

## FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

February 22, 2026

Matthew 4:1-11

### Abundant Grace

The season of Lent begins with a 40-day trip into the harsh and desolate wilderness. While it might not be as enticing as a trip to Tahiti, it is an important one, nevertheless. It is our time to learn from Jesus how to deal with our own wild beasts, our own hungers and thirsts, and our own run-ins with the Tempter, by leaning on God's Word.

This year, though, I don't need to say "yes" to this invitation to follow Jesus into the desert. That's because I have never emerged. I have been in a state of wilderness lostness for quite some time. Wild beasts remain nipping at my ankles. False promises of stones turning into bread have not satiated the hollow pit in my soul. And tempters seem to be trying to get my attention everywhere I turn.

It is easy to "do" Lent when everything is right in the world. When we feel safe and hopeful, Lent becomes a season of eagerly listening to God, slowing down, praying more, and helping others. But when worries of rising grocery bills and whether it is safe to go out in a public place overtake your thoughts, you wonder: Is this harsh world the norm?

I know I am not alone asking this, as studies show how hurtful and hateful society has become. There was a recent poll that revealed a whopping 47% of Americans agreed that people have become ruder to one another since Covid. The other day, a colleague shared an insight that I found profound. She observed how there was a growing sense of entitlement, yet no one had any shame over the things they said and did.

Perhaps this Lenten season is not so much about entering the wilderness as it is about helping one another exit it — to find our way back to hope by holding even tighter to God's Word, by kicking the wild beasts away, and by claiming the name of Christ when tempters tout false promises.

For here is the good news for all my perpetual wilderness wanderers. There are always — always — angels among us eagerly waiting to administer the help that we need. Perhaps there is one sitting in the pew next to you.

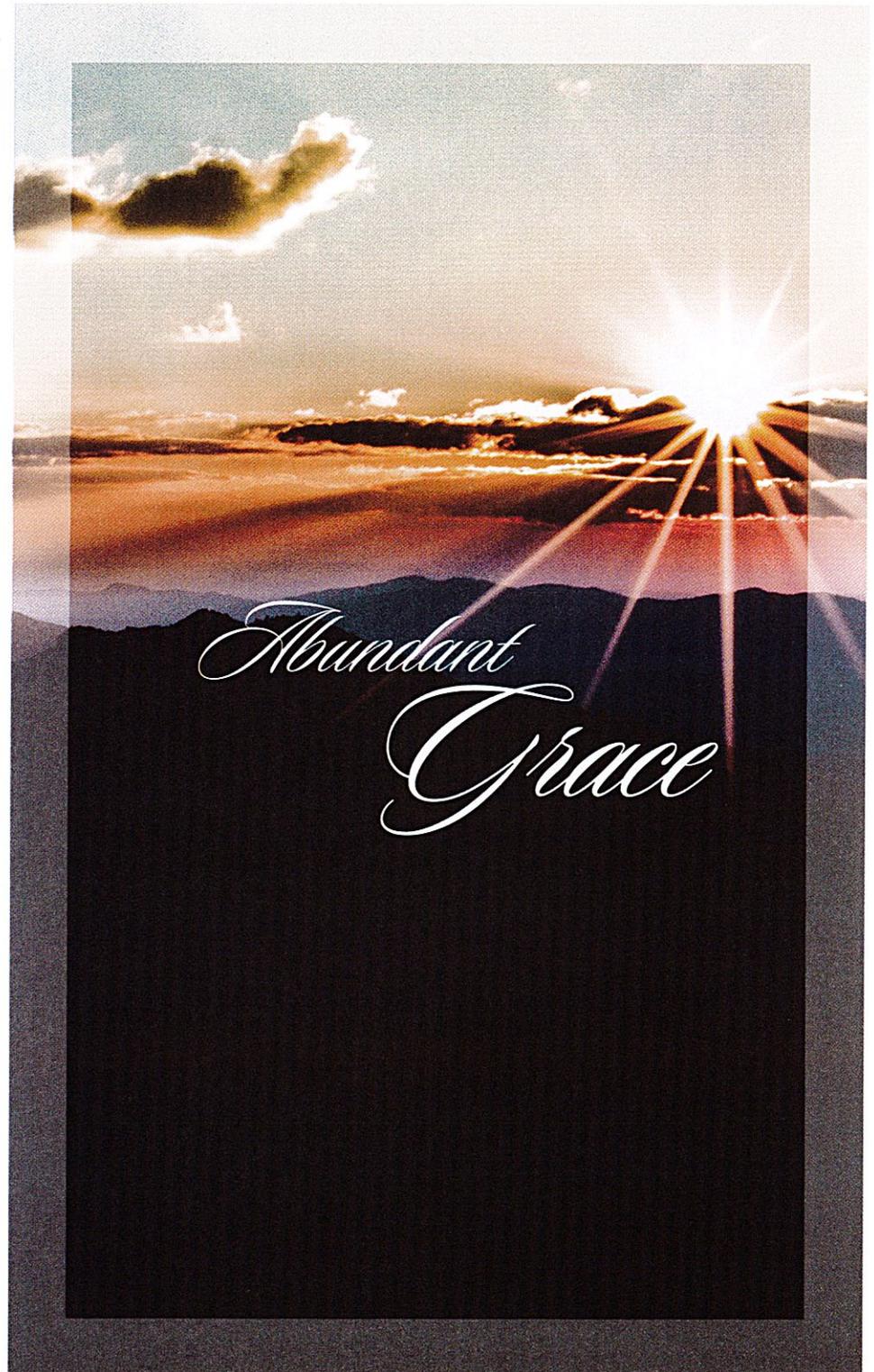
*Redeeming God, there are many of us who seem to be trapped in a never-ending wilderness. The weight of the world's worries and fears are robbing us of joy and hope. Strengthen us. Grant us courage. Increase our faith. May this Lent we reach out to one another so that we emerge from our desert desolation together, united in a love that no evil can destroy. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

