

*Praise God, sun
and moon; praise
God, all you
shining stars!*



www.parkwayucc.org

December 31, 2023

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Limitless Love | Courageous Action | Spirited Inquiry

Purpose Statement

Parkway United Church of Christ strives to be an inclusive community embracing: spiritual nourishment, open-minded inquiry, courageous action, and interfaith partnerships to fulfill God's calling to create a just world for all.

Congregational Statement

Parkway United Church of Christ, with God's grace, seeks to be a congregation that includes all persons, regardless of race, ethnic, or socio—economic background while respecting differences of gender, marital status, age, sexual orientation, and mental and physical ability. We aspire to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. We invite all to share in the life and leadership, ministry, fellowship, worship, sacraments, responsibilities and blessings of participation in our open and affirming congregation.

PARKWAY UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST

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John Nourse, *Pastor Emeritus*

Welcome *to* Parkway

Thank you for joining us this morning! If you are with us virtually, please let us know you are here by commenting in the chat or sending an email.

Welcome Children We invite children to full participation in worship. We also have activity bags for young children to use while they are here.

Bell Rung During Lord's Prayer A tradition begun when farmers working in surrounding fields would stop their work and join in prayer.

Scripture Reader Michelle Brueggemann

Flowers today Borgmann family

Please consider signing up to donate flowers and/or read scripture in 2024: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60BoD4CA4AC23AB9-scripture1>

Subscribe to our email lists: Sign up at www.parkwayucc.org

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Mental Health Support

988 (new nationwide 3-digit number similar to 911... call or text)
24/7 Crisis Hotline 800-273-8255 (TALK) | 800-SUICIDE: 800-784-2433
24/7 Missouri Department of Mental Health 800-811-4760
Text 741741 and someone will text right back...www.crisistextline.org
Behavioral Health Network of Greater St Louis 314-449-6713

The numbers below are called Warmlines (not Hotlines).

They are peer run by people with lived experience.

Not all of them are 24/7/365

Teen Warm Line: 1 800-248-8336

Black Warm Line: 1-800-604-5841 (They are divested from the police)

Trans Warm Line: 1-877-565-8860

Project Return Warm Line: 1-800-448-9777 (run away)

Learn more about warm lines: <https://warmline.org/warmdir.html>

Birthdays

- 12/31 BURCHAM, Stan
- 1/1 LUEDLOFF, Barry
- 1/3 BURKHARDT, Connie
- 1/3 RISTAU, Nicole
- 1/4 SIMONSON, Ryan
- 1/6 HILGEMAN, Bill
- 1/6 TILLY, Ethan

1st Sunday *after* Christmas

Sunday, December 31, 2023 | 10:00am | Sanctuary & Facebook Live

Meditation *This is the message of Christmas: We are never alone!*
~Taylor Caldwell

Prelude *Ermuntre Dich* (Break Forth, O Beauteous Light) – orig. by Johann Schop (1641), trad. harmony by Johann Sebastian Bach 1734)

Welcome

Passing the Peace of Christ

Lighting of the Candles & Ringing of the Bell

Introit *Welcome to Our World*—Chris Rice (solo by Barry Luedloff)
Tears are falling, hearts are breaking, how we need to hear from God.
You've been promised, we've been waiting, welcome, holy child.
Welcome, holy child.

Hope that you don't mind our manger, how I wish we would have known.
But long-awaited holy Stranger, make yourself at home,
Please, make yourself at home.

Bring your peace into our violence, bid our hungry souls be filled.
Word now breaking heaven's silence, welcome to our world.
Welcome to our world.

Fragile finger sent to heal us, tender brow prepared for thorn,
Tiny heart whose love will save us, unto us is born. Unto us is born.

So wrap our injured flesh around you, breathe our air and walk our sod.
Search our soul and make us holy, perfect Son of God.
Perfect Son of God... Welcome to our world.

Scripture Psalm 148 (NRSV – New Revised Standard Version)

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise in the heights!
Praise God, all angels; praise God, all the host! Praise God, sun and moon;
praise God, all you shining stars! Praise God, you highest heavens, and you
waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for God
commanded and they were created. God established them forever and ever;
God fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. Praise the Lord from the
earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy
wind fulfilling God's command! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all
cedars! Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! Royalty
of the earth and all peoples, and all rulers of the earth! Young men and women
alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for God's
name alone is exalted; God's glory is above earth and heaven. God has raised
up a horn for the people, praise for all the faithful, for the people of Israel who
are close. Praise the Lord!

