

hands & feet



A monthly newsletter of the Southbridge Methodist Church

Mark Your Calendar

Mondays 6:30pm
Lent Small Group

Wednesdays 3:30pm
EspresSoul

March 10, 6:30pm
Council Meeting

New Sermon Series
starts on March 20

March 23, 6pm
Movie Night
"The Case for Christ"

EDITORIAL

The Gospel and the War in Ukraine

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that all who believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16

My dear friends in Christ,

While organizing our Ash Wednesday service, I reflected on the situation in Ukraine and how we can look at it from the point of view of the Gospel. In order to do that, I focused on the struggle of the Protestant churches in Nazi Germany during the 1930s prior to World War II.

The German Evangelical Church, a national union of Lutheran, Reformed and United churches, was being infiltrated by a pro-Nazi group known as the Deutsche Christen ("German Christians"). The situation got so bad that at one point the great medieval Magdeburg Cathedral had its high altar draped in swastikas – uniting a symbol of racism and fascism with the Cross of Christ. In response to this, an anti-Nazi group was formed by concerned clergy, theologians and laypersons known as the Bekennende Kirche ("The Confessing Church"). The Confessing Church opposed Nazi interference in the church as well as Nazi ideology. At its founding synod held in Barmen, near the city of Düsseldorf, they issued their Declaration of May 1934. Its most famous statement is this: "Jesus Christ, as he is testified to us in the Holy Scripture, is the one

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MARCH 2022 EDITION

"God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy." – Pope Francis



EDITORIAL (continued)

Word of God, whom we are to hear, whom we are to trust and obey in life and in death.” In other words, in all things, in war, in peace, in patriotism, in resistance, in protest, we must listen to, trust and obey Jesus Christ as the one Word of God, even if to do so means to invite death rather than life. Several Confessing Church pastors and laypersons were sent to concentration camps and of those many were executed.

So, with this example in mind, how do we do this, obey Christ as God’s living Word, when the Russian government has chosen to wage an aggressive and fratricidal war against Ukraine?

If we oppose Russia’s war on Ukraine because we feel Christ demands it, what do we do? The idea of a NATO-led land war against Russia is unthinkable. But it is also unthinkable from the viewpoint of the gospel. Jesus is not a man of war. Try as we may, it is impossible to find a pro-war statement in the Gospels or anywhere else in the New Testament. If we turn to the Hebrew Bible to find a pro-war verse or two and we revel in the militarism of the psalms and other Old Testament books, what exactly are we doing? These stories were about the Kingdom of Israel – not America, not Europe, not Russia.

The Gospel proclaims that God loves all of us, not just ancient or modern Ukraine, not just America, not just Russia. God is on everyone’s side. John Calvin writes: *“Our neighbor bears the image of God; to use him, abuse him, or misuse him is to do violence to the person of God who images himself in every human soul... Not only do I despise my flesh when I wish to oppress someone, but I violate the image of God which is in me.”* Any idea in our minds that somehow leads us to believe that the sacred worth of a human being is less than our own based on race, religion, nationality, evil intent, enemy status, or any other quality is a heresy. It is a heresy because it denies that the person is created in the image of God. It is a heresy because it denies that God so loves the world – even our enemies – that God gave his only Son.

This compels us to ask now, in a time of war, what the proper relationship between love of God and love of country should be. How do we hear and obey Jesus Christ? If basic patriotism is not enough, what is it that will help us to be both good citizens and faithful Christians? Are the two mutually exclusive, or is it possible, somehow, to live these two claims? Th

