

HOUSE OF PRAYER

Is a gathering of God's people who value:

Welcoming, Relationships, Compassionate Community, and Openness

Lazarus

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So, the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. John 11:1-6



Pastor Ben Sandin

We know very little about Jesus' life prior to his public ministry. The gospel of Matthew and Luke share his birth story and a few details from childhood and that is basically it. The story of Lazarus in John's gospel hints at strong friendship between Jesus and Lazarus, as well as Mary and Martha. When Lazarus is ill on his deathbed, Mary sends word to Jesus. She knows he can cure Lazarus, but she also knows how much Jesus loves and cares for him. This is why Jesus'

response is so befuddling. Rather than go immediately to Bethany (as most would for a friend or loved one) he waits two days, during which Lazarus dies. While it is tempting to jump to the conclusion of the story when everything works out in the end, it is important to dwell with this text.

Jesus tells the disciples that Lazarus' illness will not lead to death, but will be for God's glory. He then tells the disciples that Lazarus is not merely sleeping but is dead. These two, seemingly contradictory, sentiments encompass the core of Jesus ministry. In Christ, death is not the end of the story. Death is defeated on the cross and Lazarus' death will be sign of promise revealed on the cross. As the chronology of John's gospel makes clear, it will be only a few days after Lazarus' death that Jesus will die on the cross. Both Jesus and Lazarus are dying, but death will not be the last word. We no longer have to fear death for it is swallowed up in the victory of Christ's resurrection. Thanks be to God!

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Holy Week Worship Online

Holy Week will look a little different this year as we worship together from home! Join us for a week of meaningful worship online at www.hoplc.org/recordings.

Palm Sunday (April 5) at 9:30 am: Join us for worship as we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as he was hailed as king.

Maundy Thursday (April 9) at 7 pm: Join us for worship as we focus on the last night of Jesus' life.

Good Friday (April 10) at 7 pm: Join us for this moving worship service which reflects on the suffering and death of Jesus.

Easter Sunday (April 12) at 9:30 am: Join us as we celebrate the glorious resurrection of our Lord!



Leadership Ministry Team Update

Prayer Partners



*Brent King
President*

SPOILER ALERT: I might hurt Ben Whalen's feelings a little bit in this article.

On February 17, I got an email from Ben Whalen letting me know that we'd gotten paired-up as Prayer Partners—part of the initiative to deepen connections between folks attending our 9:30 a.m. service and the ReFuel service. After a few rescheduling efforts, Ben and I were finally able to carve out 15 minutes on March 8 to meet.

I found our conversation quite good. We talked a bit about what forms prayer can take—ranging from structured, routine daily prayers all the way to casual and informal “talking with God.” I shared with Ben that I'm more in the “casual” camp...my praying doesn't usually follow a schedule (however, I intentionally ask God's blessing for those who might be ailing during the Prayers for the People). I also commented that Children's Sermons are a great (and easy-to-understand) way to learn about how to talk to God--followed by joining the kids in a prayer before they go off to Sunday School.

We wrapped our time together by sharing what things we could pray for on each other's behalf and committed to reconnect in a couple weeks. I left our chat feeling really good!

Now...the spoiler part. I need to disclose to Ben that I'm not his only Prayer Partner. As part of the House of Prayer community, I've got a building full of Prayer Partners. This compassionate community has kept our family in its prayers throughout our membership; we occasionally even get cards in the mail from the HOP Staff reminding us that we're all Prayer Partners!

Sorry, Ben, that our Prayer Partnership isn't just us two guys. My hunch is that you don't mind a bit.

From Our Bishop - Gathering Through April



Below are excerpts from an email letter sent on March 20, 2020, to ELCA congregations from Bishop Ann Svennungsen. House of Prayer will follow this recommendation and will suspend all in-person worship and other gatherings at least through April. The church has also been closed to all rental groups through April.

Dear friends in Christ,

Thank you for your servant leadership in God's church and world. As your bishop, I call upon you as leaders to suspend all in-person corporate worship and all other in-person gatherings at least through April. Do this today. I believe this is one of the most important things our faith communities can do to love the neighbor in a time of COVID-19. ...

Our swift actions matter. Containing the spread of this virus "flattens the curve," making it more likely our medical system can adequately care for those who do get sick. ...

As your bishop, I call upon you as leaders to faithfully create new ways to tend your community of faith; to love the neighbor; and to build beloved community - all in the context of physical distancing. ...

