

First Baptist Church of Fitchburg

1400 John Fitch Highway Fitchburg, MA 01420 Phone# 978-345-5622

April 26, 2020, 3rd Sunday of Easter

Pastor: Rev. Meredith H. Christian Song Leader: Diane Hope



Welcome and Announcements:

Good morning congregation, on this lovely Sunday. Thank you for joining our service as we come into the presence of God together to celebrate His many blessings, and share your deep concerns.

I thank each of you for having shared your time, talents, and resources with each other and this ministry, and for your continued prayers for each other, and all those affected by sickness, anxiety and distress around the world.

Please feel welcome to share concerns and celebrations with me and your deacons, who will forward them to myself directly. My email is meredithhchristian@gmail.com and phone is (774) 276-0505.

Let us share in our Call to Worship.

***Call to Worship:** As we come to worship, we ask that You will warm our hearts, clear our minds, purify our thoughts, and motivate our wills, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Invocation:

Heavenly Father, in this new time and season, we at times become overwhelmed by the tragedies of life, we struggle to understand life's mysteries or become disillusioned or discouraged, even teetering on the brink of losing faith in the sight of so much negative news that surrounds us in a time when bad news can seem like the only voice in the room.

We ask You Lord to remind us of Your Good News of salvation through Your Son Jesus, and to open our eyes to Your presence among us, to comfort and encourage us with Your Spirit and bless us with Your healing touch, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Gloria Patri:

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be
world without end. Amen, Amen.*

Hymn: "Open My Eyes, That I May See" (Hold Ctrl key and Click on link->) <https://youtu.be/UkXIjZERSnE>

First Reading: *Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 (NIV)*

"I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came over me; I was overcome by distress and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the LORD: "LORD, save me!"

What shall I return to the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the

LORD is the death of his faithful servants. Truly I am your servant, LORD; I serve you just as my mother did; you have freed me from my chains.

I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the LORD—in your midst, Jerusalem. Hallelu Yah”

Solo: *“I Love The Lord”* by Whitney Houston – <https://youtu.be/IU9iJ0YU0PO>

Celebrations and Concerns:

Please pray for comfort for Marilyn and her family on the passing of her sister Pricilla this week.

Prayers for Catherine’s granddaughter Breanne for her healing.

Nichole asks for prayers for her family, in particular her sister-in-law Comfort, who was recently struck by a car and struggles with complications, and also for Adeline, the ever cheerful and faithful attendee of our congregation who resides with the Yangsi family and is, by the grace of God, being released from the hospital after suffering from multiple serious health issues.

Please join me in praising God for their healing and pray that the families and children find comfort through God’s Spirit and support each other.

Silent Prayer:

Let us observe a moment of silent prayer for all those who have died this week, no matter the cause, and for any other concerns that may be on your heart.

Pastoral Prayer:

Prince of Peace, Holy Comforter, and Good Shepherd, we pray this morning for those who are discouraged, who find it difficult to find peace, who need comfort, who need assurance of Your divine presence. We pray for those who are discouraged with their jobs or lack thereof, who cannot seem to get ahead, who do not like the things they are being called on to do, and those experiencing conflicts at work or in their homes.

We pray for those who are discouraged with their family life—who are experiencing a breakdown in their relationships, who are disappointed with their spouse or children, who don’t seem to be able to find a way to resolve their differences, or who have become combative or hurtful toward others, particularly those they profess to love, as a way of releasing their current frustrations.

Almighty God, we come before You to pray for all who are dealing with an almost daily heaviness of the soul and a gloominess of outlook that they cannot overcome. We ask You to bring them peace, comfort, and guidance, as we pray the prayer Jesus taught us to pray,

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.

Children's Message: (Offered by Debi Cross)

Why Does God Allow Bad Days?

You know, sometimes I just have a bad day. Does that ever happen to you? Do you ever feel like your day just can't get any worse? Now, think quietly to yourself about the last time you had a bad day. Maybe you're not having such a great day right now! How did you feel when you had a bad day? Angry? Frustrated? Hurt? Embarrassed? Sad? I have felt all those things, and I'm sure you have too. But there is something I want you to think about the next time you are having a difficult day. I call it 'The three L's of Life'. Can you guess what they are?