*(Rev. Donna Frischknecht Jackson is a communications specialist for the United Church of Christ and author of today's Sunday Bulletin.)*



8.5" x 11" UCC SUNDAY BULLETIN SERVICE

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# St. John's Grace United Church of Christ

1000 S Rolling Road, Catonsville, Maryland 21228

**First Sunday in Lent**

**February 22, 2026 11:00 AM**

## *Vision Statement:*

Our vision is to be a community of faith and a voice of hope following Jesus' way of love and service.

[www.stjohnsuccmd.com](http://www.stjohnsuccmd.com)

*Nursery care is available during service for young children.*

## **ORDER OF WORSHIP**

+ Please rise in body or in spirit                      Congregation reads text in *bold italic*.

### **WE GATHER AS GOD'S PEOPLE**

#### **Welcome and Announcements**

#### **Centering Prayer and Silence**

In the name of Compassion, the embodiment of Peace, the incarnation of Mercy, we turn ourselves to you, we hear your Word, we see the Radiance of your face. Our whole being resonates with your Truth. May we open ourselves to your Presence, now and always, here and in every place we travel. Let our every step recognize the holiness of the realm in which we live. Let our every word express the sacred covenant we hold in our hearts with you. Amen.

#### **Silent Meditation**

#### **Lighting of the Presence Candle**

In lighting this candle, we acknowledge that:  
*God is here, now, everywhere, always.*

#### **+Invocation and Call to Worship**

In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For heavenly peace and the salvation of our souls let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For the things we fail to do, for the separation we cause, for all the ways we fail to express your love,

*Lord, have mercy.*

For peace in the whole world, the stability of God's People and for the oneness of all, let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For this church, and all who enter it with faith and reverence, let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For everyone in ministry that serves, for all clergy and the people, let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For our country, and everyone in public service, let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For this city, for every city and land, and for the faithful who live in them, let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For good weather, abundance from the earth, and for peaceful times, let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For those who travel, by land, sea and air, for those who are sick or suffering or in captivity, and for their safekeeping, let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

That we may be spared all affliction, violence, danger and want, let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

Help us, save us, have mercy on us and keep us, O God, in Your grace.

#### **+Opening Hymn:**

Amazing Grace

NCH #547 v. 1-4

## Prayer for Transformation and New Life

Let us pray together:

*May we roam on the mountains of your presence, listening to the sermon of the blessed, hearing the gentle urging of the wind, feeling the movement of spirit, seeing the pure heart that waits, for the revelation of Christ in every face. Help us to study the oneness in your eyes, the thunder and groaning power of the words you choose to speak to us. Help us with ears that listen and eyes that see. May we choose love as a path through every pain, kindness as the fulfillment of every action, mercy with every confrontation, grace for every confused moment in our lives. From the mountains may the cool breath of spirit lift our feet as we travel a path without fear, and beyond anxiety to the presence of others to serve those in need. May we worship in spirit and truth, and when thirsty, drink from the living water you bring us, the water gushing up to eternal life. Amen.*

## Words of Grace

Jesus has told us, "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." We can trust in the power of God's grace in every place and time. Amen.