In this Lenten season, we are reminded again and again that - no matter what suffering we face - we are not alone. No matter the clouds that obscure our view of the future - we are not alone.

This journey of the cross makes clear that nothing - neither life nor death nor anything else - can separate us from God's fierce love and unwavering presence in Jesus Christ. We rest in that promise.

In ongoing prayer, Bishop Ann Svennungsen

Around House of Prayer

House of Prayer Worship at Home & Connects in Community

On Friday, March 13, 2020, Gov. Tim Walz declared a “peacetime emergency” to heighten the state’s readiness to respond to COVID-19 and moved to limit gatherings in Minnesota to fewer than 250 people and 10 for higher risk populations. In consultation with the HOP Staff, Leadership Ministry Team, and our Richfield Collaboration Churches, On Saturday, March 14, HOP decided to suspend in-person worship services beginning Sunday, March 15.

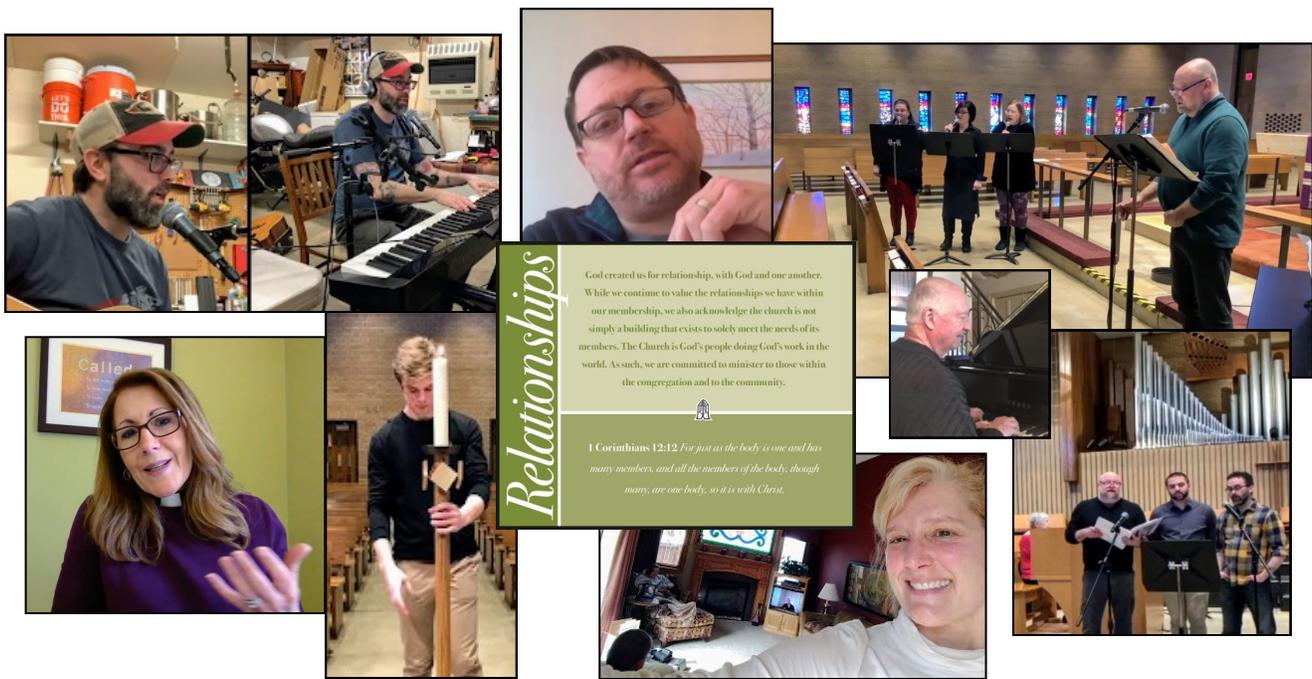
Many thanks and extreme kudos to the HOP staff, especially Josh Countryman (tech wizard) for acting so quickly to provide a recorded worship service for our congregation in one day! The March 15 worship service was recorded, edited, posted on the HOP website and Facebook page, and emailed to the congregation on Sunday, March 15! During Lent, we worship together on Wednesday evenings. The HOP staff quickly decided to provide weekly Lenten Worship in the same recorded format beginning March 18. Both Sunday and Wednesday worship services will continue to be available by 9:30am and 7:30pm respectively at least through April.

