

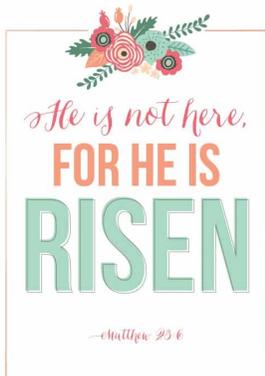


His Mansion

A newsletter from
First United Methodist Church
of Southbridge

"In my Father's House, there are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you..."

APRIL 2020



"Do not abandon yourselves to despair. We are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song"

Pope John Paul II

Reminder:

We meet for worship at 9 am and enjoy fellowship, coffee and treats afterwards



FROM PASTOR SABINA'S DESK

Dear friends in Christ,

Yes, we have entered the Easter season. But this year, things are quite different. No egg hunts, Holy Week services, etc. The Bible says "Go home, my people and lock your doors! Hide yourselves for a little while until the Lord's anger has passed" (Isaiah 26:20). So, we are obeying scrip-

ture. As we continue to observe the period of social or physical distancing, let us not forget to keep a very close watch on our personal health and wellbeing, our families, neighbors and friends. This time of uncertainty may be an opportunity for us to get closer to God. This crisis could be a warning us to change our self-centered ways to the way of love, to embrace one another as a people of one human race, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves, to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being. We affirm this in our baptismal covenant but need to put it into practice.

So, while we follow the practices of good hygiene to prevent us from the perils of this virus, let us continue to call on God, humble ourselves, and pray and seek His face. Let us turn to God so we can hear what God wants us to hear. God will answer our prayers for strength in the middle of te storm. Let us recognize and acknowledge that it is in God we live and move and have our being and, with God, all things are possible. God told Jeremiah: "Call upon me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you have not seen before." God did it for Jeremiah then, He can still do it for us today. Though many may be afraid, 'fear' for us Christians is 'wisdom.' The Bible tells us that "God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of sound mind." Let us proclaim our 1 Isaiah 26:20 2 2 Chronicles 7:14 3 Acts 17:26 4 Matthew 19:26 5 Jeremiah 33:3 6 2Timothy 1:7 2 faith in the very words of our Nicene Creed: "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen."

Continued on page 2

April

Lord, may I be
slow to condemn,
quick to forgive,
reluctant to judge
and eager to show mercy.

Prayer of the month

FROM PASTOR SABINA'S DESK

(continued)

Let us remember to pray for those whose family members have contracted the virus or have suffered death as the result of this pestilence. In all these things, let us remind ourselves in the words of the song writer who said:

"Be not dismayed whate'er betide, God will take care of you... No matter what the test may be, God will take care of you."

We are still connected! Online services, Bible Studies on Zoom, and more...

Let us continue to do everything through prayers that God will fill every day of our lives with good health, happiness, safety, peace and love.

Abba, Father, I lift up our church and family asking for your blessing, strength, hope and peace. Amen.

With peace, grace and gratitude,

Sabina



"Come out of the clutter and clanging of our culture and discover the peace of meeting the God of the Bible in the pages of His Word. Engage Bible Studies take you verse by verse into the richness of the Scriptures in ways that impact your heart and illumine your mind."

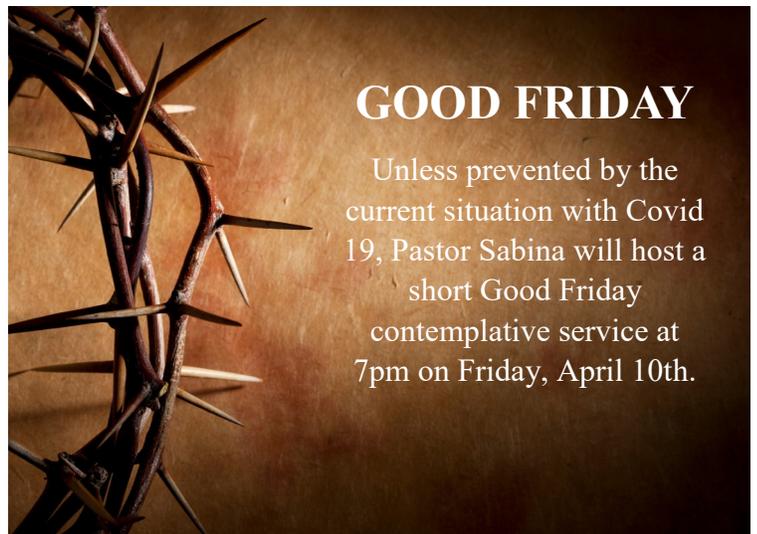
"Bible 101" every Monday at 6:30pm

(dinner will be served)

Come and learn the basics of the Word of God!

