

CONTEMPLATIVE COMMUNION SERVICE

— April 2024 —

A NEW
CREATION

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
1432 Washtenaw Ave | Ann Arbor, MI 48104
firstpresbyterian.org

WELCOME

We're glad you're here!

Thank you for joining us at this short service of communion. We use a simple spoken liturgy with no music.

Liturgy by A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

Prayers and Poems by Sarah Are, A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

Confessional prayer (April 7, 14, and 21) by Thom Shuman, Lectionary Liturgies

Ways to Give

Your gift allows us to carry out our mission as an inclusive and diverse faith community.

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April 7, 2024

“Love the Lord your God with all your Heart”

CALL TO WORSHIP

They went to the cross,

And watched you breathe your last.

So they ran to the upper room,

And locked the door in fear.

Then, on this day so many years ago, some women went to the tomb,

But you were not there.

You were not there.

You were already set loose in the world—

spreading a holy type of love.

So find us here.

Spread love here.

Family of God, Christ is risen!

Alleluia! Amen!

CALL TO CONFESSION

Easter is a story of transformation—

Death to life; despair to hope; betrayal to forgiveness.

We need that type of transformation—every day and all the time.

So join me in the prayer of confession, for in our truth-telling with the divine, we are transformed. Let us pray—

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We have so many rules for others to follow, God of grace. We are so convinced that those around us have sold their souls out of greed, that we do not notice the emptiness of our own. We use words and actions which shatter the hearts of others, as ours slowly wither from lack of kindness.

Forgive us for our choosing to live the way we want, Merciful God. May we have nothing up our sleeves, but offer all we have to others. May we speak the words you give us, as we share the good news of grace. May we seek to love you as completely and trustingly as did Jesus the Christ, who loved us as sisters and brothers of your heart.

Silent Confession

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

We are heard, we are forgiven, we are offered new lives of service and faith.

Thanks be to God, who offers justice not judgment; who shares grace with us, not holds grudges against us. We are forgiven. Amen.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

God of love,

There are so many words in a day—

To-do lists and stress,
self-talk and notifications.

There are so many words,
and yet the only words we really need are yours.

Drown out every voice but your own, and speak to us through this text, for we are craving good news, your risen love.

Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

2 Corinthians 5:17

Mark 12:28-30

REFLECTION

Dan Francis

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

God, you are like the sun—for just as the sun never stops rotating around the earth, you never stop running toward us.

And God, you are like the wind—for we can't see you, but we can feel you. We feel you when we come together, when joy escapes our bones in the form of laughter, and when we hold a newborn.

And God, you are like the feeling of coming home—for no matter how long we are away, or how much time has passed, the doormat still says, “welcome,” and there is still a place for us at the table.

So today we bow our heads and close our eyes, hoping to feel you as strongly as we feel nostalgia and fear, or love and loss, which permeate our bones. We hope to feel you as strongly as the wind and the sun, for faith and doubt have always been intertwined for us.

Wonder stands at the heels of praise and joy has the memory of suffering.

**So God of the grave, we pray—
Be among us in our darkest moments.**

Be among us in our miscarriages and divorce, in our stress and anxiety, in our fear and doubt. Be among us in our loneliness and grief, in our isolation and our regret. Be among us in our addictions and depression, in bullying and self-doubt.

Be among us when Easter feels far away, and the grave feels too close.

God of life after death—
Enable us to be Easter people.

People who live into joy, wonder, and gratitude as a spiritual practice. People who acknowledge death in the world, but do not fear it. People who trust that nothing can separate us from your love.

God you are like the sun, and the wind, and the feeling of coming home.

You are all too great for us and simultaneously present in our midst. So rise again in our suffering, and rise again in our joy. Hear our songs of praise today and know that we love the way you love and long to live the way you lived.

And while you linger here, pour out your Spirit on this Table so that this ordinary bread and cup can remind us of your love. Pour out your Spirit on this Table so that in this meal we get a glimpse of your promised day—where all are welcomed, all belong, and all are fed.

And pour out your Spirit on us, for we long to be your Easter people.

And now, in gratitude for your consistent presence among us, we join our voices together in the prayer you taught us to pray, saying—

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; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION
SHARING OF BREAD AND CUP
PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

God of Grace—

We thank you for the way you designed joy to be contagious, for sunsets and sunrises, and for the air in our lungs.

We thank you for summer rains, starry nights, and home-cooked meals shared together.

We thank you for this sacred space, this Table, and for this day— which all hold the promise that love is enough.

God, you give us new life, beautiful life, full life.

Amen.

POEM BENEDICTION *Easter*

The earth doesn't deserve the sun.

We pollute her skies and poison the air. And yet, day after day, She keeps coming back.

Day after day, she warms my skin, Lights the night, and draws me in.