As restrictions on public gathering, messages from our Bishop, and finally the “stay at home” order issued by Gov. Walz on Wednesday, March 25, continue to change our landscape, we know now more than ever the importance of community. In recent months, we’ve focused on our HOP value of Welcoming; without missing a step, HOP members have uplifted our value of Relationships.

“God created us for relationship, with God and one another. While we continue to value the relationships we have within our membership, we also acknowledge the church is not simply a building that exists to solely meet the needs of its members. The Church is God’s people doing God’s work in the world. As such, we are committed to minister to those within the congregation and to the community.”

1 Corinthians 12:12 *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.*

We continue to explore avenues to actively check-in and provide care for our membership during this challenging time. We pray for God's presence and peace to be with each of you. You are a beloved child of God as a community of faith and we are here for you. Please let us know if you need anything.



Around House of Prayer

New Eternal Light Sculpture

House of Prayer commissioned sculptor Alisa (Al) Holen (daughter of members Ilene & Norman Holen) to create a new eternal light for the sanctuary. The previous bronze and stained glass eternal light fell and was broken beyond repair in the summer of 2018. This piece was installed on March 10, 2020. Here are a few words the sculptor:

Dear Pastor Ben,

I would first like to offer my sincere thanks to you for trusting me with the responsibility of creating a new vessel to display the eternal flame for the House of Prayer. A childhood spent with Norman and Ilene ensured that I was surrounded by both beautiful functional pottery and my father's remarkable sculptural work. This, along with their encouragement and support allowed me to realize a very rewarding career as a ceramic artist. I was truly touched by the opportunity to create a piece for the church where I spent much of my childhood, and where my parents still worship. When you asked if I might take on this project, I first wanted to visit the sanctuary that holds many fond memories. The inspiration for this piece came directly from the beautiful architecture and sculptural symbolism of the HOP sanctuary.

The ascending pipes of the organ have always captivated me. They are a powerful focal point in the sanctuary and I wanted to reflect their beautiful rhythmic pattern in this vessel. I also reflected on the symbolism of the seed in the baptismal font, and repeated the pod shape in both the cut-out and positive shapes of the piece. My hope is that the vessel for the eternal flame will complement the sanctuary, protect the flame, and allow a person's eye to find new patterns in these familiar shapes as they move around the sanctuary and their view of this new piece changes.

I tried to give the design a sense of verticality and ascension. Additionally, the religious significance of the number three was an important deciding factor in this design, and you will find threes repeated throughout. Finally, the top and less visible surface of the piece is divided into fifteen radial bands. I understand that in religious numerology, fifteen represents rest. As the artwork will most often be viewed on Sundays, a subtle reminder to rest felt like an appropriate way to finish the vessel.

I sincerely hope that this piece is enjoyed for many years at HOP and I would lastly like to mention that the installation of this work would not have been possible without the great help of Ramo, my husband Paul, and our friend; sculptor Al Wadzinski. It was truly a group effort.

Peace, Alisa (AL) Holen



Around House of Prayer

Monthly Finance Report

April generally brings us to our annual stewardship drive but this year will be a little different. We are working to send out our annual stewardship letter and moving into pledge Sunday in a manner that fits best with what we need to do to look out for each other. Given the rapid pace of change, we will have to adapt rather than put together an exact timeline. Understanding that flexibility is needed we will still take the information from pledges and utilize past giving patterns to create a budget that will work for House of Prayer for the upcoming fiscal year. I give a great deal of credit to Jo Shoberg for analyzing current finances and working to determine how to put a realistic budget together with the disruption in society due to our country's need to handle the COVID-19 response in a manner that is best for everyone.

Our financial income from offerings in February was lower than expected, but we have seen a slight uptick in early March. We are still operating behind our budgeted amounts but we are fortunate to have operating reserves that will help us weather a short-term difficulty. Brent King, Pastor Ben, Jo Shoberg, and I have met and will continue to discuss our financial picture as next year's budget is created to ensure that we make modifications necessary to put a prudent budget in place for the following year. These discussions have continued and now include doing what we can to plan out the disruption due to COVID-19.