*Gathering at the Advent/Christmas Wreath

One: The celebration continues.

Many: Christ is born for all of us.

One: Mary and Joseph both said “yes” to God.

Many: We also want to be part of this birthing of a new reality.

One: We each have a role to play as the Spirit equips us to bring more hope, peace, joy and love into the world.

Many: We echo this story in our words and actions.

All: Let us worship our God together—Creator, Christ and Spirit.

*Song *While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks #58, v1-4*



1. While shep-herds watched their flocks by night, All seat-ed on the ground,
2. “Fear not,” said he, for might-y dread Had seized their trou-bled mind;
3. “To you, in Da-vid’s town this day, Is born of Da-vid’s line
4. “The heav-en-ly Babe you there shall find To hu-man view dis-played,



The an-gel of the Lord came down, And glo-ry shone a-round.
“Glad tid-ings of great joy I bring To you and hu-man-kind.
The Sav-ior, who is Christ the Lord, And this shall be the sign:
All hum-bly wrapped in swath-ing bands, And in a man-ger laid.”

*Opening Prayer

Holy One, as the shepherds return to their life and their work, after being directed by the angels to go see the Christ Child and his parents, so we too go back to our lives and activities. We do not go back as if nothing has happened. God has become flesh and has lived and loved among us. Jesus is our Emmanuel (“God with us”). The Spirit helps us to understand who we are now and what we are to do next. Amen.

*Response *Spirit of the Living God*

**Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me;
Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me!
Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me.**

Children’s Time

Children return to sit with their families.

Blessing the Children *Be Near Me, Lord Jesus*

**Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
And teach us, dear Jesus, to laugh and to share.**

Scripture Mark 1:1-20 (CEB – Common English Bible) Jesus

The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God’s Son, happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah:

*Look, I am sending my messenger before you.
He will prepare your way, a voice shouting in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight.”*

John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. John wore clothes made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. He announced, “One stronger than I am is coming after me. I’m not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. And there was a voice from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.”

At once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.

After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God’s good news, saying, “Now is the time! Here comes God’s kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!”

As Jesus passed alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” he said, “and I’ll show you how to fish for people.” Right away, they left their nets and followed him. After going a little farther, he saw James and John, Zebedee’s sons, in their boat repairing the fishing nets. At that very moment he called them. They followed him, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired workers.

Song *Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow*



1. There's a star in the East on Christ - mas morn,
2. If you take good heed to the an - gel's words,

Harmony *Unison*

Rise up, shep-herd, and fol - low, It will lead to the place where the
 Rise up, shep-herd, and fol - low, You'll for - get your flocks, you'll for -

Harmony

Christ was born, Rise up, shep-herd, and fol - low.
 get your herds, Rise up, shep-herd, and fol - low.

Refrain

Fol - low, fol - low, Rise up, shep-herd, and fol - low,

Fol-low the Star of Beth-le - hem, Rise up, shep-herd, and fol-low.

Moment of Silent Reflection

Sermon

A Time of Prayer *Cares Chorus*

I cast all my cares up-on you, _____ I

lay all of my bur - dens down at your feet, and

an - y-time that I don't know what to do, I will

cast all my cares up - on you. _____

Pastoral Prayer & Prayers of the People

Lord's Prayer

Our [Creator/Mother/Father/Holy One] 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.

[A variety of names for God are welcome here – including in the Lord's Prayer.]

Invitation to Generosity



Offering Our Gifts to God

If you have an offering to give, please place it in the plate on the communion table before the end of the closing hymn. There are also offering plates in the Gathering Space just outside the sanctuary. Thank you for your generosity.

Offering Anthem *Joseph's Song* – by Michael Card

How can it be? This baby in my arms,
sleeping now, so peacefully.
The Son of God, the angel said.
How can it be?

Lord, I know he's not my own, not of my flesh, not of my bones.
Still, God, let this baby be Son of my love.