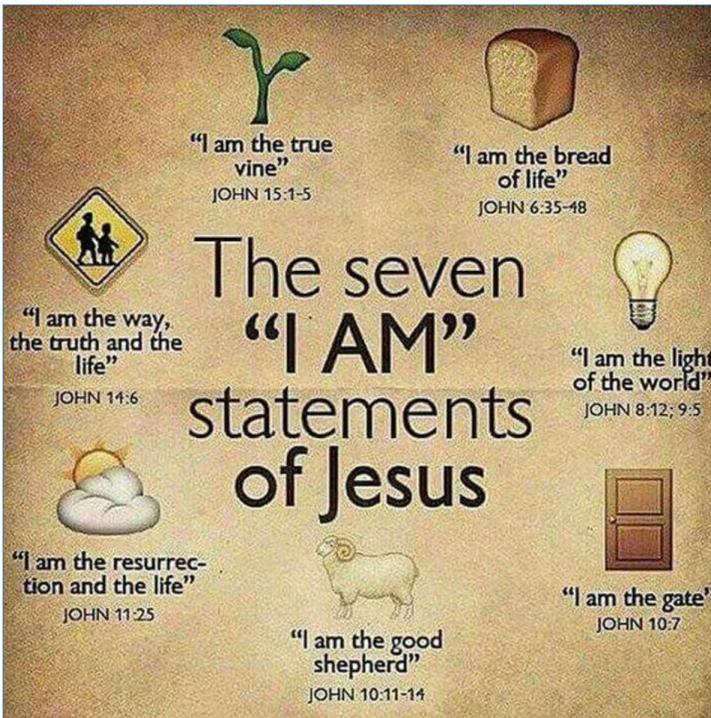
John’s Gospel does not deny the reality of these claims, but over and against them it sets God’s requests of love – love for the entire world. John is clear about that.

The gospel does tell us what we should do, tough, and difficult as that may be. “And these are God’s words,” says Paul at the end of Romans 12: “If your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him drink; for in so doing, you shall heap coals of fire upon his head.” Don’t allow yourself to be overpowered with evil: take the offensive and overpower evil with good. Now that is a radical foreign policy. Patriotism is not enough. God will not bless Putin’s war because Putin feels it is patriotic to reclaim the territory of the Russian Empire or Soviet Union. God does not care about human patriotism. God only cares that we are loyal to the Kingdom of Heaven. And in this, God demands that our heavenly citizenship have priority over any earthly passport we may have. And therefore, no matter what our politics are, we must love the world and its people as God does. We must listen to the one Word of God, Jesus Christ, and deal with his commands – and his command is none other than this: that we must love our enemies and resist vengeance.

But I will tell you this: if I were a Ukrainian and the enemy was at the gates; if I was called to defend my homeland; if I needed to fight to protect family, home and loved ones, I would – damn right! Damn right! I would do it, but it is a damnable choice. War is always a failure before Jesus Christ. Always. It is because we were unable to overwhelm the evil with light that we go to war. We may need to fight at times because as a human race we still have not evolved, have not achieved full redemption. In the past, we chose to turn from the Word of God for the sake of others and accept the damnable choice of violence for a greater good. And this is always what war is: a damnable choice. We cannot expect God to ever approve. When we fight, no matter who we feel is right, we fail from a Gospel perspective. The question is this: is the war in Ukraine one of those awful situations that demands of us that we turn from Christ and wage war, which to God is always wicked, and then return begging forgiveness at the foot of the cross? Is it one of those times? The price is extremely high and dangerous. And I confess that I do not know the answer.

But take heart. The war against Ukraine will end and I believe that the Ukrainian people will eventually prevail. I do not believe most Russian people want this war.

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NEW LENT/EASTER SERMON SERIES

March 20:
“I am the Bread of Life

March 27:
“I am the Light of the World”

April 2:
“I am the Gate”

April 10—PALM SUNDAY:
“I am the Good Shepherd”

April 17– EASTER:
“I am the Resurrection and the Life”

April 24:
“I am the True Vine”

May 1:
“I AM, therefore we are”

“Because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins.”

Leviticus 16:30

Prayer of the Month

A Prayer for Ukraine (Church of England)

God of peace and justice, we pray for the people of Ukraine today. We pray for peace and the laying down of weapons. We pray for all those who fear for tomorrow, that your Spirit of comfort would draw near to them. We pray for those with power over war or peace, for wisdom, discernment and compassion to guide their decisions. Above all, we pray for all your precious children, at risk and in fear, that you would hold and protect them. We pray in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.
Amen.



Lent



40-DAY PRAYER CHALLENGE

Fast from personal time! Take 30 minutes daily from time usually spent on leisure (social media, TV, etc.) and pray and listen to God. 40 days, 40 ideas! **We will pray for our church everyday (guidance for the future).** The challenge starts on Ash Wednesday (3/2).