As stated last month, If you intend to give a larger gift for the full fiscal year, but have not done so, please let Jo know if that will still be coming. House of Prayer will appreciate continued giving and any increase in giving. Please also understand that your contributions to House of Prayer outside of finances are far more important than money. We appreciate the generosity of this congregation and understand the concerns of those on fixed incomes and who are already giving at maximum capacity.

Our congregation and staff work diligently to make good use of our resources, which include talent, time, and financial contributions. Please prayerfully consider giving to House of Prayer as we close out this fiscal year and move into next so that we can continue to be a light to the community no matter the circumstance.

If you'd like to share any thoughts or concerns, please feel free to call me at 612-483-3081 or send me an email at charleysimonson@hotmail.com.

Thank you, Charley Simonson

February Financials

	<u>Feb-20</u>		<u>YTD</u>	
	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Budget</u>
Revenue				
Offerings	36,712	45,000	353,064	390,400
Rental Income	7,780	7,300	55,195	56,000
Ministry Income	1,562	765	15,258	4,647
Operating Reserve	0	0	14,168	0
Total Revenue	46,054	53,065	437,685	451,047
Total Expenditures				
	60,204	66,994	467,061	477,897
Net Operating Revenue	-14,151	-13,929	-29,376	-26,844



Around House of Prayer

From the Creation Care Team



Three members of our Creation Care Team attended the Minneapolis Area Synod EcoFaith Network Power-up: *Determining Our Collective Path Forward* held at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Bloomington on Saturday,

February 8. Bishop Ann Svennungsen began the program by saying that when there's a crisis in their office, they all drop what they're working on so everyone can work on the issue. She calls this an "All-Hands-On-Deck" moment. She said our current Global Climate Change issue is an "All-Hands-On-Deck" moment. Pastor Marie Anderson Lippert offered her perspectives on Global Warming and mentioned this quote by young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, "I want you to act as though the house is on fire; because it is."

Ruth Ivory Moore, ELCA's Director of Environment and Corporate Social Responsibility, was the featured speaker. Her presentation was about how we must get to carbon neutrality and sustainability and how water and climate change is related. It's not too late, but we must act swiftly and collectively to call our legislators to action on the real crisis that is developing.

Attendees then moved to breakouts that featured Minnesota watershed districts. House of Prayer is located in the Richfield-Bloomington Joint Powers Water Management Organization and is surrounded by the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District. We attended the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District presentation given by Kim Labo, the Education and Engagement Coordinator for that district. She emphasized smart salting and the fact that just one teaspoon of salt can contaminate five gallons of water. The #1 source of chloride permanently accumulating in Minnesota's lakes, streams, and groundwater is from deicing salts used for wintertime snow and ice management.

April 22, 2020, is Earth Day, celebrating 50 years of caring for God's earth. More than 100 million people and 100 countries, from Argentina to Zimbabwe, are expected to take part in the Great Global Cleanup. We need an "All-Hands-On-Deck" approach to help protect all of God's Creation.

Fall Festival Update

The Fall Festival Planning Committee met on January 16 of this year to report the results of House of Prayer's 2019 Fall Festival held Saturday, November 2. Our net income for the event was \$5,066.70.



It was a huge success, with many positive comments from vendors having plans to return in 2020. We were credited for being organized, friendly, a "favorite church bazaar," and with having a wonderful lunch available for them and the shoppers. In addition to the vendors and their arts, crafts, and other goods, House of Prayer's Bake Sale table is always a hit, and the fresh and frozen lefse was all sold before the end of the day!

Thanks to ALL of you who helped with this festival – it couldn't have been done without you!

Keep this in mind for Fall 2020, the second Saturday in November, when we will be presenting this fun and successful festival all over again!

Women's Group

Thanks to all who came out for Happy Hour at Houlihan's on March 5 to join us for one of our first Women's Group kick off events! The energy was great and new ideas emerged for more events to come.

More details to follow as more events get planned. If you have questions, please contact Pastor Kelly at ksandin@hoplc.org or 612-866-8471.



Children, Youth and Family

Thank You Shareholders

Our youth asked you to invest in their summer trip to Montana and you as a congregation stepped up! Thank you to everyone who purchased a share and made their trip more possible.

Eight of our high schoolers are preparing to head to Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp in Montana for a week this coming June, where they will try multiple high adventure wilderness activities that help them connect with one another and with God's beautiful creation (photo is from their recent bowling outing together to bond before the trip). Shareholders will receive monthly email updates as we prepare, photos & reflections after we return, and will be invited to a Shareholder Dinner at the end of summer to hear more from trip participants about what they did and the impact it had. Thanks again!



