

# HOLY VESSELS



A LENTEN SEASON OF RECOVERY

## **“Stories”**

*Third Sunday in Lent*

*March 7, 2021*

## **GATHER**

*People gather around Jesus as his reputation becomes known from town to town. As we gather virtually or physically, we too are yearning for presence, for peace, for help.*

## **Prelude**

### **Welcome and Announcements**

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

## **Threshold**

We continue our Lenten “season of recovery” as we focus on health as essential to our spiritual lives.

**Vessels, holy and whole  
Broken, needing the One  
Open, body and soul  
Healer, come.**

Those who collect beach glass often become “archeologists”—seeking out any markings or clues as to the story of the original piece. It often takes much time to bring out the truth behind it. This week we acknowledge the power of truth-telling as a healing property. There are stories that have shaped our lives, leaving us without the ability to see who we truly are in the eyes of God and leaving us without the ability to speak the depth of our stories of struggle. We focus on the importance of recovery of mental health, reclaiming our sense of who we are and being able to proclaim new redemptive stories of divine worth.

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## **APPROACH**

*People opened their lives to Jesus. We are drawn to the Healer—opening our hearts with honesty about our lives and finding assurance that offers peace.*

### **Opening Prayer of Confession**

Charlotte Frary, Liturgist

Let us acknowledge our need to restore, repair, renew our Holy Vessels, and that the health of our minds deeply affects our physical and spiritual health.

Let us pray:

Centering and Calming Divine Breath of God,  
You gifted us with amazing minds, capable of so many things. You gave us the ability to think and feel, imbuing us with discernment of thought and emotion.

Like our physical bodies, sometimes this aspect of our selves is beleaguered.

We struggle under the strain of disappointment, despair, and delusion.

Too often we hide this, afraid of what others might think of our difficulties in managing or moving forward, even in the face of devastating circumstances.

Too often we perpetuate the stigma of a less-than-perfect state of mind by shaming ourselves and others.

Millennia of misunderstanding compounds our fear.

We label and belittle, all the while turning the hatred upon ourselves, for no one is immune from troubles of the mind at some point.

So many are suffering now, God, weary and distraught, grieving and at the end of their rope.

We cannot fathom the proportions of loss and so we look away, sometimes even from the need in our own community.

Help us, Healer.  
Show us our capacity for compassion.  
Forgive our inattention.  
Move us to move  
one step at a time toward greater care for one another.

In this silence, we sense and acknowledge our yearning for wholeness.

*Silence*

**Vessels, holy and whole  
Broken, needing the One  
Open, body and soul  
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**Assurance**

I invite you to imagine and search for a warmth at the core of your body. It may help to keep your eyes closed. This warm orb of light is deep within you, although sometimes it may feel dulled, even cold. If it feels this way now, allow this.  
Do not judge yourself. Perhaps you DO feel this warmth and all feels right with the world. This just is. You may not always feel this way. This just is.  
Whether or not you feel the warmth of peace and assurance right now, this does not make you right or wrong, good or bad. It just makes you human. And you are not alone.  
Perhaps you can imagine the warmth coming from someone whose presence fills you with comfort. See it radiate from them to you.

Know this: You are accepted.  
No. Matter. What.  
Accepting the truth of our difficulties is part of the journey of recovery.  
Sharing our stories of difficulty can open the way for healing.  
For you, for me, for all.

Take a deep breath in to let this truth fill you...  
and breathe out with the relief of assurance.

**Peace**

I invite you to imagine warmth surrounding you and extending to those who may be next to you in close proximity.  
Imagine this warmth extending beyond your walls to the neighborhood...  
the wider community...  
the church...

and see it spread like the rising sun, let it expand to all the world.  
Let this be our peace. **Amen.**

If you have not already, I invite you to open your eyes.

The peace of Christ is with you.  
**And also with you.**

**Opening Hymn**  
*“Be Still My Soul”*

**BELIEVE**

*People were fortified by Jesus’ words and deeds that revealed care for all—especially those marginalized. We strengthen our belief in the possibility for renewed health and vigor for all.*

**Time for Children**  
*Mark Burrows*

**A Contemporary Word**

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”  
— **Maya Angelou**

“Tell the story of the mountain you climbed.  
Your words could become a page in someone else’s survival guide.”  
— **Morgan Harper Nichols**

Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process  
is the bravest thing that we will ever do.”  
— **Brené Brown**

“The courage it takes to share your story might be the very thing  
someone else needs to open their heart to hope.”  
— **Unknown**

**Musical Proclamation**  
*“There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy”*

## **An Ancient Word**

*Matthew 9: 27-33*

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you." And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus sternly ordered them, "See that no one knows of this." But they went away and spread the news about him throughout that district. After they had gone away, a demoniac who was mute was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the one who had been mute spoke; and the crowds were amazed and said, "Never has anything like this been seen in Israel."