I think that's what Easter feels like. We haven't earned love,

And yet, love couldn't stay away. The stone had to roll,

The dawn had to break, Love had to win.

So each morning I thank God for this tiny glimpse of Easter— Light that breaks through the night,

Love that can't stay away.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE



April 14, 2024

“Love the Lord your God with all your Soul”

CALL TO WORSHIP

from Bruce Prewer

Let us start this service well, by reminding ourselves:

That it is not we who chose Christ,

but Christ who chose us,

That we are not here because of our goodness

but because of Christ’s grace,

That we are not here to enlighten ourselves,

but to allow Christ to enlighten us,

That we have not come to be entertained

but to worship God with heart, soul, mind and strength.

CALL TO CONFESSION

Easter is a story of transformation—

Death to life; despair to hope; betrayal to forgiveness.

We need that type of transformation—every day and all the time.

So join me in the prayer of confession, for in our truth-telling with the divine, we are transformed. Let us pray—

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Great Lover of Justice, hear our prayers:

called to treat all people equally,

we take sides and pick favorites;

chosen to be your children,

we arrogantly assume others are not so honored;

challenged to be examples of faith,

we reveal our worst natures to our families and friends.

Forgive us. Open our hypocritical hearts to your healing touch of compassion and hope. May we give ourselves to you — confidently, completely, faithfully.

Silent Confession

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Hear the good news: the One who created goodness and beauty is also the One who shows no partiality, but offers grace and peace to all.

God has heard our prayers and done the very thing we asked — forgiven us, healed us, restored us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

God of love,
There are so many words,
and yet the only words we really need are yours.
So today we pray, drown out every voice but your own,
and speak to us through this text, for we are craving good news.
We are desperate for your risen love.
With gratitude we pray, Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

2 Corinthians 5:17
Mark 12:28-30

REFLECTION

Ellen Johnson

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

God, you are like the sun—for just as the sun never stops rotating around the earth, you never stop running toward us.

And God, you are like the wind—for we can't see you, but we can feel you. We feel you when we come together, when joy escapes our bones in the form of laughter, and when we hold a newborn.

And God, you are like the feeling of coming home—for no matter how long we are away, or how much time has passed, the doormat still says, “welcome,” and there is still a place for us at the table.

So today we bow our heads and close our eyes, hoping to feel you as strongly as we feel nostalgia and fear, or love and loss, which permeate our bones. We hope to feel you as strongly as the wind and the sun, for faith and doubt have always been intertwined for us.

Wonder stands at the heels of praise and joy has the memory of suffering.

**So God of the grave, we pray—
Be among us in our darkest moments.**

Be among us in our miscarriages and divorce, in our stress and anxiety, in our fear and doubt. Be among us in our loneliness and grief, in our isolation and our regret. Be among us in our addictions and depression, in bullying and self-doubt.

Be among us when Easter feels far away, and the grave feels too close.

God of life after death—
Enable us to be Easter people.

People who live into joy, wonder, and gratitude as a spiritual practice. People who acknowledge death in the world, but do not fear it. People who trust that nothing can separate us from your love.

God you are like the sun, and the wind, and the feeling of coming home.

You are all too great for us and simultaneously present in our midst. So rise again in our suffering, and rise again in our joy. Hear our songs of praise today and know that we love the way you love and long to live the way you lived.

And while you linger here, pour out your Spirit on this Table so that this ordinary bread and cup can remind us of your love. Pour out your Spirit on this Table so that in this meal we get a glimpse of your promised day—where all are welcomed, all belong, and all are fed.

And pour out your Spirit on us, for we long to be your Easter people.

And now, in gratitude for your consistent presence among us, we join our voices together in the prayer you taught us to pray, saying—

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; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION
SHARING OF BREAD AND CUP
PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

God of Grace—

We thank you for the way you designed joy to be contagious, for sunsets and sunrises, and for the air in our lungs.

We thank you for summer rains, starry nights, and home-cooked meals shared together.

We thank you for this sacred space, this Table, and for this day— which all hold the promise that love is enough.

God, you give us new life, beautiful life, full life. Amen.

POEM BENEDECTION *I Pushed My Bed Into The Sun*

I pushed my bed into the sun,

Because that's what you do when it rains in your room,

And that's what you do when it's winter all year long,

And that's what you do when doubt feels like muscle memory.

So I pushed my bed into the sun

And prayed that the light would warm my bones.

And like a garden, my bed began to sprout Memories of love like flowers.

I should have known that despite the rain in my room,

The sun would still find me.

I should have known

That if I pushed my bed into the sun,

My bed would turn into a garden. I should have known.

Even on my darkest day,

I cannot escape your light.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE



April 21, 2024

“Love the Lord your God with all your Mind”

CALL TO WORSHIP

from John Leach/engageworship.org

Come to worship! Come and give God all you are!

