025



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN**

March 16, 2025

Second Sunday in Lent

10:00 am

Gathering

Justice is getting what we deserve.
Mercy is not getting what we deserve.
Grace is getting better than we deserve.
- Ray Beeson

<p>Welcome to our guests who are visiting with us today!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Activity bags are available for children.- Large print bulletins are available from the ushers.- Please stand when noted by the *- Congregation responses are in bold.	<p><i>No matter who you are. No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, you are welcome here!</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Please stop at the welcome station for a gift.- Please note our worship service is livestreamed.
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GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: As people of Christ,

P: We seek to be of the same mind as Christ.

L: As people of Christ,

P: We seek to have the same love as Christ.

L: As people of Christ,

P: We seek to serve those Christ loves.

L: As people of Christ,

P: We seek to look to the interests of others.

L: As people of Christ,

P: We come together this morning to proclaim Jesus Christ the Lord!

All: Come let us worship the God who leads us into life!

***HYMN**

For the Beauty of the Earth

Blue #40

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

L: Holy God, you call us to wear compassion;

P: **Forgive us when our style tends toward selfishness and greed.**

L: You call us to wear kindness;

P: **Forgive us when malice comes out of our closets.**

L: You call us to wear humility;

P: **Forgive us when we put on haughtiness.**

L: You call us to wear patience.

P: **Forgive us when we wrap ourselves in our own timetables.**

L: You call us to wear forgiveness;

P: **Forgive us when our grudges fit us all too well.**

L: Above all, you call us to clothe ourselves in love.

P: **Forgive us when we wear anything less.**

All: **Fashion us once again to be your people, made in your image, wearing signs of your abundant love for all, woven together in the body of Christ. Amen.**

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

L: Do not be afraid, God says, for I am sending you to do my work.

P: **Do not be afraid, God says, go forth and serve.**

L: Do not be afraid, God says, for I am always with you.

P: **Do not be afraid, God says, for I have chosen you.**

L: Let us live then as God's people, forgiven and sent forth in Christ's name.

All: **Amen.**

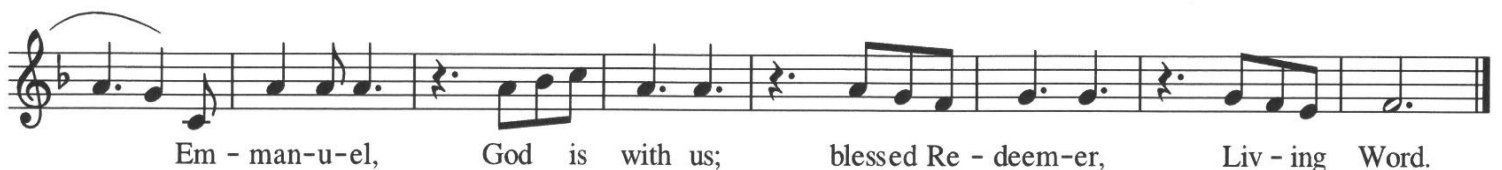
L: May the peace of the Lord be with you all.

P: **And also with you.**

***PASSING OF THE PEACE**

(Please greet one another with signs of peace)

***GLORIA (Sung Twice)**



SCRIPTURE LESSON

Philippians 3:17-4:1

PSALM 27 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)



- L: The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
- P: **The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?**
- L: When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh — my adversaries and foes — they shall stumble and fall.
- P: **Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.**
- L: One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.
- P: **For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.**
- L: Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.
- P: **Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! R**
- L: 'Come,' my heart says, 'seek his face!' Your face, LORD, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me.
- P: **Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help.**
- L: Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!
- P: **If my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me up.**
- L: Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.
- P: **Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.**
- L: I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.
- P: **Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD! R**

Celebrating the Meal

All Christians are welcome at the Lord's table. The bread is gluten-free. The cup is alcohol-free.
Those choosing not to commune may receive a blessing from the servers.

The Invitation to the Meal

- L: Jesus said I am the bread of life. You who come to me shall not hunger; you who believe in me shall never thirst.
- P: **In the company of all who are hungry and thirsty, we come to this table to know the risen Christ and to share in the bread of life and cup of blessing.**

The Great Thanksgiving

- L: The Lord be with you.
- P: **And also with you.**
- L: Lift up your hearts.
- P: **We lift them up to the Lord.**
- L: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
- P: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**
- L: It is right and good always to give thanks...

