

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

February 22, 2026



The Temptation of Jesus

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

February 22, 2026

First Sunday in Lent

10:00 am

Gathering

Original sin is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved.
- C.K. Chesterton

Where sin increased, grace increased even more.
- Romans 5:20

<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.- Visitors please stop at the welcome booth.- Please stand when noted by the *- Congregation responses are in bold.- Please note our worship service is livestreamed.	<p>Our Mission is to Love God and Serve People.</p> <p>Everyone is Welcome Because Everyone Matters.</p>
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GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Our Lenten journey has begun.

P: **Let us follow the example of Jesus who...**

L: Listened for the voice of God in the wilderness,

P: **Followed the leading of the Holy Spirit,**

L: And resisted temptation.

P: **Jesus is the Bread of Life.**

L: Let us feast on him during this Lenten season.

All: **Come let us worship.**

***HYMN**

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

Blue #358

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Gracious God, **we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.**

*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

L: Through scripture, God uses wilderness experiences for moments of transformation and rebirth.

P: **No place or experience is too far removed from God's love.**

L: Not even death can separate us from God's amazing grace.

P: **As we journey forward, may we always be certain that God's Spirit is here with us.**

L: In Christ, we are forgiven.

P: **Thanks be to God.**

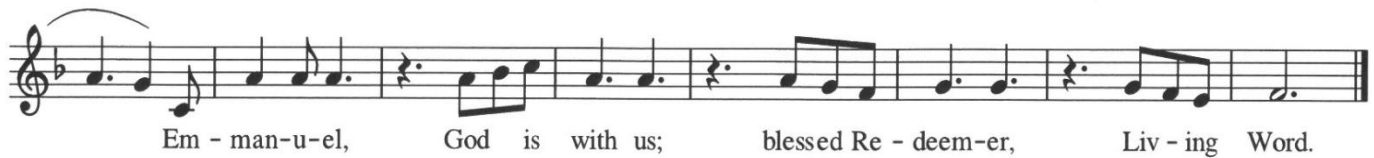
L: May the peace of the Lord be with you all.

P: **And also with you.**

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

(Please greet one another with signs of peace)

*GLORIA (Sung twice)

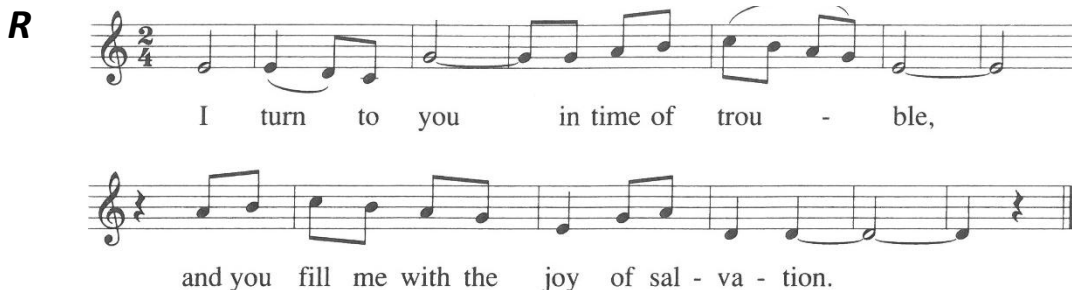


Hearing the Word

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

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



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.

P: **For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.**

- L: Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity;
- P: **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: Beloved in Christ, the Gospel tells us that on the first day of the week, Jesus Christ was raised from death, appeared to Mary Magdalene, on the same day sat at table with two disciples, and was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.
- P: **This is the joyful feast of the people of God. Men and women, young and old, come from the east and the west, the north and the south, and gather about Christ's table.**
- L: This table is for all people who wish to know the presence of Christ and to share in the community of God's 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 and everywhere to give thanks...

The Words of Institution

L: We praise your name as we proclaim 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:

You Are My All in All

Congregation join on refrain:



Je - sus, Lamb of God, wor - thy is your name!



Je - sus, Lamb of God, wor - thy is your name!

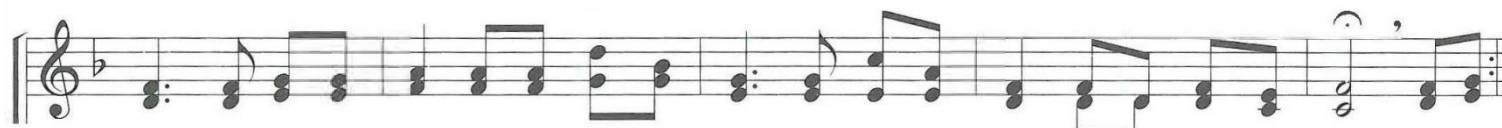
Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

Blue #501

In the Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful



In the Lord I'll be ev - er thank - ful, in the Lord I will re - joice! Look to God, do not be a -
fine



fraid; lift up your voic - es, the Lord is near; lift up your voic - es, the Lord is near. In the

As We Gather at Your Table

Blue #695

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

TIME WITH CHILDREN

Rev. Chris Myers

SONG (Children preschool through grade 8 leave for Sunday School.)