Put your hearts into it:

make up your minds to give him the best.

With all our hearts we worship.

Open up your souls and spirits:

let his Spirit move you and touch you.

With all our souls we worship.

Don't switch off your brains:

worship thoughtfully and intelligently.

With all our minds we worship.

Put your back into it:

never tire of exalting God and showing others you mean it.

With all our strength we worship.

All creation praises God,

everything I am comes to give him the best I can.

CALL TO CONFESSION

Easter is a story of transformation—

Death to life; despair to hope; betrayal to forgiveness.

We need that type of transformation—every day and all the time.

So join me in the prayer of confession, for in our truth-telling with

the divine, we are transformed. Let us pray—

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of new life, we need Easter like the desert needs rain.

For you give us unending love, and we turn it into a commodity.

You give us mystery, and we force it into certainty.

You give us community, and we set rules about

who is in and who is out.

You give us grace, but we hold grudges against our neighbors.

You give us light and we ration it out to those we believe deserve it.

God of grace,

Forgive us for our shortcomings.

Dwell among us like rain in the desert—holy and unexpected—

until new life grows here. Gratefully we pray, Amen.

Silent Confession

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Family of Faith—

In the act of the cross, Jesus Christ experienced almost every type of hardship humans can inflict on one another—isolation, abandonment, physical and emotional abuse, shame, betrayal.

And still—

He came back for us.

No matter what you have done or left undone, you are known and loved by a God of unimaginable grace.

Like rain in the desert, your sin is washed clean.

Hear and believe the good news of the gospel:

You are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

God of love,

there are so many words,

and yet the only words we really need are yours.

Drown out every voice but your own, and speak to us through this text, for we are craving good news.

We are desperate for your risen love.

With gratitude we pray, Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

2 Corinthians 5:17

Mark 12:28-30

REFLECTION

Mel Rogers

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

God, you are like the sun—for just as the sun never stops rotating around the earth, you never stop running toward us.

And God, you are like the wind—for we can't see you, but we can feel you. We feel you when we come together, when joy escapes our bones in the form of laughter, and when we hold a newborn.

And God, you are like the feeling of coming home—for no matter how long we are away, or how much time has passed, the doormat still says, “welcome,” and there is still a place for us at the table.

So today we bow our heads and close our eyes, hoping to feel you as strongly as we feel nostalgia and fear, or love and loss, which permeate our bones. We hope to feel you as strongly as the wind and the sun, for faith and doubt have always been intertwined for us. Wonder stands at the heels of praise and joy has the memory of suffering.

**So God of the grave, we pray—
Be among us in our darkest moments.**

Be among us in our miscarriages and divorce, in our stress and anxiety, in our fear and doubt. Be among us in our loneliness and grief, in our isolation and our regret. Be among us in our addictions and depression, in bullying and self-doubt.

Be among us when Easter feels far away, and the grave feels too close.

God of life after death—
Enable us to be Easter people.

People who live into joy, wonder, and gratitude as a spiritual practice. People who acknowledge death in the world, but do not fear it. People who trust that nothing can separate us from your love.

Linger here. Pour out your Spirit on this Table so that this ordinary bread and cup can remind us of your love. Pour out your Spirit on this Table so that in this meal we get a glimpse of your promised day—where all are welcomed, all belong, and all are fed.

And pour out your Spirit on us, for we long to be your Easter people.

And now, in gratitude for your consistent presence among us, we join our voices together in the prayer you taught us to pray, saying—

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; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION
SHARING OF BREAD AND CUP
PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

God of Grace—

We thank you for the way you designed joy to be contagious, for sunsets and sunrises, and for the air in our lungs.

We thank you for summer rains, starry nights, and home-cooked meals shared together.

We thank you for this sacred space, this Table, and for this day— which all hold the promise that love is enough.

God, you give us new life, beautiful life, full life. Amen.

POEM BENEDICTION *Watered*

Every plant needs three things to grow: Soil, light, and water.

I wish I could be so simple.

I need a space to belong, and space to plant roots.

I need stars to wonder at

And sunsets to make me feel small.

I need hands to hold,

And another heartbeat to fall in rhythm with.

I need music like I need air,

And air that smells like trees.

I need food that tastes like home,

And a home that feels like Sabbath. I need a place at the table,

And a table to remind me of my Place in this world.

So water me with the stories of Jesus.

Cover me in hope, which looks like light,

And bury me in the promise that love is stronger than death.

For with those three things, I am sure to bloom.

Maybe it is just that simple.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE



April 28, 2024

“Love the Lord your God with all your Strength”

CALL TO WORSHIP

from Eliza Buchakjian-Tweedy

What does the Lord require of you?

