

**First Congregational Christian
UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST**

March 2026



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From the Pastor – March 2026

♪♪ Are you washed in the blood? In the soul-cleansing blood of the lamb? ♪♪ I used to sing that hymn all the time. Did you? I'm curious: did you wince a little when you read that line? Or, perhaps you felt a hint of disgust at the thought of bathing in someone's blood. I mean, isn't that what the worst villains do in the movies?

Progressive Christians sometimes encounter the cross as a source of mild embarrassment. For example, pastors, scholars, and philosophers will often take up the topic of "the myth of redemptive suffering (or violence)". One theologian called a theology of the cross "cosmic child abuse". Still, others have claimed that the cross didn't become a part of Christian symbolism until after the church became intertwined with Roman imperial power, in the time of Emperor Constantine.

While those attempts to limit or alter the theological significance of the cross have met with mixed success, problems stubbornly persist when it comes to the task of making theological sense of the crucifixion of Jesus.

In a phrase, these problems come primarily from a theological concept called "substitutionary atonement". This is a common concept for many Christians, and a way to understand how Jesus's death could bring salvation to the world; or to put it differently, how it is that Jesus "died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3).

However, at its worst, substitutionary atonement can descend into a crude story about how God sent Jesus to save us from God. Substitutionary atonement is also the reason why so many hymns want us to "cherish the old rugged cross" or celebrate "a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains."

One problem that many see with substitutionary atonement is how it has eclipsed the other ways that the earliest church made sense of the death of Jesus. There are other meaningful facets to the cross that are sacred and worth our attention.

For the remainder of Lent and through Holy Week, I'd like to take us through these meanings. Each Sunday morning, as well as on Good Friday, we'll explore the ways that the first century church made sense of the death of Jesus.

The Lenten themes will be (in order), the cross as the love of God, Christ's solidarity with the oppressed, the Passover Lamb and the New Exodus, and the disciple's cross. Then, on Good Friday we will appreciate our kaleidoscopic vision of the cross and

prepare the way for Easter Sunday when we will celebrate what is called the “Christus Victor” view of the cross, seeing the cross as victory in light of the resurrection.

We’ll also take time during this series to consider ideas like the myth of redemptive suffering and violence. And we’ll take up the idea of substitutionary atonement, weighing it against our present day understanding of history and theology.

This is more than just a way to impress (or bore) your friends at a dinner party. The cross of Christ is essential to understand who Jesus was and is. It ended blood rites for Christians. It shows us what it means to be a follower of Jesus (“take up your cross and follow me”). And while the cross has been used as a sign of conquering, colonization, and oppression, it is essential to learn what the cross means as liberation and nothing less than a symbol of the ultimate, life-giving power of God.

LENT & HOLY WEEK 2026 WORSHIP CALENDAR

Sundays at 11:00 AM

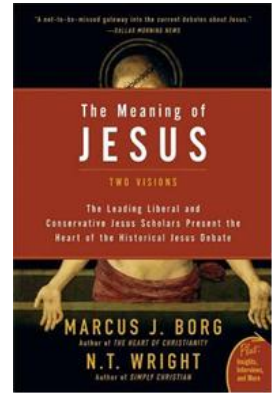
Services are also (live)streamed on YouTube at

<https://youtube.com/@fccuccchesterfieldva8567>

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| March 1 | 2nd Sunday in Lent (Communion Celebrated)
John 2:23-3:17; “The Love of God” with Rev. Willson |
| March 8 | 3rd Sunday in Lent (International Day for Women)
John 4:1-42; “Solidarity with the Oppressed” with Rev. Willson |
| March 15 | 4th Sunday in Lent
John 9:1-41; “The Cross & the Disciple” with Rev. Willson |
| March 22 | 5th Sunday in Lent
John 11:1-45; “The Passover Lamb & The New Exodus” with Rev. Willson |
| March 29 | Palm Sunday
Matthew 21:1-17; “The Last Sacrifice” with Rev. Willson |
| April 3 | Good Friday
“Dimensions of the Cross” with Rev. Willson |
| April 5 | Easter Sunday (Communion Celebrated)
Easter Brunch at 9:30 AM (no Faith Formation)
Worship: Matthew 28:1-10; “Christus Victor” with Rev. Willson |

Adult Faith Formation Sundays at 9:30 AM

From now through Palm Sunday, the Adult Faith Formation class is reading and discussing “The Meaning of Jesus” by Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright. This book details the thoughts of the leading liberal and conservative Christ scholars, as Borg and Wright come together to present the heart of the historical Jesus debate. All are welcome to join us on Sunday mornings for our discussions – even if you haven’t read the book!



- Mar 1 - Part VI, Chs. 11 & 12 (pp. 170-187) “The Birth of Jesus”
- Mar 8 - Part VII, Chs. 13 & 14 (pp. 188-205) “Jesus Coming Again”
- Mar 15 - Part VIII, Ch. 15 (pp. 207-228) “Jesus & the Christian Life” (Wright)
- Mar 22 - Part VIII, Ch. 16 (pp. 229-250) “Jesus & the Christian Life” (Borg)
- Mar 29 - Conclusion “Synthesizing the Two Visions”

March Birthdays



Herschell Emery	3/05
Kishon Lee	3/09
John Meszaros	3/10
Hannah Hinton	3/26
Connie Lewis	3/26

March Anniversaries

3/19 Doug & Sharon Macauley



**Daylight Saving Time
begins March 8.**

Don't be late for church!



