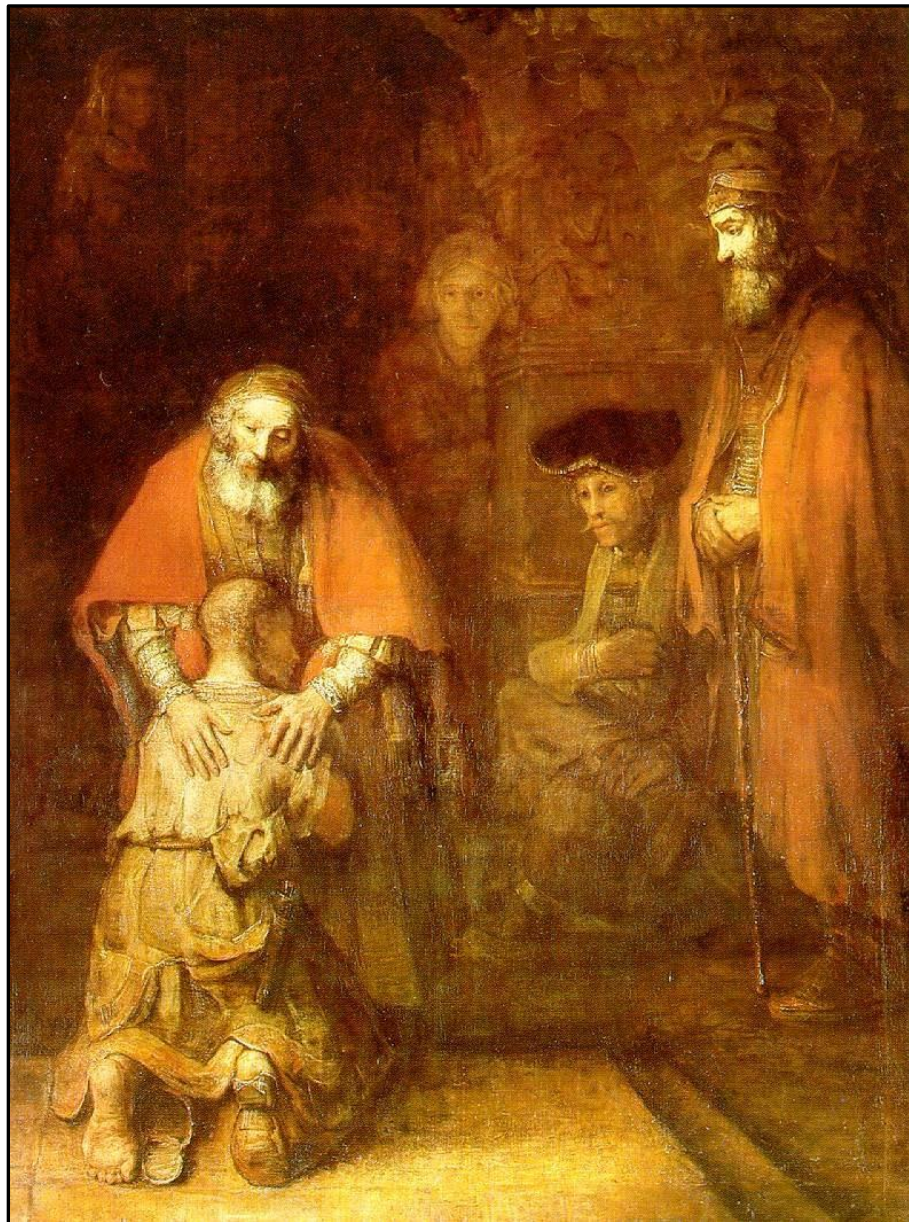


**First Congregational  
United Church of Christ  
River Falls, Wisconsin**

**March 30, 2025**



**Parable of the Prodigal Son**

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

March 30, 2025

*Fourth Sunday in Lent*

10:00 am

<b>Gathering</b>
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“I do not at all understand the mystery of grace - only that it meets us where we are,  
but does not leave us where it found us. I can be received gladly or grudgingly,  
in big gulps or in tiny tastes, like a deer at the salt.”

- Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*

<p>Welcome to our guests who are visiting with us today!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>No matter who you are. No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, you are welcome here!</i></p>
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- 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.

- Please stop at the welcome station for a gift.
- Please note our worship service is livestreamed.

## GATHERING MUSIC

### WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL

### CALL TO WORSHIP

L: No matter how far we wander from you, O God,

**P: Your steadfast love finds us.**

L: No matter how unjust the world seems to us, O God,

**P: Your steadfast righteousness sustains us.**

L: No matter how vulnerable our lives seem to us, O God,

**P: Your steadfast presence gives us hope.**

L: No matter how unloved and uncared for we feel, O God,

**P: You hear our cries and answer our prayers.**

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

**\*HYMN**

*Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*

**Blue #68**

### **\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

L: O God, though we run so far away,

**P: We are never lost from you.**

L: Though we take everything for granted and dismiss your grace,

**P: You never leave us or forsake us.**

L: We confess our tendencies to wander and to forget that all good things come from you.

**P: We become so self-absorbed that we don't see you sitting right next to us.**

L: Open our eyes to your presence.

**P: Free us from the desire to take life into our own hands.**

L: And welcome us home,

**P: Always. Amen.**

### **\*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

L: While we are still far off,

**P: Our God sees us and is filled with compassion.**

L: When we run away,

**P: God runs toward us to put his arms around us and give us the kiss of welcome and grace.**

L: Friends, believe the good news:

**P: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God!**

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

**P: And also with you.**

### **\*PASSING OF THE PEACE**

(Please greet one another with signs of peace)

### **\*GLORIA**

*Come, All You People*

*Come, all you people, come and praise the Most High; Come, all you people, come and praise the Most High; Come, all you people, come and praise the Most High; Come now and worship the Lord.*

*Come, all you people, come and praise the Savior; Come, all you people, come and praise the Savior; Come, all you people, come and praise the Savior; Come now and worship the Lord.*

### **BAPTISM OF LILY RACHEL HODGES**

#### ***Welcome and Presentation***

L: They were bringing children to Jesus that he might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant, and said to them.

**P: "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."**

L: Members and friends in Christ, we gather to celebrate God's gift of grace in the baptism of Lily Rachel Hodges. To us a child is given!

**P: Thanks be to God!**

## ***Address***

- L: Baptism is the sacrament through which we are united to Jesus Christ and given a part in Christ's ministry of reconciliation. Baptism is the visible sign of an invisible event, the reconciliation of people to God. It shows the death of self and the rising to a life of obedience and praise. It shows also the pouring out of the Spirit on those whom God has chosen. In baptism, God works in us the power of forgiveness, the renewal of the Spirit, and the knowledge of the call to be a part of God's people.
- P: This is the water of baptism. Out of this water, we rise with new life, forgiven of sin and one in Christ, members of Christ's body.**

## ***Questions***

- L: As parents and sponsors of this child, will you encourage Lily to renounce the powers of evil and to receive the freedom of new life in Christ?

***Parents and Sponsors: We will, with the help of God.***

- L: Will you teach her that she may be led to profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior by sharing with her the church's life, worship, and fellowship?

***Parents and Sponsors: We will, with the help of God.***

- L: Christ will first be known to Lily by the Christ seen in your home. By the grace of God, will you model the Christian life for her, provide instruction in the Christian faith, and live with her in the covenant of baptism so that she may lead a godly life until the day of Jesus Christ?

***Parents and Sponsors: We will, with the help of God.***

- L: Will you, the children of First Congregational United Church of Christ, welcome Lily into the life of the church? Will you learn, play, and explore God's world with her?

***Children: We will, with the help of God.***

- L: Jesus calls us to make disciples of all nations and to offer them the gift of grace in baptism. Will you who witness and celebrate this sacrament, nurture one another in the Christian faith and include Lily in your love and prayer?