Lock In Fun



We recently had our annual lock-in for middle and high schoolers led by college students in the Gustavus Youth Outreach Team.

It was tons of fun as always as they led us in games, worship, Bible study, more games, and then left a little time for sleeping. Can't wait for next year!



Sunday School Singers

In early March, the Sunday Schoolers joined 9:30 worship to share their musical talents – both singing and playing mallet instruments!

Thanks as always to Mindy for leading them in song each week and to the kids for sharing their voices in worship.



Taking Faith Home

The Minneapolis Area Synod is partnering with Milestones Ministry so congregations can offer Taking Faith Home to their worshipers through the end of April. Taking Home Faith is a weekly home resource based on the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL). It includes daily Bible readings, a prayer for the week, mealtime prayer, a blessing for the week, a recommended hymn, caring conversation starters, devotion, service idea, and Christian rituals and traditions, all based on the RCL. There are also videos available at <https://milestonesministry.org/toolbox/milestones-ministry-resource-guides-and-info/> The videos show what Taking Home Faith looks like as a worship and devotional resource for the home.

Children, Youth and Family

New Preschool Hours

Did you hear? The preschool is ready to expand this fall 2020! We will be open Monday-Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and have several options for childcare schedules for children age 3-5 years old.

We've transitioned to a Montessori school, which focuses on each individual child, and so no matter what schedule a family chooses, we can follow their child's abilities and interests while they are here. We will always work hard to follow House of Prayer's values and provide a warm environment for children to spend their days in.

Know someone looking for a preschool this fall? Have them contact Nicole at noslon@hoplc.org.



Distance Learning for Youth

In-person gatherings are cancelled until further notice BUT that doesn't mean we can't keep practicing our faith together!



The Sunday Schoolers will get a take-home lesson to do with their parents to start exploring the stories of Holy Week & Easter.

The 5th and 6th graders will continue exploring the story of Moses & the Exodus while Confirmation youth have started learning about the sacrament of Baptism - also through fun take home activities.

High schoolers continue to set goals to dig deeper into personal faith practices and mentors continue connecting with their youth.

We hope these creative adaptations will remind us all that faith has always been and always will be something that permeates our whole lives and can't be confined in a church building!

Thanks from VEAP



Meeting Basic Needs.
Building Stronger Communities.

Together in January/February we donated 520 rolls of toilet paper for VEAP which the youth group delivered and repackaged on February 12.

VEAP was incredibly grateful for the donation and volunteer assistance and we look forward to ongoing partnership with their service to our community!



Christ in Community - Collaboration of Richfield ELCA Churches

Community Projects

Last month over 80 people from House of Prayer, Oak Grove, and Woodlake Lutheran Churches gathered for dinner (pictured below) to discuss how we can use our gifts and passions to serve our community of Richfield and beyond. This is a culmination of work done last year with a community organizer who facilitated one on one conversations with our members, canvassing to talk with neighbors, and research visits with leaders in our community. We're happy to share that we will be moving ahead with two very exciting community initiatives:

Middle School Partnership

We will partner with the Boys & Girls Club at Richfield Middle School to expand their after-school programming on Thursdays to include a few more groups meeting at Woodlake Lutheran Church. Volunteers will be needed to help setup, provide snacks, and lead small groups of kids in special interest groups like cooking, card playing, board games, or whatever idea volunteers and youth are excited about! Planning is already underway, and programming could begin as early as April. Please talk with Pastor Neal Cannon from Woodlake if you have questions or want to get involved with this project: ncannon@woodlakechurch.org or 651-403-3324.

Love Your Neighbor Challenge

We will recruit and coach members of our churches to intentionally build relationships with the neighbors on their block or in their apartment building over a six-month period. Volunteers would do this in their own neighborhood whether they live in Richfield or another city. The specific challenges would be flexible enough to help meet neighbors for the very first time or deepen friendships with neighbors you already know. Planning will begin soon but the project won't begin in earnest until this summer. Ben Whalen from House of Prayer is coordinating this effort and can be reached at bwhalen@hoplc.org or 612-500-9523.

Thank you SO MUCH to everyone who attended the Collaboration Dinner and/or helped with the input gathering stages last year. It continues to be abundantly clear that our congregations care deeply about living out our faith values in the community and are ready to make that a reality! We – the Collaboration Steering Committee – continue to be incredibly proud of our congregations and are excited for what is to come. Now the work begins!