Important Note:

Until further notice, our weekly Bible study will be held online using Zoom. If interested in joining us, please let Pastor Sabina know so she can provide you with a link to the meeting.



GOOD FRIDAY

Unless prevented by the current situation with Covid 19, Pastor Sabina will host a short Good Friday contemplative service at 7pm on Friday, April 10th.

"Here is my servant! I have made him strong. He is my chosen one; I am pleased with him. I have given him my Spirit, and he will bring justice to the nations. He won't shout or yell or call out in the streets. He won't break off a bent reed or put out a dying flame, but he will make sure that justice is done. He won't quit or give up until he brings justice everywhere on earth, and people in foreign nations long for his teaching." Isaiah 42:1-4

A PRAYER FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
Our minds are consumed by a virus that threatens our bodies

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
Our band-width is stretched thin as we try to gain control

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
Our minds are filled with fear about how we will pay the bills

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
Our brains are tired of seeking answers to unknown scientific solutions

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
Our attention is devoted to 24-hour news cycles while our families still need us to see them

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
Our minds are overcome with worry about how bad things may get

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
Melt our fear
Mold our faith
Fill us with hope
Use us to share the good news that you are the source of life and peace.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
Draw our attention to new life budding in the trees and flowers outside our windows

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
Focus our minds on gratitude for breath that sustains us

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
Shape our instinct to find you in everyone we see in a Zoom meeting

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
Set our thoughts on what is pleasing and good

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
Cultivate our creativity to find new ways to connect with our community

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
Make space in our brains for meditation on your presence in us



Hungry? Lonely?

Please join us for
our free weekly
meals

Mondays—5 pm
Fridays—5 pm

On the menu (examples):
Soups, chili, spaghetti and meat sauce, casseroles,
BBQ, salads, bread, fruits, ice cream and other des-
serts.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Until further notice, meals will be “to-go”.
Please call Pastor Sabina if you need a meal to be de-
livered to you during voluntary quarantine.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us
May it be so

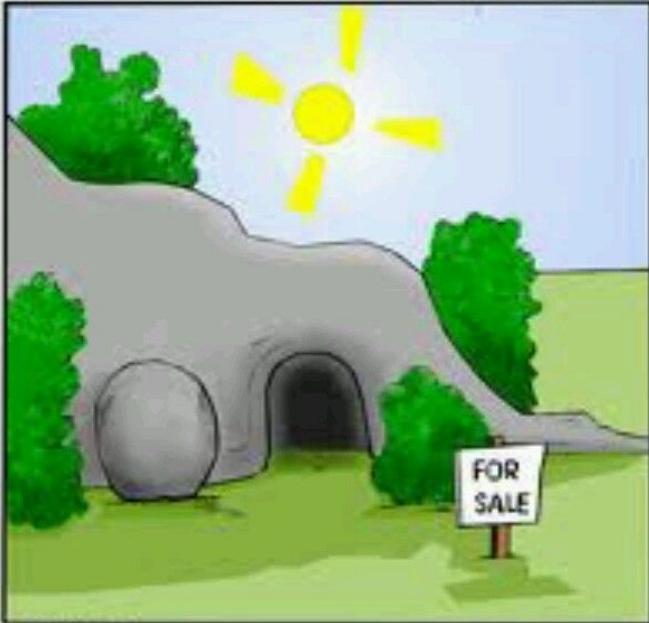
By Rev. Erica Robinson-Johnson, Director of Con-
nectional Ministries/Assistant to the Bishop
With phrases borrowed from “Spirit of the Living
God” by Daniel Iverson (UM Hymnal No 393)
Scripture: Romans 8:6 “To set the mind on the flesh is
death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and
peace.”

VERSE OF THE MONTH

*“Jesus said to her,
“I am the resurrection and the
life. Whoever believes in me,
though he die, yet shall he live.”*

John 11:25

The Back Pew - Jeff Larson



FOR SALE - Single owner tomb. Only used three days, and still has that new tomb smell. Reason for sale.. resident was resurrected.