1. Your commitment to this Lent Challenge
2. Thanksgiving for blessings
3. Repentance
4. Wisdom and direction
5. Our ministries
6. The people of our church (by name)
7. The people we serve (by name for those you know), the poor
8. The addicts and the homeless
9. The community of Southbridge (and surrounding towns), revival
10. The Methodist Church
11. All churches and volunteers working for the Kingdom
12. Yourself and your life
13. Your family and friends (by name)
14. The people you don't like, your enemies
15. Your relationship with God
16. Our spiritual leaders
17. Our country
18. Our political leaders (all of them, worldwide)
19. Those who do not know Christ
20. Children and youth
21. Schools and teachers
22. The elderly
23. Those affected by abortion
24. The earth
25. All nations and people
26. The ability to forgive others
27. Right priorities
28. Peace and the people of Ukraine
29. Our brothers and sisters of color
30. The LGBTQ+ community
31. The disabled and the sick
32. A heart of love and generosity
33. Endurance and strength
34. The immigrants and refugees
35. Those in jail
36. Persecuted Christians and the victims of human trafficking
37. The grieving
38. Those who are lonely, hopeless, or sad
39. Those thinking of suicide
40. Easter

JOIN US FOR COMMUNION
EVERY SUNDAY
DURING LENT.



Verse of the Month

*Dust you are, and to dust
you shall return.*

Ecclesiastes 3:20

MISSED CHURCH LATELY?

We need your continued financial support. This include regular Sunday offering. If you have not contributed lately because you were not able to come to church, please consider helping by sending a church to the church, or donating online on our website homepage (click on the "donate" button on top of the screen) at www.fumcsouthbridge.org.

JOIN OUR EMAIL GROUP!!

Did you know we send a weekly email newsletter with Sunday worship information and other important announcements?

If you would like to receive this weekly email, please send a request to Pastor Sabina at pastorsabinaterrades@gmail.com

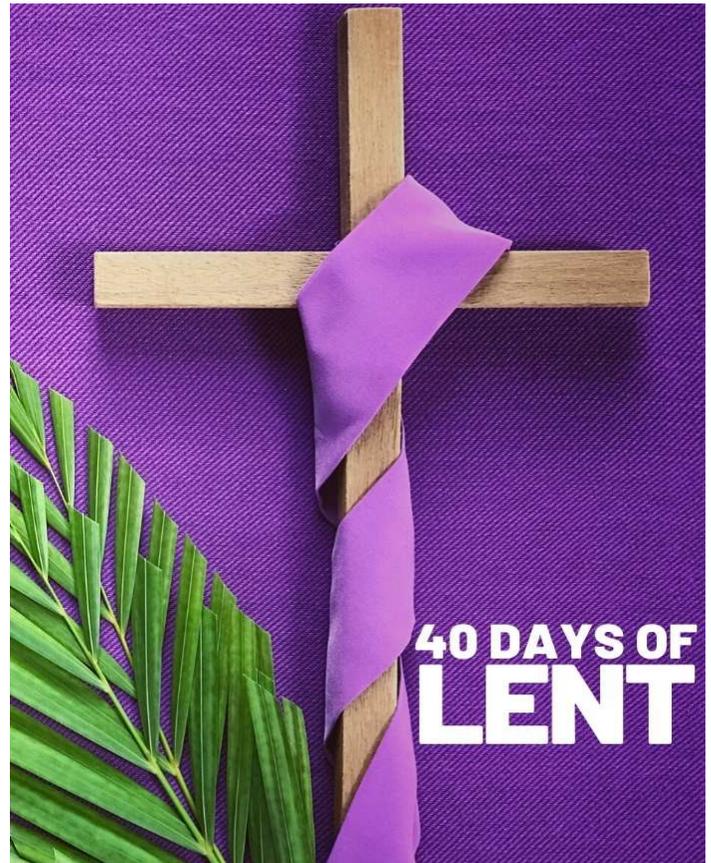
EDITORIAL (conclusion)

Most Russians have family ties to Ukraine – loved ones, grandparents, cousins, and friends. Many Ukrainian citizens are ethnic Russians. To an average Russian, this invasion is similar to the United States invading Canada – which is also an unthinkable idea.