Refrain: God, show how I fit into this plan of Yours.

How can a man be father to the Son of God?

Lord, for all my life I've been a simple carpenter.

How can I raise a King? How can I raise a King?

He looks so small, his face and hands so fair,
And when he cries the sun just seems to disappear.

But when he laughs, it shines again.

How can this be? (refrain)

How can it be? This baby in my arms,
sleeping now, so peacefully.

The Son of God, the angel said.


How can it be? (refrain)

*Prayer of Dedication


Holy One, in this season of giving and receiving, we are eager to do our part. We want to lean on one another, learn from one another and realize our common humanity. We are in this together. Amen.

*Song of Parting *Go! Tell it on the Mountain*

Refrain



Go, tell it on the moun - tain O-ver the hills and ev - ery - where;



Go, tell it on the moun - tain That Je - sus Christ is born! *Fine*

1. While shep-herds kept their watch-ing O'er si - lent flocks by night,
2. The shep-herds feared and trem-bled When lo! a - bove the earth,
3. Down in a low - ly man - ger The hum-ble Christ was born,



Be - hold through-out the heav-ens There shone a ho - ly light.
Rang out the an-gel cho - rus That hailed our Sav - ior's birth.
And God sent us sal - va - tion That bless - ed Christ-mas morn. *D.C.*

*Benediction

*God's Light Goes Forth

*Music for Going Forth *Go, Tell It on the Mountain* – African-American spiritual, arr. by John W. Work III (1940)

Join the Children's Ministry Team

We are looking for two additional volunteers to join the team and help teach Children's Ministry in 2024. It's an excellent way to serve in this church, and we have a vibrant Children's Ministry program. So, if you have a joy teaching children from PreK to 3rd Grade, we'd love to have ya! It's pretty low commitment, so not too demanding, so if you feel you'd have a couple weeks out of the month free, or even just one week a month, then this could be the right fit for you. If interested, please reach out to Gabriel Requadt, our Director of Christian Education, for more information:
gabriel@parkwayucc.org

Announcements

Please use the form at www.parkwayucc.org/communications for all announcements for our media. Bulletin and eNews deadline: noon Monday.

AMOE, My Favorite First Thursday of the Month

Adventurous Men Out Early (AMOE) meets in the Heritage Room at 9:15am on Thursday, January 4, 2024. All are welcome. We drink coffee, eat extra high caloric pastries, and chat about most anything.

Contact Richar Scherrer: 90fivetpr@gmail.com | (314) 591-6803

Annual TWELFTH- NIGHT FEAST & FESTIVAL 2024

Mark your calendars now for our annual TWELFTH-NIGHT FEAST & FESTIVAL This year's Twelfth-Night at Parkway UCC is on Friday, January 5, 2024 (the 12th Night of Christmas). FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC! Gather here at Parkway UCC at 6pm, with the festivities beginning at 6:30pm. Featuring several visiting Choirs and other Musicians presenting their best (and last) of this Christmas Season's music PLUS . . . good feasting after! Please contact Parkway UCC's Music Director at barry@parkwayucc.org

Inquirers' Gathering - for those who want to know more about PUC and who want to be known

Monday, January 8, 2024 | 6:30-7:45pm | Dessert | Heritage Room

Our goals that evening include:

- getting to know one another a bit more
- describing Parkway's worship, outreach, education, leadership, fellowship
- taking a look at our denomination, the United Church of Christ
- sharing ideas about the exciting future of Parkway UCC
- soliciting your thoughts on how we can be a more welcoming and inviting community of faith
- discussing some key issues of faith
- answering any of your questions

You will find our time together meaningful and informative.

Some churches call this sort of gathering a New Members Class—we do not. While we do know that there are a number of visitors who have expressed interest in becoming members of the church, we do not assume that Inquirers are seeking membership. We just want to be hospitable, get to know you and have the chance to express gratitude for your presence among us.

Kevin Cameron: kevin@parkwayucc.org | 314-872-9330

Childcare is available that evening if requested ahead of time.