Sincerely, the Collaboration Steering Committee:

Neal Cannon, Micah Pearson, Laurel Johnson, Scott Dahlquist, Ben Sandin, Kelly Sandin, Cara Wright, Ben Whalen, Tom Zarth, Julie Tvette, Mike Tvette, & Tammy Wilkinson



Lazarus

Continued from Page 1

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." John 11:17-27

After Jesus heard the news of his friend Lazarus' illness, he stayed away for two days. By the time he arrives, Lazarus has already been dead for four days. When Martha hears of Jesus' arrival, she went to him (Mary stays home) and confesses disappointment that he hadn't come sooner and the belief that even after death he could still do something. Martha continued to believe that through Christ all things were possible. When Jesus assures her that her brother will rise again, she professes faith in the resurrection "on the last day." She believes and trusts that death is not the final answer and Jesus is at the center of God's work. Jesus tells her "I AM the resurrection and the life" and offers the promise of eternal life for all who believe.

Even amid her overwhelming grief, Martha believes and trusts this promise. She understands fully who Jesus is and the mission God is accomplishing through him. This faithful confidence after the loss of a loved one is inspiring. It would have been easy for Martha to become bitter toward Jesus. After all the people he had healed, the one person he doesn't take time for is his friend Lazarus? No wonder Mary stayed home. Her reaction is more understandable. But Martha persists in believing in Jesus, trusting that he could even overcome death. As Christians, we confess that through the death and resurrection of Christ, death has been defeated and we have the promise of eternal life. Martha believed this *before* it happened. Her faith was amazing.

Jesus said: I AM the resurrection and the life. Jesus is the resurrection and through Christ we have the promise of eternal life; full redemption and reconciliation with God and the promise of reunion with those who have gone before us. Jesus is also the life. In Christ, we have the full presence of God in our lives. Walking with Christ in our life allows us to cling to the eternal promise during suffering and loss and not lose hope.

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" John 11:32-27

Jesus' journey to the cross was gut wrenching and challenging. He knew what God's plan meant for him. He knew the pain he would endure on the cross, but also how his death and resurrection would change the world forever. The truth is Jesus is not only the savior of the world, but also fully human. He had personal relationships and friendships with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Jesus' journey to the cross led him to wait two days to come back Lazarus, in order to show God's glory, but it wasn't without a cost. When Jesus saw the pain and mourning in the eyes of Mary he was "deeply moved" and began to weep. Jesus wept for Mary and for himself. He wept because his journey to the cross would also mean the loss of those he loved. Jesus wept and showed his compassion for human relationships, suffering and grief. Jesus wept and showed us God's heart.

Lazarus

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So, they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." John 11:38-44

Jesus' grief for Lazarus and support for Mary and Martha show us God's heart for the hurting. We need this reminder for all the pain, heartache, and loss we experience. We are not alone; God is with us. Jesus' raising of Lazarus demonstrates that death does not have the final say in life, God does. There is nothing impossible for God. Jesus raises to new life a man who had been dead four days. He raises him up with the powerful words: "Lazarus come out!" Lazarus is no longer bound by the power of death – through Christ he has been raised. This is the promise for us as well.

Through Christ, we hear the command to "come out" of the tomb of death and despair. Through Christ, we achieve victory over sin, darkness, and evil. Through Christ, we can claim the victory of life. Jesus wept for those he loved. He wept for Lazarus, Mary and Martha and he weeps for us. And like Lazarus, we too will share in the promise of new life through the death and resurrection of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed. He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So, from that day on they planned to put him to death." John 11:45-53

The raising of Lazarus was definitive proof that Jesus was the Messiah. All those who witnessed Lazarus, dead four days, coming out of the tomb believed in Jesus because of it. This word spread fast, as one might expect, and found the ears of the Pharisees and other religious leaders. This would be a pivotal moment for the Jewish leadership. Would they, finally, give credence to the belief that Jesus was the Messiah? Or would they obstinately insist Jesus was a fraud who needed to be destroyed?

