

Closing Hymn - "God Whose Love Is Always Stronger" (tune: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus)

Text by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, used by permission

God whose love is always stronger Than our weakness, pride and fear,  
In your world, we pray and wonder How to be more faithful here.  
Hate too often grows inside us; Fear rules what the nations do.  
So we pray, when wars divide us: Give us love, Lord! Make us new!

Love is patient, kind and caring, Never arrogant or rude,  
Never boastful, all things bearing; Love rejoices in the truth.  
When we're caught-up in believing- War will make- the terror cease,  
Show- us Je-sus' way- of liv-ing; May our strength-be in your peace.

May our faith in you be nourished; May your churches hear your call.  
May our lives be filled with courage As we speak your love for all.  
Now emboldened by your Spirit Who has given us new birth,  
Give us love, that we may share it Till your love renews the earth.

Sending Forth  
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord, here and in the world. Amen.

Postlude

## WELCOME, GUESTS!

**Children:** Thank you for bringing your children with you!

**Restrooms:** In the hallway outside the sanctuary and the hallway by the kitchen ADA accessible.

**Giving:** Our ministries are grateful for all your gifts.

**Communion:** All are welcome to participate. We have an open table.

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### ***Your Generosity Makes A Difference In This Community!***

Don't forget that you may also visit our website to give your contributions through the secure tithely system.

***st-lukesumc.com/give-online***

***Or scan this code with your smartphone*** →



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[www.st-lukesumc.com](http://www.st-lukesumc.com)

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## St. Luke's United Methodist Church

St. Petersburg, Fl.

**Making God's Love Known**

11:15 A.M. Service

March 5, 2023

### Gathering Songs

(TFWS 2088) Lord, I Lift Your Name on High  
Lord, I lift your name on high;  
Lord, I love to sing your praises.  
I'm so glad you're in my life;  
I'm so glad you came to save us.  
You came from heaven to earth to show the way,  
From the earth to the cross my debt to pay;  
From the cross to the grave,  
From the grave to the sky;  
Lord, I lift your name on high.

(TFWS 2108) O How He Loves You and Me  
O how he loves you and me! O how he loves you and me!  
He gave his life. What more could he give?  
O how he loves you; O how he loves me;  
O how he loves you and me!

Jesus to Calv'ry did go; his love for sinners to show.  
What he did there brought hope from despair.  
O how he loves you; O how he loves me;  
O how he loves you and me!

***Welcome/Ministry Opportunities/ Passing of the Peace***  
Share a greeting in whatever way you are comfortable

### ***Call to Worship***

Leader: We come this day hoping to encounter Christ.

**People respond: We come with burdens and questions that only He can answer.**

Leader: May we open our hearts to Him.

**People respond: May our lives be healed and strengthened for service**

Hymn #98

To God Be The Glory

To God be the glory, great things he hath done! so loved he the world that he gave us his Son, who yielded his life an atonement for sin, and opened the lifegate that all may go in.

Refrain:

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear his voice!

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice!

O come to the Father thru Jesus the Son, and give him the Glory, great things he hath done!

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood, to every believer  
The promise of God; the vilest offender who truly believes,  
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives. REFRAIN

Great things he hath taught us, great things he hath done,  
and great our rejoicing thru Jesus the Son; but purer, and  
Higher, and greater will be our wonder, our transport, when  
Jesus we see. REFRAIN

*Prayer of the People*

**God of the ages, we come into this holy space asking for your blessing, only to find that the abundance of your love is already around us. Open our eyes to see the blessing of your creation in the beauty all around us. Open our ears to hear the blessing of your word as it is proclaimed in story and song this day. Open our hearts to experience the blessing of faith through the gentle touch of a friend or the supportive smile of a stranger. And open our doors, that we may become vessels of your blessing to a world still in need of salvation. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

*Moment of Silence/Pastoral Prayer/The Lord's Prayer*

**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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

Sing Psalms Psalm 32 : 1-7 (Tune Gethesemane)

*Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

**Those whose sins are known, confessed,**

**By the Lord are surely blessed.**

*Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

**Those who turn to God in love**

**Find forgiveness from above.**

*Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.*

**Those whose sins are known, confessed,**

**By the Lord are surely blessed.**

*Therefore, let all who are faithful offer prayer to you. When a great flood of trouble comes rushing in, It will not reach them.*

**Those who turn to God in love**

**Find forgiveness from above.**

*You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.*

**Let the righteous raise their voice,**

**In the Lord, their God, rejoice.**

Special Music - O Cleansing Stream

by Douglas E. Wagner

O cleansing stream wash over me, and fill my heart with purity; the stains are deep, but this I know, that you can cleanse as white as snow. O cleansing stream of righteousness, flow over me in my distress; My heart awaits your cleansing pow'r, wash over me, O blessed show'r. O cleansing stream restore to me, an upright heart, that all might see the peace of God within my soul; O cleanse me now, and make me whole. O cleansing stream from God above, cleanse thou my heart through his great love; remove my guilt and set me free; O cleansing stream wash over me.

*Offertory* "Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley"

Peggy BeVille

Doxology

*Offertory Prayer*

God of unwavering love, you have held nothing back in your love for us, not even your Son. How we marvel at that kind of love, and how we long to reflect a portion of that devotion back to you. As we dedicate our offerings to you, lead us away from our tendency to hold back and worry that there will not be enough. Help us to live as the people of love and abundance you have called us to be. In Christ we pray. Amen.

Scripture John 3: 1-17

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person." 3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? 11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Sermon: Encounters with Christ: Nicodemus

Holy Communion

Leader: We open our hearts to you, O God

**People respond: Let us give thanks to God, who gives us courage, to the One who calls us to lives of service, we give thanks and praise**

Gracious God, we struggle with spirits of fear and greed that tempt us away from your original plan for us. We excuse ourselves from responsibilities to our neighbors. We struggle to believe we have anything to offer to the whole. And at times we knowingly do harm to others for the sake of our own gain. You know our struggles, O God. And so you sent us Jesus. In him we learn how to show up for one another. Jesus lived in service to collective well-being. He sought out those in need of community. He befriended the ones who were isolated. He challenged the structures that destroy. Through his life, you taught us that the same capacities live in us. We too can choose the way of service to collective life. You have given each of us gifts to play our part. The same spirit of courage that kept Jesus proclaiming love even in the face of death lives in us. On the night of his arrest, Jesus shared a meal with his companions. He took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to his disciples and said: "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."