“If man had his way, the plan of redemption would be an endless and bloody conflict. In reality, salvation was bought not by Jesus' fist, but by His nail-pierced hands; not by muscle but by love; not by vengeance but by forgiveness; not by force but by sacrifice. Jesus Christ our Lord surrendered in order that He might win; He destroyed His enemies by dying for them and conquered death by allowing death to conquer Him.”

A.W. Tozer
 “Preparing for Jesus' Return:
 Daily Live the Blessed Hope”



“When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me

Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.”

John 13:12-16

He is Risen

DEATH COULD NOT HOLD HIM.

Rejoice in the resurrection of

Jesus Christ.



WISHING YOU A BLESSED AND JOY FILLED EASTER!



CHURCH ONLINE

Do you miss attending worship? Well, in these uncertain times, two things remain certain:
 God and your church!

Join us for Church at 9am on Facebook!! Go to The Southbridge First United Methodist Church Page and just watch!!



What is Good Friday and why do we call Good Friday “good,” when it is such a dark and bleak event commemorating a day of suffering and death for Jesus?

For Christians, Good Friday is a crucial day of the year because it celebrates what we believe to be the most momentous weekend in the history of the world. Ever since Jesus died and was raised, Christians have proclaimed the cross and resurrection of Jesus to be the decisive turning point for all creation. Paul considered it to be “of first importance” that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and was raised to life on the third day, all in accordance with what God had promised all along in the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3).

On Good Friday we remember the day Jesus willingly suffered and died by crucifixion as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins (1 John 1:10). It is followed by Easter, the glorious celebration of the day Jesus was raised from the dead, heralding his victory over sin and death and pointing ahead to a future resurrection for all who are united to him by faith (Romans 6:5).

Still, why call the day of Jesus’ death “Good Friday” instead of “Bad Friday” or something similar? Some Christian traditions do take this approach: in German, for example, the day is called Karfreitag, or “Sorrowful Friday.” In English, in fact, the origin of the term “Good” is debated: some believe it developed from an older name, “God’s Friday.” Regardless of the origin, the name Good Friday is entirely appropriate because the suffering and death of Jesus, as terrible as it was, marked the dramatic culmination of God’s plan to save his people from their sins.

In order for the good news of the gospel to have meaning for us, we first have to understand the bad news of our condition as sinful people under condemnation. The good news of deliverance only makes sense once we see how we are enslaved. Another way of saying this is that it is important to understand and distinguish between law and gospel in Scripture. We need the law first to show us how hopeless our condition is; then the gospel of Jesus’ grace comes and brings us relief and salvation.

In the same way, Good Friday is “good” because as terrible as that day was, it had to happen for us to receive the joy of Easter. The wrath of God against sin had to be poured out on Jesus, the perfect sacrificial substitute, in order for forgiveness and salvation to be poured out to the nations.

Without that awful day of suffering, sorrow, and shed blood at the cross, God could not be both “just and the justifier” of those who trust in Jesus (Romans 3:26). Paradoxically, the day that seemed to be the greatest triumph of evil was actually the deathblow in God’s gloriously good plan to redeem the world from bondage.

The cross is where we see the convergence of great suffering and God’s forgiveness. Psalms 85:10 sings of a day when “righteousness and peace” will “kiss each other.” The cross of Jesus is where that occurred, where God’s demands, his righteousness, coincided with his mercy. We receive divine forgiveness, mercy, and peace because Jesus willingly took our divine punishment, the result of God’s righteousness against sin. “For the joy set before him” (Hebrews 12:2) Jesus endured the cross on Good Friday, knowing it led to his resurrection, our salvation, and the beginning of God’s reign of righteousness and peace. Good Friday marks the day when wrath and mercy met at the cross. That’s why Good Friday is so dark and so Good.



Christ’s “mandate” is commemorated on Maundy Thursday---“maundy” being a shortened form of mandatum (Latin), which means “command.” It was on the Thursday of

Christ’s final week before being crucified and resurrected that He said these words to his disciples:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34).

What Was the New Commandment?

Well, for one thing, it raised the definition of love to a new and higher standard. Jesus sacrificially met His followers’ deepest need---that of new spiritual life and the forgiveness of sins. He even loved His enemies, and He calls us to show love to those who don’t appear to deserve it. Just as Jesus loved sinners “to the end” (or “to the max” John 13:1) when He had nothing to gain from them, so must we.