The Words of Institution

- L: We praise your name as we remember the mystery of faith...
- All: **Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

Prayer of Consecration

Distribution of the Elements

Hymns during the distribution of the elements:

Lead Me, Guide Me

Blue #498

Here I Am, Lord

Blue #559

If You Believe and I Believe

***If you believe and I believe and we together pray,
The Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free,
And set God's people free, and set God's people free.
The Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free.***

Prayer of Thanksgiving

All: We give you thanks, Almighty God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Proclaiming the Word

GOSPEL LESSON

Luke 13:31-35

SERMON

Rev. Doris Ruben

***HYMN**

Be Thou My Vision

Blue #502

***STATEMENT OF FAITH – United Church of Christ**

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God, and to your deeds we testify:

You call the worlds into being, create persons in your own image, and set before each one the ways of life and death.

You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

You judge people and nations by your righteous will declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior, you have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues and races.

You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be your servants in the service of others, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory.

You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, your presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in your realm which has no end. Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Amen.

THE PRAYERS & LORD’S PRAYER

Lord in your mercy... **Hear our prayer.**

- L:** God, remember us in your love, and teach us to pray:
P: **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.**
Your Kingdom come: your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the Kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

GATHERING OUR GIFTS *Old Rugged Cross* **David Reilly**

***DOXOLOGY**

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, ye heavenly host: Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

Holy God, sometimes we scurry so for joy that we forget what it feels like.
Sometimes we work so hard for peace that we neglect the peace that is sitting with us in our chair. Sometimes we hope so much for hope that we miss the hopeful signs that are right underfoot. And sometimes we are so urgent for a gift that we forget to give. Let this day be different, O God. Let us give freely, as freely as you are able to receive. Amen.

Sending

***HYMN** *Leaning on the Everlasting Arms* **Blue #496**

***BLESSING**

POSTLUDE

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Our guest preacher this morning is the Rev. Doris Ruben a retired UCC pastor who lives in Winona and serves with Pastor Chris on the Northwest Church and Ministry Team. She has served pastorates in Stratford, Dorchester, Wisconsin Rapids as well as churches in Iowa and Minnesota. She is also a close friend of the Rev. Barb de Souza our retired healthcare missionary in Brazil. Please be sure to welcome her.

SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Doris Ruben
Celebrant: Doris Ruben
Cantor: David Reilly
Liturgist: Sue Danielson
Deacons: Jena Most, Marshall Skule,
Karen Lloyd, Laura Anderson
Organist: Terry Mithun
Nursery: Kahla Fuller
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman
Trustee: Louie Filkins
Welcomers: Barb Mahoney, JoAnn Lentz
Coffee
Fellowship: Welcoming Committee
Counters: Jean Smith, Allen Barnes

CHURCH STAFF

Pastor: Christopher Myers
Education Pastor: Stacy Johnson Myers
Youth Minister: Alex Plum
Music Coordinator &
Bell Director: Jamie Mills
Choir Director: Sarah Plum
Organists: Terry Mithun,
Marsha Pearson
Building Manager: Timothy Bylander
Church Moderator: Marie Roe
Office Administrator: Missy Luedtke
Nursery Attendant: Kahla Fuller
Custodian: Farnum Fuller

Treasurer's Report

	<u>Mar 9, 2025</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 9,665	\$ 134,019
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,623	\$ 106,230

A full accounting of all income and expenses is available in the church office.

*Includes annual and monthly gifts.



Offering QR Code

1. On your mobile device, open your Camera app or QR Code app
2. Point your camera at the QR Code
3. Click the tab 'Give Online'



Join us each Wednesday at 6:30 pm in the Fellowship Hall for our 30-minute Prayer Around the Cross Worship Service preceded by the Family Meal. Reserve dinner by Tuesday night please.

Please remember the following in your prayers this week:

Those who are ill or recovering:

Jeff (brother-in-law of Janice Healy), Barbara de Souza, Crissy (daughter of Brad Williams), Jim French (father of Missy Linaberry), Jeff Auchampach (nephew of Yvonne Benson), Melissa Oscanyan, Pope Francis, Peg Steinmetz, Janice Anderson (grandmother of Sarah Plum), Marc Otto, Margaret (wife of Don Baumann)

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For those who enjoyed the Back Bay Mission Shrimp Boil dinner which raised \$500 for the mission
- For the new evening Men's Group who packed meals at FMSC going to Zambia, thank you for your service!
- For those who will participate in the next Evening Men's Group sessions that begin the end of March, may we better connect and support one another on our Christian journey
- For our pastors and musicians gearing up for Lenten Prayer Around the Cross worship services on Wednesdays during Lent, may they help us all on our Lenten journey toward Holy Week and Easter
- For the return of our Wednesday Night Family meals which run through Holy Week, may we all be fed!