The text suggests that for a moment they considered their options. If they allowed Jesus to go forward with his ministry, then all the people would believe in him and it would upset the political peace with the Romans. This could possibly lead to a revolt and the Romans destroying the Temple and all of Jerusalem (which happened later in 69 BCE). Or they could destroy Jesus and keep the peace with Rome. This became the preferred option. If the Jewish leaders were right, they could save Jerusalem and the Temple. If they were wrong, they would be responsible for handing over the Messiah God has promised and sent for them. In the end, they made a decision based on political expediency rather than principled faith.

It is tempting to judge the Jewish leaders harshly for their political calculations and lack of faith. Yet, when faced with difficult decisions and choices between competing needs, we often follow the same path. It is much more tempting to choose the easy path even when we know it is wrong. The religious leaders knew that acknowledging Jesus as Messiah would cause pain. It would mean a repudiation of their own leadership positions and a potential crackdown by the Roman army. If they chose to persecute

Lazarus

Jesus, they could keep their lifestyle and maintain the status quo. They will possibly lose either way, but they could be right and keep their privilege. How many would choose differently?

How often do we face such choices? Do we take the risk of leaving a comfortable job we hate to follow the nudge of God to an unknown venture? Do we speak out against injustice when it might risk the loss of friendships? Do we choose the lesser of two evils or find a different path? Life is full of choices and our character is formed by the choices we make over time. The path of faith puts love of God and love of neighbor at the center of our choices. We may make choices we regret or miscalculations, but if God is at the center of our discernment, we will make good choices more often than not. When we put ourselves and our own self-interest at the center of our decisions, we will cross the moral line over and over again. The choice is ours and ours alone. What will you choose?

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus. John 12:1-11

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, they were both in grave danger. Jesus was recognized by many as the Messiah God had promised. People were believing and trusting. The Jewish religious leaders were threatened by Jesus and had made the decision to destroy him. Lazarus was a problem too, for as long as he was alive there was indisputable evidence of Jesus' ministry. So, Lazarus must be destroyed as well.

Amidst this backdrop, we find Jesus, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha enjoying their last meal together. The meal celebrated Lazarus being raised from the dead and Jesus as the Messiah. This was a jubilant occasion shared between friends who loved one another. It was also known by Mary that it was the last chance to say goodbye to Jesus. As they gathered around the table, she took expensive perfume and anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. This was an act of service and love. It also acknowledged Jesus' journey to the cross. She anointed him in preparation of his burial. In ancient Israel, dead bodies were anointed with spices and ointment to cover up the smell. Mary anoints Jesus *in advance* because she understands what God is up to. She understands Jesus must travel to the cross to achieve God's plan. And just as Lazarus was raised from the dead, so will Jesus be raised.

As theologically important as this moment is, I am more deeply struck by the tenderness shared between Jesus and Mary. Yes, Jesus dies for our sins and by defeating death and the grave opens up for all people the promise of eternal life. This is the essence of the gospel and cannot be overstated. But in this story, it is the intimacy and closeness between them all (except for Judas) that is striking. Mary doesn't just accept Jesus as her Messiah and Savior, she loves him. She cares for Jesus and seeks to serve him. Her outpouring of love is directly related to her gratefulness. She knows what God is doing and the only fitting response is love. So, it should be us as well. God has given us grace, mercy, and love through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Yes, we should have faith and believe, but God wants more than our intellectual assent to theological propositions. God wants our heart and our love. May we love God with all our heart, mind, and spirit!

Prayer: Lord, fill my heart with love for you. Help me to believe and trust your promises are for me and are real. Help me to live my life for you and share your love in the world, in Jesus' name, AMEN.

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Worship Services:
Sundays at 9:30 a.m.
Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. at
www.hoplc.org/recordings

The **Hi-Lines** is published by the House of Prayer Staff and volunteers. Any questions can be directed to Cara Wright, Director of Operations & Communications, at cwright@hoplc.org.

Milestones

WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

Couples	Date	Years
<i>Anniversaries (50+ years and 5 year increments)</i>		
Craig & Kathy Tilbury	04/08/1995	25 years
Jason & Kate Sagness	04/15/2000	20 years
Jerry & Charlotte Carlson	04/19/1958	62 years

MEMORIAL SERVICES in March

Sharon Riffel March 26, 2020



April 2015 - 5 Years Ago:

HOP Loaves and Fishes Team—L-R: Andy Henrickson, Gil Frosig, Jeanne Lindstrom, Mike Murphy, Steve Johnson, Pam Murphy, Sue Burt, Jim Anderson