Tuesday Evening Discussion New Book Jan 9

2nd & 4th Tuesday | 6:00pm potluck | 7:00pm discussion | Heritage Rm
Please join us on for our first session on *The Book of Charlie* by David Von Drehle. This is the true story of the author's neighbor, 109 year old Charlie. Von Drehle came to understand that Charlie's resilience and willingness to grow made this remarkable man a master in the art of thriving through times of dramatic change. *The Book of Charlie* is a gospel of grit—the inspiring story of one man's journey through a century of upheaval. The history that unfolds through Charlie's story reminds you that the United States has always been a divided nation, a questing nation, an inventive nation—a nation of Charlies in the rollercoaster pursuit of a good and meaningful life. Read the first 50 pages for our first session. Contact Helen Race: raceh@att.net | (314) 401-4382

AWOL: Adventurous Women Out Late

All are invited to go AWOL this winter and spring!
Join us as we make new connections and strengthen existing ones.

Saturday, January 13

Golden Globe nominated film - TBA. Carpool from church at 6:30pm

Thursday, February 15

Mamma Mia at The Fox Theater 7:30pm (around \$65) RSVP by Sunday, January 7 so we can purchase tickets.

Sunday, March 3 at 1pm- ART IN BLOOM @ The St. Louis Art Museum. This event requires RSVP

Saturday, April 13 at 1pm- Spend a couple of hours with us at Laumière Sculpture Park

Friday, May 10 at 6pm- Dinner on the patio - details TBA.

Contact Carment Bumgarner: cfbum@charter.net | (314) 330-0813

Lobbying with Our Better Angels: Working with Congress to Build Bridges by Cynthia Changyit Levin

Sunday, Jan 14 | 11:15am | Heritage Room & ZOOM

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84691476997?pwd=aEM2ZURyWURLNmkwD0EzV0VHV1lyQT09#success>

Meeting ID: 8469147 6997 | Passcode: 181565 | Dial (312) 626-6799

Author and activist Cynthia Changyit Levin shares real stories from her non-partisan advocacy experiences to illustrate the importance of working with members of Congress even when we don't agree with them. She will also give an update on Bread for the World's advocacy on the Farm Bill and offer a letter-writing action for participants to help bring nutrition to people in poverty in the U.S. and around the world.

Contact Richar Scherrer: 90fivetpr@gmail.com | (314) 591-6803

Tuesday Afternoon Dialogue's New Book Starting January 16

The Anthropocene Reviewed by John Green

TAD resumes Tuesday, January 16 at 2:00pm. We're looking forward to hearing what books everyone enjoyed over our break. Discussion from 2:00pm – 3:00pm and fellowship at 1:45pm.

TAD's next book is John Green's *The Anthropocene Reviewed: Essays On a Human-Centered Planet*. From Amazon: “*The Anthropocene* is the current geologic age, in which humans have profoundly reshaped the planet and its biodiversity. In this remarkable symphony of essays adapted and expanded from his groundbreaking podcast, bestselling author John Green reviews different facets of the human-centered planet on a five-star scale—from the QWERTY keyboard and sunsets to Canada geese and Penguins of Madagascar. Funny, complex, and rich with detail, the reviews chart the contradictions of contemporary humanity.” TAD would love to have you. Contact Jackie Eiffert: jeiffert2@gmail.com; 661-378-6781

Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83670617428?pwd=bUxPZEdDMlU4ay9oNndTWw4yZUYwUT09>
(312) 626-6799; Meeting ID: 836 7061 7428; Passcode: 480007

Adventurers ~ Urban Archaeology: Lost Buildings of St. Louis

Pulitzer Arts Foundation, 3716 Washington Boulevard, St Louis MO 63108

Join the PUCC Adventurers on Thursday, January 25 as we visit the Pulitzer Arts Foundation's exhibition *Urban Archaeology: Lost Buildings of St. Louis*. The modern Pulitzer building is accessible, parking is close, and entry is free. We'll meet at Parkway at 9:30am for carpooling or 10:00am at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation. Afterward we'll head to a restaurant for lunch.