*Jesus loves me! This I know, as he loved so long ago,
Taking children on his knee, saying, "Let them come to me."
Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.*

GOSPEL LESSON

Matthew 4:1-11

SERMON

Rev. Chris Myers

*HYMN

When We Are Tested



1 When we are test - ed and wres - tle a - lone,
2 When in the des - ert we cry for re - lief,
3 When we are tempt - ed to bar - ter our souls,
4 When we have strug - gled and searched through the night,



fam - ished for bread when the world of - fers stone,
plead - ing for paths marked by cer - tain be - lief,
trad - ing the truth for the pow'r to con - trol,
sort - ing and sift - ing the wrong from the right,



nour - ish us, God, by your word and your way,
lift us to love you be - yond sign and test,
teach us to wor - ship and praise on - ly of you,
Sav - ior, sur - round us with cir - cles of care,



food that sus - tains us by night and by day.
trust - ing your pres - ence, our on - ly true rest.
seek - ing your will in the work that we do.
an - gels of heal - ing, of hope, and of prayer.

***STATEMENT OF FAITH (from a morning prayer liturgy at Eastern Mennonite Seminary)**

We believe in God:

Whose love is the source of all life and the desire of our lives,
Whose love was given a human face in Jesus of Nazareth,
Whose love was crucified by the evil that waits to enslave us all,
And whose love, defeating even death, is our glorious promise of
freedom.

Therefore, though we are sometimes fearful and full of doubt, in God we trust; And
in the name of Jesus Christ, we commit ourselves in the service of others,
To seek justice and to live in peace,
To care for the earth and to share the commonwealth of God's goodness,
To live in the freedom of forgiveness and the power of the spirit of love,
and in the company of the faithful, so to be the church for the glory of
God. Amen.

THE PRAYERS & LORD'S PRAYER (debts/debtors)

Lord in your mercy... **Hear our 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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine
is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

GATHERING OUR GIFTS – Emma Cruciani

Gratitude

Arr. by Brandon Lake



(Directions at
end of bulletin)

***OFFERTORY**



***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

Glorious God, above the noise of conflict, there is a song of peace. Above the
world's weeping, there is a song of hope. Above the cries of hate, there is a song of
love. Bless these gifts, O Lord, that we, too, might be singers of Your song. Amen.

Sending

***HYMN**

I Sing the Almighty Power of God

Blue #31

***BLESSING**

POSTLUDE

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SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Chris Myers
Celebrant: Chris Myers
Cantor: David Reilly
Liturgist: Steve Koecher
Deacons: Laura Anderson, Ann Nelson
Liz Swank, Becky Pajac,
Heidi Cavaness
Organist: Marsha Pearson
Nursery: Kahla Fuller
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman
Trustee: Scott Nelson
Coffee
Fellowship: Congregational Croissants
Counters: Trish Graves, Allen Barnes
*Altar table flowers are given by Bobbie Kuhn in
honor of their 57th wedding anniversary.*

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
Custodians: Farnum Fuller,
Troy Zakrzewski

Treasurer's Report

	<u>Feb 15, 2026</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 8,293	\$ 101,531
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 11,308	\$ 79,156

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:

Barbara de Souza, Jeff Auchampach (nephew of Yvonne Benson), Glen Corliss (brother of Raelle Jorae), Eric (friend of Liz Swank), Joyce Kampstra, Jim Larson, Mike Checkalski (friend of Mark Hudnall)

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For our pastors and musicians gearing up for Lent and the Prayer Around the Cross worship services in the Fellowship Hall on Wednesdays at 6:30pm, may we come together to worship and pray
- For our choir and other local choirs gearing up for the It Takes a Village concert on Sunday, February 22nd at 4pm at Ezekiel, may your voices bring hope and healing to the folks in Haiti (proceeds from the concert go to the village in Haiti sponsored by the churches of River Falls)
- For housing insecure folks in our community and those who are planning for Wellspring, a community of Tiny Homes to meet housing insecurity needs in our community, may God grace them with vision and courage
- For our own Alex Plum competing in his 4th Birkie this Saturday and Peter Rayne in his 30th+ Birkie, go get 'em!
- For our Back Bay Mission Team headed to Biloxi, MS over Spring Break, may you be the light of Jesus as you work there
- For Louise Schmahl (sister of Becky Pajac) as she continues dialysis

Prayers for our World:

- As we end the Winter Olympics may we remember the common bonds that bind us together
- For those in our church and community living in fear with recent immigration raids
- For those in treatment and rehab, may you be given strength for the journey
- For stability and peace in Venezuela, Gaza and Ukraine
- 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
- For those living with dementia and families trying to care for them, may they all be given strength, grace and help along the way

Prayers of Thanksgiving:

- For the gift of the season of Lent a time to return to God and remember our priorities
- For the gift of winter in all its varieties (all of which we have seen this week!)
- For those who will receive blood from the March 16th blood drive in our Fellowship Hall, may it bring life
- For the return of our full Family Meals each Wednesday during Lent (sign up!)
- For our master Plinko builder Marshall Skuhl who created a hit for the Among Friends group, thank you!
- For 10 years of generating clean solar energy with our church solar panels, thanks be to God!