First, remember that God allows us to LEARN.

Bad days teach us something. They teach us compassion. Think about this verse from Hebrew: We do not have a high priest (Jesus) who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we

are, yet without sin." Hebrews 4:15. Jesus has compassion on us. He had to endure terrible things, and he is able to have understanding on us. Jesus certainly had bad days, too!

Our 2nd 'L' is LESSON.

God is always disciplining us. Now that doesn't mean he is punishing us. He is making us better. He is improving us, training us. That's discipline. In each bad day, God has a lesson we can learn! What is the lesson God wants you to learn today? Maybe He wants you to learn that how to overlook an offense. Maybe He wants you to learn that you can trust Him to bring you through this bad day. I know someone who had a lot of bad days--David. Just when he thought it couldn't get any worse, it did! Was God there for David? God was right there the entire time. But God gave David difficulties to discipline him--to help David become better. David learned many lessons in his life, and He trusted God through all those many bad days.

The 3rd 'L' to remember is LOVE.

Have you ever watched Clifford the Big Red Dog? It's about a little girl named Emily who loved her dog so much that he (Clifford) grew bigger than any other dog in the world. Do you think God loves you that much? He loves you so much more than that! Why does God let you have bad days? Because He loves you. God wants you to grow into a beautiful person. Just like Emily's love for Clifford made him grow Big, God's love for us makes us grow big too--we become filled with big, wonderful heavenly blessings. He wants blessings for you--not blessings like toys and candy, which fade away, but heavenly blessings that will last forever. Blessings like being a good friend, being humble and sweet, being kind, loving, compassionate and caring. Those kind of blessings you can't buy in a store. You have to become them. And you don't become those things without God--God gives them to you through difficult times, through bad days, hard weeks, tough years.

"All discipline at the moment seems painful rather than pleasant. But later, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Hebrews 12:11.

How will you endure your next bad moment, or your next bad day? Will you remember that you can learn from it? That God can teach you a lesson about Him, or yourself? That God is loving you, even though it feels like you're all alone? Remember those things, and see how good is the Lord our God.

Youth Message: (Offered by Catherine Robertson)

JESUS HAS A PRAYER REQUEST FOR YOU!

Matthew 9:38, the short account; Luke 10:2, the equipping account

- Was it hard to find 5 praises to lift up to the Lord, each day, of this past week?
- Did it become harder when you heard that school is closed for the remainder of this term?
- Are you struggling with summer thoughts of 'what about camp/vacation/friends/fun' etc?
- Are you wondering about - yearning for a return to 'normal' again, as it seems so grey now?

OR....

- Were you able to look beyond hard things and see the blessings in your life?
- Did it require more energy and time to think about the days' blessings?
- Did you write down the praises that you lifted up to the Lord?
- Was this a *discipline* where you learned more about yourself and the Lord?
{Perhaps being surprised at the blessings you found as you reflected over your day – a '*Seek and you shall find*' method? Then discovering that you became more aware of blessings as they happened!?!}



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I am sorry that we cannot gather and talk together about these reflections of yours. We are living in a time of waiting. I choose to see it as a retreat – stepping back from the world and focusing on what the Holy Spirit wants **me** to learn **now**: To practice the Fruit of the Spirit ([Gal 5:22-23](#)), to put on the Whole Armor of God,

(Eph 6:10-18) for prayer, and to lift up the prayer request from Jesus. I know that when it's time, we will be able to go back out into the world again. But how will we do that?

- Will we just run out the door and look for the 'normal' we once enjoyed?
The world seeks that hope.

But we have the HOPE of our risen Savior! Soooo.....

- ✓ Will we feel we are being **called** by the Lord to 'Go Forth' (Mark 16:15) – OR – perhaps we may feel we are being **sent** to be part of the Harvest of God?

Is one different from the other?

PART ONE = we will see how the one builds on the other. We will contemplate how the Lord is working in our lives to prepare us for the Plan and Purpose God has for every person! The ultimate decision is always ours – our choice to accept the Plan -- or rebel against it.

Let's look at this prayer request from Jesus.....

The Harvest Is Great, the Laborers Few (Matthew 9:35-38)

³⁵Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, **"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to**

send out laborers into his harvest." **Wait! – What?**

WOW!