**P: We promise our love and prayer.**

## ***Act of Baptism***

L: The Lord be with you.

**P: And also with you.**

L: Let us pray. Gracious God, bless this water. By your Holy Spirit save those who confess the name of Jesus Christ that sin may have no power over them. Create new life in your servant Lily who will be baptized this day, that she too may rise with Christ. Glory to you, Eternal God, the one who was, and is, and shall always be, world without end. Amen.

I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit be upon you, Lily, child of God, disciple of Christ, member of the church.

**Baptismal Song**

***Child of Blessing, Child of Promise***

***Child of blessing, child of promise, baptized with the Spirit's sign;  
with this water God has sealed you unto love and grace divine.***

***Child of God your loving Parent, learn to know whose child you are.  
Grow to laugh and sing and worship, trust and love God more than all.***

**Prayer**

L: Let us pray. We give you thanks, O God, for this child and the grace acknowledged here in water and the Spirit. Embrace us all as sons and daughters in the one household of your love. Grant us grace to receive and nurture this new member of the body of Christ.

P: **Give to the newly baptized: strength for life's journey, courage in time of suffering, the joy of faith, the freedom of love, and the hope of new life; through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.**

**Name: Lily Rachel Hodges**

**Born: May 10, 2024**

**Baptized: March 30, 2025**

**Lily's parents are Quinn Hodges and Rachel Sitz**

**Lily's sponsors are Erin and Bret Walejko**

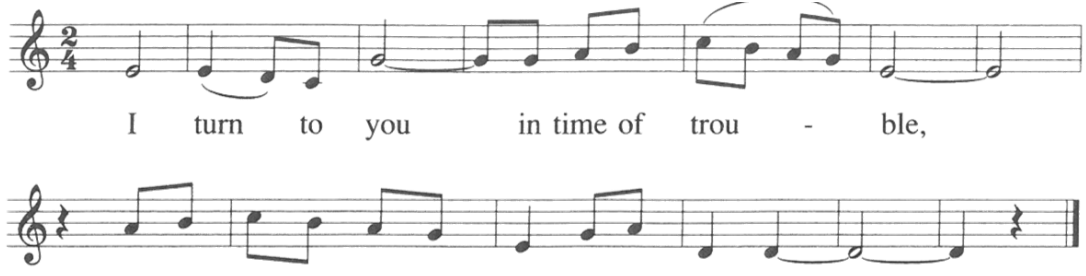
**Hearing the Word**

**SCRIPTURE LESSON**

**2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

**PSALM 32 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)**

**R**



I turn to you in time of trou - ble,  
and you fill me with the joy of sal - va - tion.

**L:** Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

**P:** **Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.**

**L:** While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

**P:** **Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD', and you forgave the guilt of my sin. R**

**L:** Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

**P:** **You are a hiding-place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.**

**L:** I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

**P:** **Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.**

**L:** Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.

**P:** **Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart. 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:** From the North and the South, the East and the West,

**P:** **Come let us eat at Christ's table.**

**L:** From Europe and Africa, Asia to South America, from around the corner to around the world,

**P:** **Come let us drink at Christ's table.**

L: Young and old and every age in between; the faithful and the struggling, the rich and the poor,

P: **Come let us gather at Christ's table as one people.**

***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:*

**Gather Your People, O Lord**

*Congregation join on refrain:*

Refrain



Gath-er your peo-ple, O Lord. Gath-er your peo-ple, O



Lord. One bread, one bod-y, one spir-it of



love. Gath-er your peo-ple, O Lord.