## **Sermon**

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

### **ASK**

*People who were healed by Jesus were not afraid to ask. And so we come before the Holy One, making our petitions and desires known, trusting the work of the Spirit.*

## **Song of Preparation**

*"Make Us Holy, Make Us Whole"*

**In your love, make us whole.  
May we rest in your compassion.  
Calm the lost, weary soul  
in the warmth of your love.  
May your peace fill our hearts.  
May we know the love of Jesus.  
By your grace, you console.  
Make us holy, make us whole.**

## **Prayers of the People**

*Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler*

Healer of our every ill,  
especially our malady of stigmatized fear of mental illness,  
we come before you to make our petitions known.  
Hear our cries for healing of body, mind, and spirit.  
We know that already you are at work among us,  
showing us the way to recovery from the toxicities and grief of our time.

You have stamped each one of us as “worthy.”  
We give you thanks that your mercy is wide  
and your faithfulness to us not depend upon  
having our feelings sorted out or our sense of well-being secure.  
You are not waiting for us to “get our act together” before  
offering us your love and grace.

We pray especially for those who have experienced  
heightened and acute mental and emotional difficulties as a result  
of this past year of isolation and fear.  
We pray for those who feel far from hope  
and we mourn those who could not find a lifeline to survive this hardship.  
We pray for those who find themselves without access to adequate care,  
someone to talk to, or appropriate resources to steady their hearts and minds.  
We give thanks for those who are telling their stories,  
showing us how to open our hearts to help others  
and offering ripples of healing in the community.  
We pray grateful thanks for progress toward holistic healthcare  
and the efforts of all who are working to de-stigmatize mental illness,  
making it easier to ask for, and get, the help so desperately needed.  
We ask for courage and encouragement to re-evaluate  
how we as a church can help now and into the future.

We pray this day for...

## **The Lord’s Prayer**

**In your love, make us whole.  
May we rest in your compassion.  
Calm the lost, weary soul  
in the warmth of your love.  
May your peace fill our hearts.  
May we know the love of Jesus.  
By your grace, you console.  
Make us holy, make us whole.**

## **KNOW**

*The parting words Jesus' gave to those he healed were often as much balm as the healing act itself. We hear words of encouragement from the One who makes beauty from brokenness.*

### **Ritual Action for the Week**

Charlotte Frary, Liturgist

The words of Jesus we heard in this week's healing story were "Do you believe I am able to do this?" Jesus' question invites us to consider our own belief in transformation.

He invites us to step into a renewed vision of our lives, to speak into being a new story,  
not be bound by the stories of the past,  
inscribed on us by others, that may be oppressing and limiting us.

Last week we put our glass pieces in a bowl. Beach glass is usually somewhat cloudy when dry.

When it comes into contact with water, it becomes clear and bright. Today, see your life as a piece of beach glass. In this moment ask God to re-fill again the holy yet broken vessel of your life with the love of Christ. As you do, pray for clarity. Ask for new ways to see the struggles you may be experiencing. Ask for understanding. Ask for a way forward.

Take a moment to think about and give thanks for God's love that transforms your life, like water transforms dry cloudy beach glass into clear bright glass.

When you are ready, pick up the container of broken pieces and breathe deeply.  
Keep the bowl in a place you will see it regularly this week.

## **RESPOND**

*Scriptural accounts of healing often end with responses from the "crowd" of witnesses. How will we proceed into the brokenness of this world and respond as the Body of Christ?*

### **Closing Song**

*"There is a Balm in Gilead"*

## **Charge**

*Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler*

Each week we look at the reaction of the crowd in the healing story. This week the crowd was amazed and cried out that nothing like it had ever been seen before. How interesting that the crowd is “seeing” something for the first time, just like the blind man is brought to sight! Could it be that this is as important to the story as the ones who received physical healing? How could we open our eyes, figuratively, in new ways? What do we need to envision anew?

And so, in our communal discerning about how this church community could become a “health hub” through our ministry and mission, let us put our minds to imagining how we could shine a positive light on the work of mental health. The needs are so urgent, especially now.

Throughout this time, I invite you to explore with us the possibilities for a new or renewed commitment to a contribution we can make at FPC Monroe Church to our larger community’s effort to recover from this past year.

## **Blessing**

*Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler*

Now go with confidence  
that the One Who Is Living Water  
is already cleansing, renewing, and clarifying our lives,  
recovering our depth of love for all  
and our joy of living in this world.

May the words of Jesus ring in your ears:  
“Do you believe it is possible?”

And may the Spirit hover, move, and deliver  
healing balm...a salve to your soul  
and a spring in your step.

As you leave this space,  
May your mouth speak of God’s goodness.  
May your arms hold those in need.  
May your feet walk toward justice.  
May your heart trust its worth.  
May your soul dance in God’s grace—  
And may this be your holy rhythm—  
The rhythm of Again and again and again,  
Until God’s promised day.  
In the name of the Lover, the Beloved, and Love itself.  
You are God’s treasure... a broken vessel... a holy vessel.  
So, go with courage, go with heart, go in peace. **Amen.**

**Amen.**

## **Threshold into the World**

**Vessels, holy and whole  
Broken, needing the One  
Open, body and soul  
Healer, come.**

## **Postlude**

### **FPC Monroe Worship Team**

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler, Pastor  
Rob Edwards, Interim Director of Music Ministries  
Charlotte Frary, Liturgist  
Isaac Fankhauser, Sound Team  
Josh McMann, Sound Team  
Randy Stiffler, Sound Team



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