This fascinating exhibition brings together salvaged architectural elements from landmark buildings, residential homes, and neighborhood institutions built in St. Louis between 1840 and 1950. The artifacts on display represent important histories of material innovation, labor, and the everyday lives of the people who inhabit the city. The exhibition sheds light on the city's history, revealing complicated legacies of power, wealth, and neglect that shape our experience of the built environment and daily life. Those people with a long history in the St. Louis area will remember many of the buildings from which the artifacts were salvaged. Included is a 15-minute film about St. Louis architecture, demolition, and revitalization, and an opportunity to provide your own input to the exhibit if you'd like. For more information:

<https://pulitzerarts.org/art/urban-archaeology-lost-buildings-of-st-louis/>

There is a very small modern art exhibit in the building that can be viewed as well if you'd like, **Sarah Crowner**: *Around Orange*.

Contact Jackie Eiffert at jeiffert2@gmail.com with any questions.

A Poemish Prayer – or a Prayerish Poem for Advent and Christmas 2023

By Leah D. Schade

** Contemplative verses for Advent and Christmas in the face
of those intent on crushing and cowering innocent lives.*

What can one newborn's cry mean
in a world so mean that it means
to snuff the soft glow of new life?

What can one child's tiny fisting hand mean
as some meander along bomb-cratered ways
meant to crack and crush a crowded and cowering people?

What can one toddler's wide eyes mean
taking in a scene of love colliding with death?

What I mean, Holy One,
is that when the meanness chokes our cries into muffled silence,
when our fists unclench into desperate palms of prayer,
when salty drops squint our once-widened eyes,

Then . . .

Reclaim our eyes with baptismal water
that rinses away salty sadness and
the grit of collision's aftermath.

Reclaim our hands for fisting with resistance
and praying with relief and gratitude.

Reclaim our cries with that soft glow
and a parenting breath that says

. . .shhhh.

Amen.

Prayer List

Wednesday, December 27, 2023

Celebrations

All the acts of kindness, justice and equity near and far.

Seasonal beauty.

Families and individuals celebrating the holidays together.

Nancy and Jack Litzinger -his healing after their COVID.

Judy Waddell - as she continues to settle in at *McKnight Place*.

Coree Mix - also experiencing a fresh start - 8649 North Ave, StL 63114.

Rebecca Ray - that her book on suicide prevention will be published for a wide audience so her wisdom, gentleness, compassion will help others.

Students, families, faculty and staff - at the close of a semester.

Gabriel Requadt - graduating from Eden Seminary - MDiv this month!

Concerns

Pinky Wilcoxon - strengthening at Delmar, Creve Coeur after surgery.

Bill Hilgeman - continued healing after serious injuries.

Cherie & Mike Stolze - as they mourn and celebrate Cherie's father.

Jackie - loving/supporting ailing mom (102); grieving step-father (103).

Lori Connors - cataract surgery on January 2 and January 8.

Val Detjen - additional surgery on January 9.

Becca Palmgren - preparing for surgery on January 11.

Kari Borgmann - her mom becoming more feeble, lack of awareness.

Matt Albers - cancer now in lungs - inoperable; clinical trial (Connors).

Grieving/struggling fams/individuals at the holidays and into 2024.

The continuing war in Ukraine.

War in the Mideast - Israel and Hamas....Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Yemen

Continuing

Cassie Rosenberger's mother Martha - ongoing cancer treatments.

Gram Ruth Hughes - Lymphoma; receiving hospice care (Schneider).

Sege Ruiz - paralyzed from car accident in September.

Joseph Miller - long road to healing (son of Deb Carter).

Annette Harrison - recovering from injuries (Stifel).

Trudy - living with cancer; healing after a fall (Scharf).

Nelson Spencer - medical concerns (Ellie Svenson).

Barb - complications with cancer tx and at odds with insurance co (Tarr)

Cherie & Mike Stolze and family - her chronic health challenges.

Bill & Nancy Darland - his ongoing health issues.

Gail, Bill and Christopher Haack - chronic health challenges.

Chris - hospice care after brain cancer surgery (Doug's sister-in-law).

Theresa - surgery/treatment/recovery - aggressive cancer (Schwarz).

Jackie - special needs adult battling Parkinson's, cancer, dementia.

Lizzie - awaiting liver transplant (niece of Barb Kuhlmann).