## +Passing of the Peace

## Departure to Church School

## WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

**The Hebrew Reading:** Psalm 32

**Ministry of Music:** God Leads Us On Chancel Choir

**+The Gospel Reading** Matthew 4:1-11

**Reflection:** Rev. Jeff Munnis

**Hymn of Reflection:** Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley FWS #2112

## WE OPEN OURSELVES TO GOD IN GRATITUDE AND PRAYER

### Prayers of the People

#### 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, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*

## WE SHARE OUR GIFTS

### Invitation to Generosity:

*God calls us by name and sends us as light to the world. Like John who pointed beyond himself, and like the servant called to gather and restore, we offer not to draw attention to ourselves; we make our offering as witness to God's love at work among us. In gratitude for the gifts we have received, and in hope for the light God is still bringing into the world. Amen.*

*Your generous offerings are appreciated and used for continuing the missions of this church.*

*For electronic giving, a QR code is available in the pews or in your bulletin at the end of the printed worship service.*

### +Doxology

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures here below;  
Praise God, for all that love has done;  
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One. Amen*

## WE GO OUT TO LIVE AND TO SERVE

### +Commission and Blessing

Our worship has ended. Our service begins.

What does God need from us?

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

Continue to serve with faith and love, depart from this time today committed to sharing the best of yourself, through extravagant generosity of time and resources, meeting the needs of others, both spoken and unspoken, seen and unseen, heard and unheard.

***We will go now seeking justice, sharing compassion, and promoting hope in the world.***

My dear friends in faith, will you go into your worlds to be people of God in Christ's name?

***We will. Amen!***

+Closing Hymn: Not My Brother, nor My Sister NCH #519  
v. 1, 2, 3

### +Benediction:

We welcome you this morning, and invite you to return,  
and worship with us every Sunday morning at 11:00 AM

*For your convenience you can scan our QR code  
to contribute electronically.*



### Name Tags for Members and Friends!

Members and friends are asked to wear name tags for worship time because they help other people. It is also helpful for folks who may know the face but not the name of another. Wearing a name tag is voluntary but shows that you care about others.

If you need a name tag, please ask a greeter or usher at the welcome desk to fill out a badge request slip!

*St. John's Grace United Church of Christ  
Stjohnsuccmd.com  
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*Senior Pastor and Interim Minister: Rev Jeff Munnis  
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# Connections...

Connecting our community through prayers, thoughts, and actions  
– no matter where we are today!

## **WE HOLD in LOVE and PRAYER:**

*Please keep these friends and loved ones in your prayers! If there is someone you would like added to our list, let Pastor Jeff or Barbara know. The church email is [welcome@stjohnsgraceucc.org](mailto:welcome@stjohnsgraceucc.org).*

Those added to the prayer list will remain for three months before being removed. If prayers need to be continued for another three months, please let Barbara know your request.

### **Continuing Prayers**

Kathy Crout  
Family of Dr. Mary ‘Tessie’ Behrens  
Lois Benson  
Family of Sharon Hamilton  
Lois Hotchkiss  
Adrian Kavanaugh  
Phyllis Dean  
Family & friends of Debby Carr

### **Serving Our Country**

Michael Barbarino	Joe Clark
Andrew Robey	Jon Fuller
Ty Smith	Jay Robey
Tom Myers	Josh Tullius
John Howard	Jason Shoemaker

### **Hospice**

**Assisted Living**  
Doris Bush  
Virginia Hoffman

## Upcoming Meetings & Events

<b>Mad Hatter Mtg</b>	<i>Sun, Feb 22<sup>nd</sup></i>	<i>12:00 pm</i>	<i>Meeting Rm</i>
<b>Serving at Westside Men’s</b>	<i>Mon, Feb 23<sup>rd</sup></i>	<i>Lunch &amp; Dinner</i>	
<b>Lenten Soup &amp; Spirituality</b>	<i>Wed, Feb 25<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>6:00 pm</i>	<i>Parlor</i>
<b>Lenten Soup &amp; Spirituality</b>	<i>Wed, Mar 4<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>6:00 pm</i>	<i>Parlor</i>
<b>Girl Scout Sunday &amp; Hospitality</b>	<i>Sun, Mar 8<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>11:00 am</i>	<i>Sanc/Parlor</i>
<b>Transition Team Meeting</b>	<i>Tues, Mar 10<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>6:30 pm</i>	<i>Meeting Rm</i>
<b>Lenten Soup &amp; Spirituality</b>	<i>Wed, Mar 11<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>6:00 pm</i>	<i>Parlor</i>
<b>Vacation Bible School</b>	<i>June 22 – 28<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>Save the Date!</i>	

### Governing Body Minutes

Our governing body consists of the Board of Trustees and the Ministries Council. Meetings are held monthly via Zoom. Interested parties are welcome. Minutes of the meetings are posted in the office hallway. Contact the office if you would like a paper copy or email copy.

### View Past Services on our Website

If you missed a worship service here at St. John’s Grace, you can now view the service on our website!  
**Go to [www.stjohnsuccmd.com](http://www.stjohnsuccmd.com) Worship/ Online Worship tab** and scroll down to the service you would like to view. They are on our YouTube channel so you can subscribe if you like.