The Bible says that there was nothing attractive about sinful mankind that drew Him to love us. God loved us while we were yet *sinners* (Romans 5:8). Salvation is not only a wonderful gift that protects us from the penalty that we deserve Romans 6:23, the work of Christ also embues new life, grants spiritual strength, and motivates godly action in those who believe:

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:11-14)

While Scripture doesn’t forbid us to commemorate days like Maundy Thursday, the main question is are we observing Christ’s new command to love---especially those who deserve it least?

A Round-Up of the Interesting Easter Traditions in Different Countries



Virtuous in Argentina

Easter is quite a big event in Argentina and various traditions are carried out to mark the occasion. Sunday sees the start of celebrations.

Easter Sunday in Argentina consists of consuming and sharing eggs as well as the special Easter cake, Rosca de Pascua. Tradition holds that people exchange eggs not only with their family, but also with friends and colleagues and the day culminates in attending mass followed by a big family gathering involving lots of food. Argentinians tend to celebrate Jesus' resurrection with a huge barbeque and a treasure hunt organized by the local governments in the main cities, so that everyone has a chance to participate.

Greek Methodology

Greece and Godliness go hand in hand. From Mythology to Christianity, Greek religious practices have always been carried out with great zeal. The Greek Orthodox Church follows the Byzantine calendar, so its Easter is celebrated on a different date, which is determined by the moon's cycle. In Greece, it is the most sacred holiday of the year marked by a full week of celebration. In Athens, Good Friday marks the first main event where a replica of Christ's tomb is carried through town. The most sacred of Easter events takes place the following day when people flock to the churches at midnight carrying unlit candles for the declaration of Christ's resurrection in saying "Christos Anesti" (Christ is Risen!) to which the reply is "Alithos Anesti" (He is risen indeed!). Following this announcement, they light their candles from the Holy Flame taken from Christ's nativity cave in Jerusalem and walk through town enjoying a glorious display of fireworks, bells and jubilation. Easter Sunday is a



day of food and more fun. After an arduous 40-day fast, the menu comprises spit-fire roast lamb and lots of colored eggs. In the Orthodox tradition, you knock eggs with your neighbor attempting to crack theirs to bring yourself good fortune.



Ceremonious in Lebanon

Lebanon's Christians not only make up almost half of the country's population, but are also very fervent in their beliefs. As such, Easter is a big deal there. Visitors will notice the ornately decorated streets, shops and restaurants

filled with all things Easter from bunnies to chocolate, painted eggs and even live baby chicks in some places. Easter Sunday is a huge celebration where absolutely everyone goes to church. After taking communion, the 40-day fast comprising a strictly vegan diet, is broken with an absolute feast featuring lamb and lots of egg breaking. A custom that is particularly unique to Lebanon is Shanineh, which is held at church where candles decorated with ribbons and flowers are handed to children who form a procession and carry them around the church. Also unique to Easter in the region is the consumption of sweets called Maamoul, these are little cookies made with a mixture of semolina and butter then stuffed with either dates or ground sugared nuts and dusted with icing sugar. They melt in your mouth.

Egg Rolling in Scotland

Easter in Scotland is a mostly laid-back event. The Scots do the traditional things commonly associated with Easter like attending mass and having a big meal, but they also add a bit of fun, particularly for the kids. Easter fun here is all about eggs. After they're boiled and painted in all kinds of colors and designs, they're taken to the park hills for rolling on Easter Sunday. While it may just sound like playtime for the kids, the event is very symbolic as it is carried out to represent the rolling away of stones on Jesus' tomb thereby assisting in His resurrection.



Celebration and Sobriety in Spain

In Spain, Easter is also the most important Christian event. Celebrated in mass throughout the country. It is marked by a carnival atmosphere throughout, with trumpets and drums.



Seville in Andalucia is the most famed Spanish region for Easter celebrations. It has 52 different religious brotherhoods whose members parade through the streets for the entire Holy Week manifesting the crucifixion. Processions continue for almost 24 hours culminating in the jubilation of the resurrection which is observed by floats covered in flowers, dancing in the streets and traditional sweet cakes.

(continued on page 7)

(Easter around the world—Conclusion)



Eggy Fun in Sweden

Easter in Sweden is about fun, food and festivity. It is especially good for family breaks as many of the Easter activities involve children. Humor-filled celebrations commence on Easter Saturday

with children dressing up as good witches setting the Easter mood by giving out letters and cards in return for eggs, sweets and coins. On Easter Sunday, food takes center stage where, in typically Nordic fashion, the feast comprises mostly fish. Edibles include different kinds of herring, a selection of smoked salmon, a hint of roast ham and various cheeses. Of course, the main attraction are eggs which are exchanged and later used in a game where participants roll them down roofing tiles to see which egg can go the furthest without breaking.