Why doesn't Jesus just do it?

Why do **we** need to pray for laborers?

He's God...so He can just do whatever He wants!!

RIGHT?



HERE'S THE THING:...We know Jesus' heart is for everyone to be saved. **But do we agree?**

Do we want to make the effort.....**do we** want to take the time.....**do we** want to give our energy..... to pray for others to be saved? **Do We?** Jesus is looking for at least two responses from us:

First – will we respond to His prayer request? Will we actually pray as Jesus asks? Or will we just read those words as something meant for the apostles a long time ago? [This is a request to **all** who read that passage.....you can ask the Lord to give you a 'hunger and thirst' for this prayer, (Matthew 5:6).]

Second – Are **we** willing to be that laborer?!? Are **we** willing to be sent? **Are We?**

The answer is up to you! Here are the facts.....

- a) The issue is already stated = 'the harvest is plentiful!'
- b) The solution is already presented = 'ask the Lord to send laborers'.
- c) We know Jesus has a plan = "Go Forth."

As Christians we are called to 'go forth' - we don't have to stop to figure out if Jesus means US – He does! Indeed, we have practiced 'go forth' via prayer!

- d) God WILL answer that Prayer Request of Jesus = (**Are you the answer??**)

HERE'S THE TAKEAWAY = 5 Practical Applications for us re: Prayer & Praise:

<1> Accept and rejoice that the Lord wants us **all** to come to Him and call Him Lord and Savior.

So, commit to continue to pray for those two+ people you've been lifting up in prayer.

<2> Be aware of those whom the Lord puts in your life.....for the 'go forth' prayers.

So, who else is the Lord bringing to mind for you to pray for during this time?

<3> The more we see the blessings of the Lord, the more we want to share that with others!

So, continue to lift up daily praises of blessings that came into your life!

<4> The closer we come to Jesus, the more we know the heart of God!

So, recognize how YOU are changing.....*Surprise(!)*....our heart is also God's Harvest!

<5> Invite the Holy Spirit to work in you.....Think about that prayer request from Jesus and.....

****Dedicate** this time as a retreat.

****Read and do** the Ephesians & Galatians scripture listed above.

****Look** up the other two passages mentioned: Mark 16:15; Matthew 5:6.

****Bonus** – find chapter/verse of the 'seek and you shall find' quote!

<God doesn't waste time. Live these weeks as 'holy unto the Lord,' (see I Peter 1:15-16).>

[NEXT WEEK is Part Two. Luke 10:1-12; and in the Old Testament, Isaiah 6:1-8]

Blessing of the Tithes and Offerings:

We love You God because You loved us. We give because You have given to us. We serve because Christ has served us. We ask that our gifts be acceptable to You Lord, not to earn Your favor, but to express our thanks for Your favor. We give, not in anticipation of blessings, but in response to them, freely and joyfully, for the good will of those in need and the propagation of Your Gospel of salvation through Christ. Amen.

(Tithes, offerings and gifts are greatly appreciated as a means to continue to care for our facilities, the needs of each other, and our local and worldwide community. We thank you for your pledges at this time and ask that you Please Pray over your gifts and mail them to, **Linda Gosselin 10 Washington Street, Fitchburg MA 01420**).

Doxology:

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise Him all creatures here below
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts
Praise Father Son and Holy Ghost.*

Hymn: "Worthy Is The Lamb" (Double Click on link & Skip ad.->) https://youtu.be/LApIJ0_jDFc

Sermon Text: *1 Peter 1:17-23 (AMP)*

"If you address as Father, the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in [reverent] fear [of Him] and with profound respect for Him throughout the time of your stay on earth. For you know that you were not redeemed from your useless [spiritually unproductive] way of life inherited [by tradition] from your forefathers with perishable things like silver and gold, but [you were actually purchased] with precious blood, like that of a [sacrificial] lamb unblemished and spotless, the priceless blood of Christ. For He was foreordained (foreknown) before the foundation of the world, but has appeared [publicly] in these last times for your sake and through Him you believe [confidently] in God [the heavenly Father], who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are [centered and rest] in God.