Prayers for our World:

- As we approach the 5th anniversary of the Covid outbreak, we remember those who have died, ways we have changed and hope we may gain wisdom from this ordeal
- For all those whose small daily acts of compassion and grace slowly help change the world (and themselves)
- For those in the military, may we be grateful for their sacrifice and service
- For our nation as our newly elected government officials take their offices, that they may govern justly, work for the common good and solve our real problems
- For the hope of peace in Gaza, Palestine, Israel and Ukraine, may God's Spirit be present
- For all of us as we work to better care for the gift of God's good creation and reduce the effects of climate change

Prayers of Thanksgiving:

- For Matthew Bylander (son of Rene and Tim) and Sierra Smith who will be married on March 22 in Annapolis, Maryland, may they grow together in love and years
- For the gift of Spring Break which takes place this coming week!
- For the return of Wednesday night family meals!
- For the return of our Prayer Around The Cross Worship services in the Fellowship Hall during the Wednesdays in Lent, may they be a time of renewal
- For Lily Hodges, daughter of Rachel and Quinn and granddaughter of Maxine and Tom Sitz, who will be baptized on Sunday, March 23, may she grow in wisdom and faith
- For Josh Sippel who graduated from Basic Training at Ft Jackson, SC on February 6 and will do training at Fort Gregg-Adams located in VA, congratulations and thank you for your service

For those grieving the loss of loved ones:

- For the family of Arlyn Koecher, father of Steve, who died this past week, may he rest in peace and his family be comforted
- For the family of Sue Taylor, administrative assistant at the Wisconsin Conference UCC office who died after battling cancer this past year, may her family be comforted and she rest in God's strong care
- For the family of Rollie Hall as they mourn, may they be strengthened at this difficult time

If you have people you wish to include on our prayer list, please contact the church office or one of the pastors.

Announcements

No matter who you are. No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, you are welcome here!

Loving God

New to Church: Are you a first-time visitor? Please stop at the welcome table in the gathering area to receive a special welcome gift from us!

Sunday Morning Text Study: Please join us on Sunday mornings to discuss the Bible passages used in worship. The group meets from **9:00–9:50** Sunday mornings in the Youth Room. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Adult Lenten Study: The Adult Bible Study group is discussing “Entering the Passion of Jesus” by Amy-Jill Levine. The group meets **Wednesday afternoons, 1:00–2:30**. Books are available in the office for \$10.00. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Prayer Around the Cross: Our Lenten Prayer Around the Cross worship services are each Wednesday until Holy Week. Join us in the Fellowship Hall at **6:30 pm** for this brief, meaningful, candle-lit service focused on prayer, simple songs and a brief, focused message.

Holy Week and Easter: Holy Week is the most important week for Christian people. It shows the depth and breadth of God's love. Challenge yourself to join us for all of the Holy Week services this year.

Palm Sunday, April 13	Sunday Worship and Procession of Palms at 10:00 am
Maundy Thursday, April 17	Worship at 6:30 pm
Good Friday, April 18	Choir presents their Good Friday Cantata at 6:30 pm
Holy Saturday, April 19	Youth set tables and prepare for the Easter Breakfast at 10:00 am
Easter Sunday, April 20	Worship at 9:00 and 10:30 am with Breakfast served from 8:00 to 10:30 am

Loving Neighbor

Relay for Life: Once again our church is participating in Relay for Life and raising money for American Cancer Society. The Relay for Life event is **Friday, April 11, from 6:00–9:30 pm at River Falls High School**. How can you participate or help? Let's start with **Soup Night – Wed, March 26 from 5:15 to 6:15 pm**. The Relay team is having their annual soup night where you can come and sample a variety of soups or indulge in one for the Wednesday Night Family Meal. Cost is a donation or the recommended \$9 per person with a family max of \$30. Thank you in advance. Interested in joining the team, purchasing a luminary bag, or helping with silent auction ideas, please contact Deb Hoffman at debhoffman234b@gmail.com or (612)308-4945. More details coming soon.

One Great Hour of Sharing is one of four special mission offerings of the United Church of Christ. This Lenten offering supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ within the Wider Church Ministries. We need to support this ministry, maybe now more than ever. Envelopes are in the pews and on the sign-up table. Thank you for your generous support. - Mission Education Committee

Simpson Shelter Supply Needs: Great buys of thermal underwear - men's & women's, women's thermal socks, men's T-shirts - all sizes, men's ankle socks, men's boxer shorts - sizes M, L, personal size body wash, personal size baby oil, lip balm, women's bras. All items MUST BE NEW. There is a bin for donations.