### Deadline for Submitting Announcements

Announcements or changes to announcements need to be submitted by noon on Tuesday prior to the Sunday service to be included in the bulletin. Email to [barbara@stjohnsgraceucc.org](mailto:barbara@stjohnsgraceucc.org).



### Spring Raffle Tickets - Now

For this fundraiser you can win two tickets to the Orioles Home Opener game on March 26<sup>th</sup>. Second prize is a gift certificate to Matthew’s 1600 restaurant in Catonsville. See Laura Prinn or the office for tickets! DRAWING is March 15<sup>th</sup>.



### Thank You!

Thank you to everyone who, despite the snow still on the ground, could visualize spring and contribute to getting our Easter flowers for the altar! We made our goal!



### **Forty Days – Forty Items**

Wednesday, February 18<sup>th</sup> was the first day of Lent. I have a challenge for you! Each day of Lent, remove one item from your closet that you no longer wear or need and put it into this trash bag. At the end of the forty days, donate these items to our Turnkey Shed located at the end of the church parking lot. They will be shared with someone who really needs them!

*Remember Turnkey Policies: Please – **no** rags, fabric scrapes, toys, or household goods.*

**See the basket in the narthex to pick up a bag.**

Thank you for your support! The Missions Committee

### **Calling all VBS Volunteers!**

Make a note – our VBS is planned for the end of June this year. If you have volunteered before, you know how much fun it is to share and teach the children!

Please let Tina and Michele know where you would like to help. We welcome everyone to plan to help during our **‘Snowball Mountain Challenge’ with Ollie the Arctic Seal!**

### **Church School every Sunday**

Calling all children! We invite you to share in worship together with your children at the 11:00 am service. After opening hymns and prayers, the children depart for Church School for the remainder and continue learning about God’s Word through storytelling, hands-on activities and fellowship.

### **Westside Men’s Shelter Mission – Now Serving**

Can you spare 1½ hours to make 100 people smile? No cooking, no cleanup, just a helping hand and a smile! If you answer yes to this question, sign up to serve the men at Westside Men’s Shelter for lunch or dinner on **Monday,**

**Feb. 23.** The signup sheet is available in the narthex.

**If you cannot serve, desserts are welcome.** And they really make the men smile! See Connie if you have questions. If the interest is there, other dates will be coming up for this mission outreach opportunity.

**For serving lunch, arrive at the shelter by 11:30 am. For serving dinner, arrive at 5:30 pm.** The signup sheet is on the bulletin board in the narthex.

### **CEA: February is for Our “Souper Sunday” Drive**

All kinds of soup are welcome and needed:

Tomato, chicken, veggie, cream, seafood.

Easy-open or need a can opener.

Cans can be big, small, tall, or squat.

Soup can be for a snack or hardy enough for a meal.



What kind of soup do you like? Say a prayer for the person who receives your gift of a can of soup.

**We are off and running with our soup collections for CEA.** We have all of February to go yet. In 2024 we collected 1,230 cans and in 2025 the total was 653. Can we at least meet last year’s amount???



**Since we started in January we have collected** a total of 312 cans so far. Can we double that and more to beat last year’s total?

Will you do your part to put a hot meal or snack of nutritious soup on the table of someone who is hungry? Please be generous as you shop this week.

### **Mission & Outreach Transitional Hold-Alls**

The National Capital Treatment and Recovery Center (a nonprofit organization based in Arlington & Alexandria, VA) provides substance abuse and mental health treatment to those who need these services. One of their programs is an 84-bed residential treatment center for men who are in need. When admitted, these men usually have their belongings in paper bags.

***You can help them feel prouder when they leave with the donation of gently used or new backpack, duffle bag, or piece of luggage.***

Please forward donations for Ken or Charlene Mowery.





## Lenten Soup and Spirituality

Join us on the following Wednesdays at 6 p.m. in the parlor as we gather for delicious soup dinners, fellowship, and spiritual reflections and discussions which will focus on our Lenten themes of Awareness, Turning, Surrendering, and Emptying. We hope you can join us!

### February 25 - Awareness of God

- When did you first become aware of God and God's presence? What was your experience?

### March 4 - Turning Toward God

- Was there a time in your life when you were turned away from God? What was that like for you? Was there a person or an event that changed you in some way and helped you turn toward God?
- How would you describe the difference between your life before vs. your life after the turn?

### March 11 - Surrendering to God

- What does it mean for you to surrender to God? Are there times you do this well, and other times that you don't? What gets in the way? Is there anything that would help you surrender more fully?

### March 18 - Emptying Ourselves to Receive God

- Imagine being completely emptied of all personal thoughts and desires. You have been born anew and are in a state of complete openness, ready to be filled with God's love and presence. What do you feel when you imagine this?

***Signing up in the narthex helps us make sure we have enough bread and soup. All are welcome!***