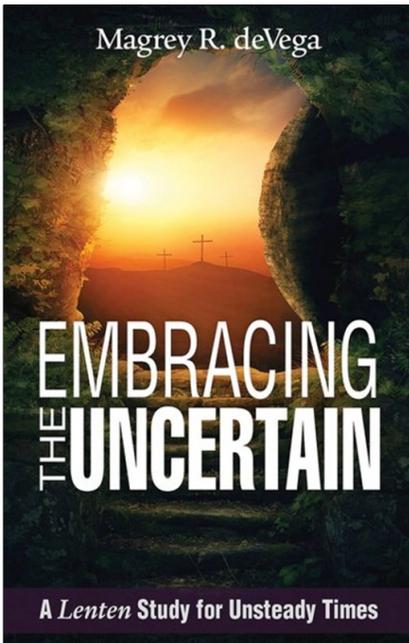
The Gospel of Christ insists that love changes everything and love never ends. If John's Gospel is true, then God loves all human beings including Russians, Ukrainians, our friends, and our enemies. It is this divine love that in the end will prevail. For now, let us pray for Ukraine and its people. Pray for peace. Keep the faith. May we in this time of war and unrest still keep a holy Lent and remember that Easter will come. Christ will rise. And Christ will come again. And Christ will conquer. And the kingdom come will be one of love, justice, and peace, world without end.

Many blessings,

Sabina



HOLY WEEK			
			
Palm Sunday	Maundy Thursday	Good Friday	Easter Sunday
APRIL 10	APRIL 14	APRIL 15	APRIL 17
10am Service	6:30pm Passover Seder	6:30pm Service	10am Service



**LENT SMALL GROUP
STARTS ON
MONDAY 3/6
AT 6:30PM
(6pm dinner)**

Just turning on the news lets us know we are living in uncertain times. Economic instabilities, eruptions of violence, and natural catastrophes can alter the lives and landscapes of entire communities. Our individual lives are often just as unsteady: relationships can break, plans can falter, and confidence can fail.

Uncertainty can definitely be uncomfortable. Many of us prefer stability and a predictable future to an unknown fate. We are wired to want to control our destiny.

The reality is that in our fast-changing, unpredictable world there are few guarantees in life. It's those who are willing to embrace uncertain-

ty and make the risky decision to follow Jesus despite the many "unknowns" who will reap the greatest rewards.

Embracing the Uncertain invites readers this Lent to engage and wrestle with life's uncertainties, not ignore them. Each of the stories are signposts in the gospel narrative, pointing down at a world filled with uncertainty, but pointing us forward to a cross that can show us how to follow Jesus with courage, hope, and obedience.

“The Case for Christ” is the story of a Chicago Tribune editor (and atheist) named Lee Strobel, who undertakes the task of debunking the “myth” of Christianity after his wife’s unexpected conversion. Ostensibly, Lee’s intent is to save his wife from getting sucked into what he fears may be a cult. But as the story unfolds, Strobel’s selfishness, intellectual pride and inability to address a deep-seated sense of woundedness stemming from his relationship with his father reveal the true motivations behind his refusal to believe in God.



449 Main Street
Southbridge, MA 01550
508-764-6501
fumcsouthbridge.org
Pastor Sabina Terrades
pastorsabinaterrades@gmail.com

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A monthly newsletter of the Southbridge Methodist Church

OFFICE HOURS: Mondays 4-6, Fridays 4-7, or by appointment

WORSHIP: Sundays at 10, in person and live on Facebook

BIBLE STUDY: Mondays at 6:30 (free dinner at 6)

ESPRESSOUL (coffee with the Pastor): Wednesdays at 3:30

CAROL'S CLOSET (free clothing, hygiene products,...): Fridays 1-6, Saturdays 10-2

BREAD OF LIFE Food Pantry: Fridays 1-6, Saturdays 10-2

ROLSIDA'S KITCHEN (free meal): Fridays at 5

INTERNET CAFÉ (free computer, wifi and coffee) TBA

LAUNDRY LOVE (free laundry and detergent) TBA