Basics for Local Kids: BFLK takes donations of new and gently used winter clothing year round. It's a great time to shop sales of winter clothing and boots for children ages newborn to 18 years. For more information go to <https://www.basicsforlocalkids.org/>. Thank you!

Among Friends is a community-based social respite program serving adults who have memory loss who reside in Pierce & St. Croix Counties. For more information, call (715) 293-2561. Check out the website: amongfriendsrf.com & Facebook. It is held at church **Tuesdays & Thursdays 9am to 3pm**.

Loving Self

Men's Group: Our church men's group meets **every other Tuesday from 9:00-10:00 am** in the Youth Room. All men are welcome to join us for coffee, donuts & lively conversation. Our next gatherings are **Mar 18 & 25 and April 8 & 22**.

New Evening Men's Group: We will start a second three-session gathering of our church guys in late March and April as detailed below. During these second gatherings, we will be looking at three parts of our Christian faith—grace, vocation and prayer. Please see Pastor Chris for details.

- Thursdays, March 27, April 10, and April 24 starting at 6:30 pm at The Garage Bikes and Brews

Women's Group: Interested in fellowship & community with other women? You are invited to join the group at noon every 2nd & 4th Tuesday. Please bring a sack lunch. The next meetings will be **Mar 25 and April 8 & 22.**

Church Yoga: The church yoga group meets on **Tuesdays and Thursdays** in the church Fellowship Hall from **9:00-10:00 am** and via Zoom. Please contact the church office to receive the Zoom link.

Let's Knit/Craft Together: Join us on **Thursdays at 10:00 am. We meet at Sycamore on the first Thursday of each month & the Fellowship Hall the other Thursdays.** We have a great time sharing our projects & enjoying each other's company. For more info, contact Marie Roe at 715-781-2103 or firstroe@gmail.com

Cribbage Night: The group meets the second Monday. Players are asked to donate \$2 & the group decides which charity. Playing time is **7:00 pm**. All abilities welcome. The next game is **April 14.**

WISE Corner: NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Family Support Group meets on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays at 6:30 pm at the River Falls Public Library and the Peer Support Group meets the same evenings at Luther Memorial Church at 6:30 pm. Our church WISE Team meets on the first Tuesday of the month at 6:30 pm. For more info, call Marg Downing 715-307-5905.

Community Life

Wednesday Meals: We offer a home-cooked meal in the Fellowship Hall. The cost is \$9 per person with a family max of \$30. **Meals are served from 5:15 to 6:00 pm.** You can get your meal to go if you go through the line (indicate when you sign up). **Reservations must be placed by noon on Tuesdays.** You can make a reservation online, the sign-up table or by calling the church office. The menu for March 19 baked pork chop, garlic mashed potatoes, red cabbage and cooked apples, and bread.

Join us for Easter Breakfast – Sunday, April 20: Easter Breakfast will be served from **8:00 am to 10:15 am.** Cost is \$10 per person with a family max of \$40, all of which goes to our Youth Fund for mission trips and opportunities. Please sign up by Wednesday, April 16. Sign up at church or online.

Learning Community Event: Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Bonhoeffer was a pastor and theologian in Germany during World War II. He was also an anti-Nazi dissident who was a founding member of the Confessing Church movement, a group dedicated to resisting efforts by the government to use churches as a pro-Nazi force to gain support and legitimacy for its goals. Bonhoeffer was arrested, imprisoned, and ultimately executed for his association with the resistance movement. Bonhoeffer authored important theological works included *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Letters and Papers From Prison*, published posthumously. Bonhoeffer famously argued that Christians should not withdraw from the world and its challenges, but rather act within the world guided by a commitment to justice and an understanding of the necessity of divine suffering. Our presenter will be Dr. Lori Brandt Hale, Professor of Religion in the Department of Religion and Philosophy at Augsburg University in Minneapolis. The evening will be **Tuesday, April 29 and will begin at 6:30 pm.** Dessert will be part of the event, so please tell us you are coming by registering either on the list on the sign-up table or online.

Youth Events

Youth Events for Wednesday, March 19:

Spring Break – No Wednesday Youth Activities

Summer Dates for Kids: Please mark your calendars for the children's summer program for 2025. We need adults to help, teens to volunteer and kids to participate. Here are the dates:

VBS: July 28-31, 2025

Children's Musical: August 18-21, 2025

VBS is for children age 3 to completed grade 5. The musical is for children in kindergarten through completed grade 6. Emma Cruciani will be the director.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Philippians 3:17-4:1

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 13:31-35

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.' He said to them, 'Go and tell that fox for me, "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem." Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."'