Home-Centered/Care Facility/Rehab Center

Marv Herpel - *Brookdale West County*; 785 Henry Ave, #217; Ballwin, MO 63021; 636-227-5838 [birthdate: March 3]

Sue Houser - *NHC Cool Springs*; 211 Cool Springs Blvd #1610; Franklin, TN 37067; 615-577-2049. [birthdate: July 8]

Pat Klein - *Anthology Senior Living of Wildwood*; 251 Plaza Dr, #325; Wildwood, MO 63040 [birthdate: September 21]

Bill Klein - *Anthology Senior Living of Wildwood*; 251 Plaza Dr, #104; Wildwood, MO 63040 [birthdate: March 8]

John Nourse *The Village at Cape Albeon*; 3300 Lake Bend Dr, #166; Valley Park, MO 63088 [birthdate: October 26]

Ruth Peace - 10379-D Forest Brooke Ln; StL MO 63146; 314-983-0253; meadletter222@gmail.com [birthdate: August 8]

Naomi Runtz - 272 N Lindbergh Blvd; StL MO 63141; 34-993-0469 naomiruntz@sbcglobal.net [birthdate: August 30]

Gladys Sims - *Friendship Village - 15200 Village View Dr, #2418*; Chesterfield, MO 63017; 636-898-8873 [birthdate: July 4]

David Smith - *Anthology of Town & Country*; 1020 Woods Mill Rd; #310; St Louis, MO 63017; 636-200-5076 [birthdate: July 24]

Judy Waddell - *McKnight Place*; 3 McKnight Pl, #229; StL MO 63124; 314-312-1129 [birthdate: August 13]

Pinky Wilcoxon - 10379-D Forest Brooke Ln; StL MO 63146; 314-983-0253; meadletter222@gmail.com [birthdate: April 7]

Other

Pres Biden, VP Harris, Congress, all local, national, world leaders.

The “me too” Movement - shining a light on sexual abuse.

All people who live with mental illness & those dealing with meds.

Caregivers of all shapes and sizes.

PUCC Family struggling with employment; healthcare costs and limits.

Our Missouri Mid-South Conference and St Louis Assn UCC

Gun violence and other violence across the US and other lands.

Conversations about the Death Penalty in the United States.

Victims of Natural and Created Disasters around the world.

Healing of relationships between the public and the police.

Peace and Justice near and far.

US Military around the globe.

1st Sunday *after* Christmas

December 31, 2023

Luke 2:22-40

Long-Awaited Gift

In today's scripture, the elder (Simeon) meets the infant (Christ Jesus). The image of the old person - wrinkled with the passing of their days and sporting a long, white beard - meeting the new baby - smooth and innocent - has been adapted in the secular world as a fitting image for the passing of the year. As we say goodbye to the old and usher in the new, what rituals do you practice to deepen and enrich your experience of the passing of time? Here are a few ideas. Maybe you have others.

Star Words

It is not known where the tradition of Star Words began, but this tradition is growing year by year among many congregations. In this tradition, words of intention, challenges to grow or spiritual gifts are written on paper stars. Then, each member of the group draws one star to guide them into the new year. Like the Wise Magi who followed the star in the sky to the Christ Child, pray that your word will lead you through the year until you more fully discover Christ's purpose for you.

Watchwords

A watchword is like a star word, except instead of a single word, a passage of scripture is written on each paper. If you choose this one, get curious about the scripture you are given. What words or phrases stick with you? Read it over several times. You may want to find it in the Bible and read it in context. Make this scripture part of your prayer life by praying it every day for a whole year. How does the watchword change as you live with it? How does it change you?

Letting Go of the Past

The new year is a good time to release what is no longer serving you from the past. Set aside some time to take stock of the past year. What were you doing when you felt God's presence and blessings most strongly? After you have written these thoughts down, ask God to bless what has happened in the past and to bless you in helping to release it. You may want to burn or bury the paper as a symbol of cleansing.

Set an Intention of Gratitude

As you step into the New Year, set an intention to express gratitude more often. Maybe you want to list three things you are grateful for before you go to sleep at night. Maybe you would like to wake up with the intention to express gratitude throughout the day. Maybe you want to be more aware of moments through the day when you feel grateful and express those in the moment.

However you prepare for the New Year, be gentle with yourself and choose one you will enjoy. You will be more likely to keep it up, and the practice will be more impactful that way.