**To do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with our God.**

What does God command of us?

**To love God with all our heart,
and all our soul,
and all our mind,
and all our strength,
and to love our neighbor as ourselves.**

God does not call us to ease or to comfort.

**But to presence, and abundance,
and grace in our struggle.**

Let us worship the God who believes in us,
and trusts in us, and abides with us.

**Let us worship the God who will ask much of us,
but will be beside us every step of the way.**

CALL TO CONFESSION

Easter is a story of transformation—

Death to life; despair to hope; betrayal to forgiveness.

We need that type of transformation—every day and all the time.

So join me in the prayer of confession, for in our truth-telling with
the divine, we are transformed. Let us pray—

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**We could do what you hope, God of our salvation, but we get so
distracted, we don't. We fill ourselves with temptation's empty calo-
ries, and wonder why we are still hungry. We put ourselves first,
and so never notice those behind us who struggle in life.**

**Forgive us. May we care deeply for those who make life difficult for
us. May we complete your hope by reaching out to those in need.
May we complete your grace by emptying ourselves for all around
us, just as Jesus did for us.**

Silent Confession

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Plant this good news deep in your thoughts: God loves you;
God forgives you; God strengthens you for service.

**May God's compassion make us more passionate to serve;
may God's forgiveness make us more merciful;
may God's love make us more loving to everyone.**

Thanks be to God. Amen.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

God of love,

There are so many words,
and yet the only words we really need are yours.

Drown out every voice but your own, and speak to us through this
text, for we are craving good news.

We are desperate for your risen love.

With gratitude we pray, Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

2 Corinthians 5:17

Mark 12:28-30

REFLECTION

Callie Feyen

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

God, you are like the sun—for just as the sun never stops rotating
around the earth, you never stop running toward us.

And God, you are like the wind—for we can't see you, but we can
feel you. We feel you when we come together, when joy escapes our
bones in the form of laughter, and when we hold a newborn.

And God, you are like the feeling of coming home—for no matter
how long we are away, or how much time has passed, the doormat
still says, "welcome," and there is still a place for us at the table.

So today we bow our heads and close our eyes, hoping to feel you.

**So God of the grave, we pray—
Be among us in our darkest moments.**

Be among us in our stress and anxiety, in our fear and doubt. Be
among us in our loneliness and grief, in our isolation and our regret.

Be among us in our addictions and depression, in self-flagellation and self-doubt.

Be among us when Easter feels far away, and the grave feels too close.

God of life after death—
Enable us to be Easter people.

People who live into joy, wonder, and gratitude as a spiritual practice. People who acknowledge death in the world, but do not fear it. People who trust that nothing can separate us from your love.

God you are like the sun, and the wind, and the feeling of coming home.

You are all too great for us and simultaneously present in our midst. So rise again in our suffering, and rise again in our joy. Hear our songs of praise today and know that we love the way you love and long to live the way you lived.

And while you linger here, pour out your Spirit on this Table so that this ordinary bread and cup can remind us of your love. Pour out your Spirit on this Table so that in this meal we get a glimpse of your promised day—where all are welcomed, all belong, and all are fed.

And pour out your Spirit on us, for we long to be your Easter people.

And now, in gratitude for your consistent presence among us, we join our voices together in the prayer you taught us to pray, saying—

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; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

SHARING OF BREAD AND CUP
PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

God of Grace—

We thank you for the way you designed joy to be contagious, for sunsets and sunrises, and for the air in our lungs.

We thank you for summer rains, starry nights, and home-cooked meals shared together.

We thank you for this sacred space, this Table, and for this day— which all hold the promise that love is enough.

God, there are not enough ways to say thank you.

So we start by acknowledging that our gratitude overflows. We start by acknowledging just how much we need you. Amen.

POEM BENEDICTION *My Mother and Mary*

My mother loves to play in the dirt.

She has gray hair and smile lines,

But still you'll find her out in her garden like a child on her knees—
elbows muddy, hands dirty,
smile lines in full flex.

I think my mother and Mary would have been friends.

For on their darkest days,

Both have gone to the garden.

So I imagine that on their darkest days,

Both Mary and my mother

Have willed new life from earth's cold ground—

meticulously tending stubborn soil while praying for a miracle—
praying that seeds will grow into flowers

that will take our breath away and remind us again that we are small.

And lo and behold,

As sure as the sun rises,

Those seeds grow.

And lo and behold,

As sure as the sun rises,

Those flowers will always take my breath away. And when they do,

You'll find my mother

Out in her garden,

elbows muddy,

hands dirty,

smile lines in full flex—

reminding me of Mary,

reminding me of God,
reminding me of the gift of new life.
And I feel small.
And it takes my breath away.
And my smile lines are in full flex.


*PASSING OF THE PEACE







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