Along with all of “Metro Richmond at Prayer,” during March let’s pray for the churches and religious institutions of Metropolitan Richmond.



Breakfast Club

The Breakfast Club will meet on
Saturday, March 14, 9 AM at Joe’s Inn,
216 Buford Rd.



Helping Hands Meeting Sunday, March 15

Join us after worship to plan for the upcoming Buy Nothing Event and Easter brunch.

**March 22
12:30 – 1 PM**



We continue to hold our monthly Social Justice vigils along Courthouse Road on Sunday mornings immediately after worship. We have plenty of signs available. Have a snack at our hospitality time, and then join us in front of the church.

Thanks to everyone who donated to our Souper Bowl of Caring offering!

These funds will be used to support the work of Shalom Farms.

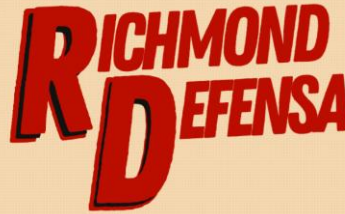


Our priority legislation has all passed in the chamber where it was introduced and is working its way through the opposite chamber. We anticipate that legislation to regulate assault weapons, rein in abuses by ICE, and limit solitary confinement will be heading to the Governor's desk by mid-month. Stay tuned for a campaign to write postcards urging her to sign these bills.

Special Election Update:

The special election to allow Virginia to redistrict temporarily if other states are allowed to do so, in order to maintain a balance of seats in Congress, is still scheduled for April 21 while lawsuits are resolved. In Chesterfield County, **early voting starts Friday, March 6** at the Central Library. In March, early voting hours are M-F 9 AM – 6 PM.

If you are interested in being part of our congregation's Justice Team, see Gail Christie. You can join the Justice and Witness Action Network and get Action Alerts [here](#).



**Community
Defense
Training
Sat, March 7
5 PM**

Join us for a special training to learn how to respond lawfully to ICE/Federal Agent presence in our communities. RSVP required to attend; contact Gail Christie if you are interested.

**Habitat Rehab
Project
Sat, March 21**



You are invited to join a team from First Congregational UCC on Saturday, March 21 to work on a Habitat for Humanity project rehabbing a house at 8801 Rams Circle, N. Chesterfield, just 3 miles from the church. We will be working there from 8 AM until 3 PM.

If you would like to participate,

- (1) email Gail Christie and let her know gail.e.christie@gmail.com
- (2) Create a volunteer profile at www.richmondhabitat.org/volunteer You will need to do this even if you worked on the Sheldeb rehab project last year, because they have updated their website and you have to create a new account and sign the waiver again.
- (3) Once you have created your profile, go to [March 21- FirstUCC Group](#) to join our team

Let Gail know if you have questions, or issues signing up.

We had so much fun the last time - hope you can join us for this one!

RISC Nehemiah Action!



"AND I CALLED A GREAT ASSEMBLY TO DEAL WITH THE NOBLES AND OFFICIALS." NEH 5:7

TUESDAY, MARCH 24th
6:30 – 8:30 PM

DOORS OPEN AT 5:30

ST PAUL'S BAPTIST CHURCH

CHILDCARE PROVIDED

4247 CREIGHTON RD



Join 31 faith communities in seeking commitments from Mayor Avula, Richmond City Council, and Chesterfield County Officials for safe and affordable housing, reducing gun violence, and addressing mental health for children and youth.



ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

SUNDAY, MARCH 15

We live in a world where people are hurting, resources are concentrated in the hands of fewer people, and compassion is diminishing. This world needs love in ways that matter and make a difference for the better. We are asked to give, even as needs grow.

We are invited to give, not because our pockets are overflowing, or to keep up with the Joneses, or because we are shamed into giving. Rather, we remember God's sacrificial love for us that keeps blessing us with resources we can share.

We give because our hearts are touched as we witness God at work in ourselves, in one another and throughout the world. Our response to God's love for us is to love others, near and far. We are agents of grace when we choose to give, trusting that God's Kingdom is being built through us and among us.

We cannot be in all of the places where our love offering will eventually go, but our gifts will bless the world far beyond what we can imagine. Through contributions to OGHS, our love offering is embodied in collaborations with local and international partners to help rebuild after disasters; to provide nourishment and shelter when people are displaced; to provide aid and expertise so the most vulnerable can dream for a better future. For over 75 years, OGHS has gathered love offerings for the world. OGHS continues to show up when there is a need, here at home and at places around the globe.

OGHS is your, our, love offering to and for the world. Let us share generously and cheerfully.

Please indicate OGHS on the memo line of your checks or Venmo payments. Thanks!



**Virtual Easter Lilies
for Immigrant Families**

In lieu of purchasing Easter lilies for our sanctuary this year, we will be collecting donations for the Richmond Community Legal Fund, which provides legal and financial support to families whose loved ones who have been detained/deported by ICE. The cost of a “virtual” lily is \$15. If you wish to make a donation, to be acknowledged in the Easter worship bulletin, please fill out the form below and place it in the offering plate or return it to the church office with your payment. Please designate “immigrant support” on your check or Venmo payment.

All requests must be received by Tuesday, March 31.

Name _____ **Phone** _____

Number of lilies _____

In honor of _____

In memory of _____