All Bells in France

In France, church bells ring every day of the year except for the three days of Easter. Legend has it that the reason the bells stop ringing is because they've made



a trip to Rome in order to be blessed. On Easter Sunday, the bells make their return and tour the entire country sprinkling chocolate eggs, chickens and rabbits, fish and sugar Baby Jesus as they go in each and every garden. After mid-day, children head to the gardens to find their hidden treasures left by the blessed bells. The day of events also includes a hearty meal, normally consisting of lamb, which is the Easter dish of choice in France.



Toy Hunting in Germany

Easter Baskets are the main tradition in Germany where each child

receives a basket put together by their parents, containing not only eggs and chocolate, but also toys and other gifts. The baskets are hidden in the back garden and the kids have to hunt for it after church on Easter Sunday. This is particularly popular in rural areas where houses tend to have big gardens, sometimes comprising several levels and full of trees and bushes.

In more urban areas, families tend to go on an Easter walk and hide their Osternest, which means Easter nest, in the forest or a meadow and the kids go hunting for it during the walk. Alternatively, if the nest doesn't appeal, some families like to hide chocolate eggs along the route of the walk.

AND HOW ABOUT THAT EASTER BUNNY?



The Bible makes no mention of a long-eared, short-tailed creature who delivers decorated eggs to well-behaved children on Easter Sunday; nevertheless, the Easter bunny has become a prominent symbol of Christianity's most important holiday. The exact origins of this mythical mammal are unclear, but rabbits, known to be prolific procreators, are an ancient symbol of fertility and new life. According to some sources, the Easter bunny first arrived in America in the 1700s with German immigrants who settled in Pennsylvania and transported their tradition of an egg-laying hare called "Osterhase" or "Oschter Haws." Their children made nests in which this creature could lay its colored eggs. Eventually, the custom spread across the U.S. and the fabled rabbit's Easter morning deliveries expanded to include chocolate and other types of candy and gifts, while decorated baskets replaced nests. Additionally, children often left out carrots for the bunny in case he got hungry from all his hopping.

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AND THOSE EGGS?

Easter is a religious holiday, but some of its customs, such as Easter eggs, are likely linked to pagan traditions. The egg, an ancient symbol of new life, has been associated with pagan festivals celebrating spring. From a Christian perspective, Easter eggs are said to represent Jesus' emer-

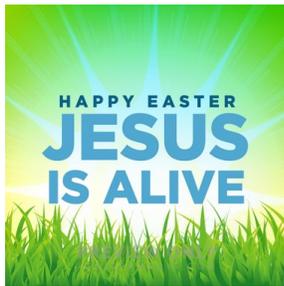
gence from the tomb and resurrection. Decorating eggs for Easter is a tradition that dates back to at least the 13th century, according to some sources. One explanation for this custom is that eggs were formerly a forbidden food during the Lenten season, so people would paint and decorate them to mark the end of the period of penance and fasting, then eat them on Easter as a celebration. Easter egg hunts and egg rolling are two popular egg-related traditions. In the U.S., the White House Easter Egg Roll, a race in which children push decorated, hard-boiled eggs across the White House lawn, is an annual event held the Monday after Easter. The first official White House egg roll occurred in 1878, when Rutherford B. Hayes was president. The event has no religious significance, although some people have considered egg rolling symbolic of the stone blocking Jesus' tomb being rolled away, leading to his resurrection.

Did You Know?

- ⇒ The largest Easter egg ever made was over 25 feet high and weighed over 8,000 pounds. It was built out of chocolate and marshmallow and supported by an internal steel frame.
- ⇒ Easter is the second best-selling candy holiday in America, after Halloween.
- ⇒ Another egg-shaped candy, the jelly bean, became associated with Easter in the 1930s.
- ⇒ For the past decade, the top-selling non-chocolate Easter candy has been the marshmallow Peep, a sugary, pastel-colored confection. Bethlehem, Pennsylvania-based candy manufacturer Just Born (founded by Russian immigrant Sam Born in 1923) began selling Peeps in the 1950s.



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His Mansion

*A newsletter from
First United Methodist Church
of Southbridge*

"In my Father's House, there are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you..."



**04/05:
04/09:
04/10:
04/12:**

**Palm Sunday
Maundy Thursday
Good Friday
Easter Sunday**