Since by your obedience to the truth you have purified yourselves for a sincere love of the believers, [see that you] love one another from the heart [always unselfishly seeking the best for one another], for you have been born again [that is, reborn from above—spiritually transformed, renewed, and set apart for His purpose] not of seed which is perishable but [from that which is] imperishable and immortal, that is, through the living and everlasting word of God. "

"A Letter To The Christians"

This message is not going to make sense to those of you who do not believe in Jesus Christ. It will sound foolish to the wise, and frustrate many intelligent people, yet I do hope will encourage and strengthen the saints (*1 Corinthians 1:18*), because today's scripture was not addressed to the agnostic, atheistic or those who believe in something or someone other than the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob made manifest through Jesus Christ. You sceptics or searchers are welcome to read on, but do so at the risk of your own confusion, or perhaps salvation, for this message is all about how contrary to the outside world us Christians really are, as we strive daily to do things that do not make sense, so that we can take no credit, for a purpose that gains us absolutely nothing, and we do these things and live this way, all while expecting and even rejoicing in suffering and pain, smiling like fools in the face of the same adversity and anxiety as you, undeterred by the ridiculous odds against us, seemingly undiscouraged, because of Jesus; all for Jesus.

So many of you know someone, or have at least heard of someone who "turned Christian" and was never the same. They used to be fun at parties. They used to hang out. They looked like and sounded like everyone else you know, except maybe your parents or "older people" who just don't get what's sick, or lit, or whatever. You know who I'm talking about. The ones who refuse to just chillax, who have totally changed from how you've known them their whole lives to some sort of passive, calm, friendly, well...Christian. They went to one Bible study, or started hanging out with those church people and now you don't even know them. What do they even do in those meetings? What was so wrong with the way they were? And are they trying to say they are now better or you're worse?

Anyway, like I said, just a bunch of Christianese from here on in. This letter from the Apostle Peter was to the Jewish Christians living in Asia Minor (That's like Turkey now), to prepare them to endure future suffering and persecution because of their faith. Like I said, weird, because who would sign up for that?

The letter basically says that if they called God their Father and really meant it, then they should act and live in a way that shows respect, devotion and not fear as in afraid of something, but huge respect and awe for the Lord. They should live differently than all the other people in their area who didn't know about Jesus or follow Him, and they should keep living like that for the rest of their lives. This wasn't something they should do for a while in order to get healthy or do something nice for others or gain wisdom or experience points. Peter was saying that once they became a Christian, the changes should be permanent, and get stronger over time.

Peter made it sound like those people used to be slaves or in some sort of bondage and then God bought them out and owns them now (*1 Corinthians 7:23*). That's harsh, I know, but not if you think of it like they had dug themselves a hole and they were in real deep debt, or had a fine over their heads that there was no way they could ever get up enough money to pay, and without payment by the due date, which was whenever the bill collector came knocking (in this case, that was the moment they died), they were doomed, jailed, and made to suffer in ways you can't believe, but then this Guy who they didn't even know showed up and when they asked if He could bail them out, He put up enough money to not only totally pay off everything they owed, but then He even gave them even more cash than they could spend just in case they forgot something, just because they asked; because He said He knew them from way back and always loved them (*Jeremiah 1:5*), and planned to pay for them (*Revelation 13:8*). How cool is that?

So anyway, these people weren't slaves, they were given their freedom in such a way that no one could take it back. They were now under their Father's protection. God made them one of His fam forever (*John 1:12-13*). He promised that He was never going to leave them (*Hebrews 13:5*), or kick them out of the family and would always have a place for them (*John 14:2-3*). I mean, Who does that?

Well then here is the catch, if there is one. Peter then said that since they were part of a new family and they were not in debt anymore, they should stop acting like they didn't have anyone or anything they could count on, or like they were about to be punished. Their new Father loves everyone, and they were expected to act like their new father.

They didn't have to scheme or manipulate in order to get what they need anymore, so they were now free to do things for other people just because it was the right and loving thing to do, no mayo, without needing to expect to get anything back from others, after all, those others might not have Someone to lean on or go to for help like they now did.

These people who had been saved by believing in what their new Friend Jesus had done for them could feel pretty good when things looked bad around them, because Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:30), in the same. And the Father made and had control over everything (*1 Chronicles 29:11*), and He is not going anywhere (Revelation 1:8).