**Breathe on Me, Breath of God**

**Blue #461**

**Be Thou My Vision**

**Blue #502**

**Amazing Grace**

**Blue #422**

## *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 15:1-3, 11b-32**

**SERMON**

**Rev. Chris Myers**

**\*HYMN**

*Grace Alone*

**Blue #436**

*Verse 1 - Choir then Verses 1 and 2 - All*

**\*STATEMENT OF FAITH - Indonesia**

**I believe in God, who is love and who has given the earth to all people.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, who came to heal us, and to free us from all forms of oppression.**

**I believe in the Spirit of God, who works in and through all who are turned toward the truth.**

**I believe in the community of faith, which is called to be at the service of all people.**

**I believe in God's promise to finally destroy the power of sin in us all, and to establish the kingdom of justice and peace for all humankind.**

**I do not believe that suffering need be in vain, that death is the end, that the disfigurement of our world is what God intended.**

**But I dare to believe, always and in spite of everything, in God's power to transform and transfigure, fulfilling the promise of a new heaven and a new earth where justice and peace will flourish. 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.**



*Arr. by Don Besig***\*OFFERTORY**

We give thee but thine own, what - e'er the gift may be; all that we have is



thine a - lone a trust, O Lord, from thee.

**\*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

O God, **blessed are you, Creator of all good things. Through your mercy and grace, you have blessed us with so many amazing gifts. With joy and thanksgiving, we dedicate our offerings and our lives to you again. May our lives and our offerings be reflective of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

<b>Sending</b>
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**\*HYMN***God of Grace and God of Glory***Blue #569****\*BLESSING****POSTLUDE**

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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.

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## **SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS**

Preacher: Chris Myers  
Celebrant: Chris Myers  
Cantor: David Reilly  
Liturgist: Ginny Larson  
Deacons: Brian Miller, Loral Keil,  
Kathy Tomlinson, Ann Nelson,  
Lance Lueck  
Organist: Marsha Pearson  
Nursery: Kahla Fuller  
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman  
Trustee: Scott Nelson  
Welcomers: Norma Revels  
Coffee  
Fellowship: Merry Widows – St. B's Donuts  
Counters: Diane Welsh, Dennis Linder  
*Altar table flowers are given by Lu Lueck in appreciation of the congregation's thoughts and prayers while she was in Mexico and US.*

## **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

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## **Treasurer's Report**

	<u>Mar 23, 2025</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 7,015	\$ 158,165
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,623	\$ 127,476

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'
-

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, Peg Steinmetz, Janice Anderson (grandmother of Sarah Plum), Marc Otto, Margaret (wife of Don Baumann)

**Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:**

- For the return of Earth Fest on Saturday, April 26th at UWRF, may it kindle in each of us a deeper commitment to care for God's good creation
- For those participating in the next Evening Men's Group sessions that meet March 27, April 10, April 24 at The Garage Bikes and Brews, may we better connect and support one another on our Christian journey
- For our pastors and musicians leading the 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 our choir getting ready for their Good Friday Cantata on April 18th at 6:30 pm, may they be given strong, voices as they lead us through the journey of Holy Week
- For the return of our Wednesday Night Family Meals which run through Holy Week, may we all be fed!

**Prayers for our World:**

- 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 Lily Hodges, daughter of Rachel and Quinn and granddaughter of Maxine and Tom Sitz, who will be baptized on Sunday, March 30, may she grow in wisdom and faith and her parents in wisdom and courage
- For the return of the Bouncy House in two weeks!
- For Matthew Bylander (son of Rene and Tim) and Sierra Smith who were married on March 22 in Annapolis, Maryland, may they grow together in love and years
- For the gift of God's grace and our call to live as God's graceful people
- For the return of Wednesday night family meals!
- For the Prayer Around The Cross Worship services in the Fellowship Hall during the Wednesdays in Lent, may they be a time of renewal

**For those grieving the loss of loved ones:**

- For the family of Wayne Revels, who died suddenly this past week, may his family be comforted
- For the family of Arlyn Koecher, father of Steve, who died recently, may he rest in peace and his family be comforted
- For all those who mourn, especially the family of Rollie Hall, 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.

**SCRIPTURE LESSON: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

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. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 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. 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. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32**

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'

So he told them this parable:

Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. 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. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 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. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 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! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" 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. 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." 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. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 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. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 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.'"