For those grieving the loss of loved ones:

- For the family of Loral Keil, wife of Brian Miller, and one of our deacons, who died this past Saturday and whose Memorial Service will be at Bakken Young on Easter Saturday, April 4th at 11am with visitation an hour before and a lunch afterward, may her family be comforted
- For the family of Terry Smith, sister of Tom Smith, who died unexpectedly and peacefully recently, may the family be comforted
- For the families of Jane Webb (Greenwood Teacher), Cody Peterson (RF Fire Department), Wanell Hansen (mother of Jill Paulson), JoAnn Lentz and Jim Filkins, may the families be comforted

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

Sunday, February 22, 2026

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!

Prayer Around the Cross: Our Lenten Prayer Around the Cross worship services resume 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, March 29 Sunday Worship and Procession of Palms at 10:00 am

Maundy Thursday, April 2 Worship at 6:30 pm

Good Friday, April 3 Choir presents their Good Friday Cantata at 6:30 pm

Holy Saturday, April 4 Youth set tables and prepare for the Easter Breakfast at 10:00 am

Easter Sunday, April 5 Worship at 9:00 and 10:30 am with Breakfast served from 8:00 to 10:15 am

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

Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study: The group is discussing Matthew Skinner's *Acts: Catching Up with the Spirit*. Copies of the book are available in the church office for \$16.00 each. The group meets in the library on **Wednesdays, 1:00–2:30 pm**. If you have questions, contact Pastor Stacy.

Loving Neighbor

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

First Church Companions: Are you interested in being a companion to someone in our church connecting with them at least once a month with a call or visit? Or would you like to have someone for a companion. Please use the sign-up sheet to be a companion or request someone to visit you.

Basics for Local Kids: There is a bin for donations. Volunteers are also needed. You can help families shop or you can help sort, restock or organize. Shifts are 2 hours. To sign up, go to <https://www.basicsforlocalkids.org/> or call Kim at 715-821-1623. Contact Renee Whipple at 715-307-5074 if you have any questions.

Grace Place is a homeless shelter run by the Salvation Army in New Richmond. It is housed in the old St. Croix County Nursing Home. They operate on a short shoe-string budget and are delighted that we will support them with donations and meals. The shelter has three family rooms, a men's wing and a women's wing. They can house up to 50 people, two or three people to a room. If you have any questions, please see Carole Mottaz.

Grace Place Donations: Needed items: **Sidewalk salt**, shampoo – large or travel size, conditioner – large or travel size, body wash – large or travel size, body lotion – large or travel size, new or like-new wash cloths, new or like-new bath towels, new or like-new hand towels, new or like-new twin and full sheets, new or like-new twin and full size blankets, new pillows, good buys. There is a bin at church for donations.

Empty Pill Bottles (Prescription Only): The River Falls Lions Club is collecting empty pill bottles, only the clear prescription bottles that are filled by our pharmacists, to send to Africa where there is an urgent need. The bottles will be washed, and the labels soaked off before they are shipped. A tub is in the gathering area.

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 meetings are **Mar 3 & 17.**

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 lunch. The next meetings will be **Feb 24 & Mar 10.**

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

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.

Game Day Sunday: Game Day Sunday is held on the third Sunday of the month. Our next Game Day is **March 15 at 11:45 am.** Join us!

WISE Team: NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Family Support Group meets the 2nd & 4th Thursdays 6:30pm at 113 East Elm St & Peer Support Group meets the same evenings at First Congregational at 6:30pm. The WISE Team meets the first Tuesday of the month at 6:30pm. For info, call Marg Downing at 715-307-5905.

Community Life

Fused Glass Project: The Christian Education Committee is organizing a project to create a large fused glass piece of art that will hang by the main stairwell. The theme of the piece will be Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Artists will learn to cut and arrange glass pieces to create the design. Once the art is complete, it will be fused in a glass kiln and then hung on the wall.

Wednesday Meals: On Wednesday nights, 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 sign up at church or online. The menu for Feb 25 is lasagna, chicken alfredo, salad, and garlic toast.

Relay for Life Soup Night: Once again the Relay for Life team will have its annual Soup Night to raise money for Relay for Life. It will be **March 18 from 5:15-6:00 pm.** The cost of the meal is a donation of \$9/person or \$30/family as with other Wednesday meals. There will be a variety of soups, fruit & dessert. You can sample/eat as many of the soups as you like. The **Relay for Life Event is Fri, April 10** beginning at 5:00 pm at the River Falls High School. The theme this year is "We are the World, United for a Cure." It will have many opportunities to participate in the event with teams selling items, selling luminaries, and the silent auction. Please plan to participate or help our church's team raise money. If you have questions or would like to join our team, contact Deb Hoffman at debhoffman234b@gmail.com or (612)308-4945.

Join us for Easter Breakfast – Sunday, April 5: 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 1. Sign up at church or online.

Name Tags: We encourage you to wear your name tags so that everyone can call you by name. It would also help the deacons when you take communion. If you do not have one, please let Missy in the church office know at missy@firstchurchrf.org. In appreciation, the Welcoming Committee.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written,

"One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you",
and "On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."

Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

"Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him."

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.