While everyone around them might worry about how they were going to keep safe or fed or what they were going to do, they could be sure that no matter what things might look like, in the end, the problems would not last forever, and they would go on in joy and peace with the God who loved them forever (2 Corinthians 4:18), and ever. What's more, should they be unclear about how much God cared about them or what He had promised them, or even forget what He did for them, they could go back and read the Book He wrote anytime.

It's called the Bible, and it is kind of like a history book, love letter, diary and last will in testament all wrapped in one, and thousands of years later, it's still a best seller. That Book is not going out of print, in fact, people can get them for free. I guess that is why they call this message Good News. If none of that makes sense then I feel confident that you got the message even without having to buy into Christianity. Now for those who are part of "the club"...

Dear Christians,

These are difficult times, so I am writing to remind you remind you of how you used to search for moments of happiness in things that dishonored your bodies, minds or spirits, but now how you have the immeasurable joy that eternal salvation brings. You used to look for comfort in things, before you experienced the peace of the Comforter, who bestows His gifts for your well being and God's glory. You would depend so much on wealth before you understood the meaning of prosperity, of God's shalom where nothing is missing and nothing need be added. You used to rely on governments, leaders and companies to provide for your protection, before accepting the One who would provide eternal security and salvation through His sacrifice.

Because of whose you are, you no longer need to worry about what will become of you because your eternity is secured. I ask you to encourage yourself through scripture readings and remember what you used to be like, and how far you have come, how much you have grown and how merciful the Lord has been in your life and then look back to those you left behind. Those whom you loved may now be suffering.

See if God is putting one of your former friends in mind and reach out to them. Let them know that you still love them, that you still care and that you were never trying to move on from them, but moving toward a new life with Jesus. Tell them that they are welcome to explore this new joy and peace and comfort with you. Share how much they are loved and wanted and valued by their Heavenly Father. Tell them He has been waiting for them to receive all that He has to give them.

I ask you saints to share with others your testimony of how you met God, or rather how God met you in your time of need. Explain what all those scriptures in the Bible have meant to you and share with others the testimonies of your personal experiences with God. Not only will you build their faith, but you will also bolster your own in remembering His goodness, miracles and mercies in your life. They will believe you when they see for themselves how your faith has worked for you and changed you for the better.

Don't let the words "you've changed" be a condemnation. May it be instead a proclamation of how all those wonderful and unique things about you have matured into the kind, loving, gentle, forgiving and hopeful person you have become and are becoming through the Spirit working within you. Let them know that you too have pain and suffer at times, even though others may not see it, and that you understand their anxieties and fears

because you are still a person, like them. You just now know a Person who you can lean on and trust to get you through those times. Tell them about Jesus.

I am glad that you surrendered your life. I rejoice that one day we will be joined in eternity, yet while we are on this earth, having given over the life we had wasted or ruined to our Creator and been made new through the cleansing of our baptismal waters, we no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died and was raised for us (*2 Corinthians 5:15*). You have offered yourself freely as a servant to the Gospel by the commission God gave you to present to them the word of God in its fullness (*Colossians 1:25*), as an act of love for your neighbor, and in fulfilling your commission, you will enrich, edify and encourage yourselves as you see the same God who did a good work in you working through you for the sake of others until He returns (*Philippians 1:6*).

I close this letter with a prayer for your well being in body, mind and spirit and the hope that I will again be able to see you and be present with you in worship soon, as the Lord allows.

Prayer: Father God, Thank you for blessing us and assuring us that our eternity is safe in You, that the suffering that we endure does not need to lead to despair, because we know You are with us. We know that Jesus has saved us and our sins are forgiven. We remember that You love us and will never leave us, even when we feel alone, and can call on you and count on You do to what is best for us, even when we do not know what we need or where we are going. Thank you for being our God.

Love,
Me

Hymn: *“Praise You In This Storm”* (Click on link->) <https://youtu.be/sAle3dI8NYM>

Benediction: May you go forth with comforting assurance that following every sunset there will come a sunrise; that following the darkness will come the light; that following every evening of despair will come a dawning of hope, and that following your Lord Jesus, will transform your daily life in ways that reflect and glorify your Holy God. Amen.

May the Lord bless and keep you all.

