



"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Psalm 139: 23-24

Dear Members and Friends of Union Presbyterian Church,
Once upon a time there was a little iceberg. Each day the little iceberg just did what it did everyday: it woke up, floated around a bit, talked to friends, went to work, ate dinner. Little did anyone know that under the water, the little iceberg wasn't so little. The little iceberg carried a whole lot of ice baggage with it. If you really watched you might see how all that extra ice wearied the little iceberg and slowed it down. Maybe you could see how it's baggage sometimes affected those around it. But the extra ice was under the water. It was mostly invisible. Then one day, the little iceberg met the Titanic...

It would be silly to tell the story of the Titanic from the perspective of the iceberg. Icebergs don't have feelings and the fact that 90% of icebergs are under water is a function of how ice floats not about "hidden emotional baggage" icebergs carry. However, I believe that most of us could probably relate to this fictional story of the iceberg. You and I can easily find ourselves carrying all sorts of stuff under the surface mostly hidden but ready to hurt ourselves and others. And what is scariest is the fact that I don't think that we have to carry all that baggage.

It's easy for us to become like icebergs in our lives. Part of the problem is in our society. In "The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality," Ronald Rolheiser writes about just how different most Western Civilizations are today from the past. Cultures long ago and even in our own country a short time ago were different. They more easily saw a connection between that natural world and the spiritual. They were more explicitly religious. They had a whole lot more religiously based rules to follow. There was a clearer understanding how what one did during the day connected to what went on in their hearts and souls.

Rolheiser writes that this didn't necessarily make these cultures better. They had their own problems. They were more superstitious, legalistic, and uptight. They often had unhealthy notions of fate, and excessive fear of eternal punishment. They "...burned witches, waged religious wars, [and sometimes] slaughtered innocent people while thinking themselves on a crusade for Christ." But at the same time, "their families and communities [often] held together better than do our own and [many more seemed] less restless and slept more peacefully than we do."

Rich Vilodas in "The Deeply Formed Life: Five Transformative Values to Root Us in the Way of Jesus," explains that our society today values things that keep us distracted and focused on day to day stuff. Things that don't require us to look at our inner life deeply. Looking inward is hard and it can hurt. So if we can keep ourselves distracted in life through what we do, what we achieve, and with the practical aspects of daily living, then if something bugs us we can just complain about it a little and walk away from it. Vilodas writes that "topside, people can look content, joyful, and successful, while privately beneath they'll confess suicidal thoughts, drug addictions, marital affairs, debilitating shame, inner rage, and so much more." We end up looking like little icebergs... dangerous just below the surface.

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Fortunately, in Scripture there is an entire book of the Bible that serves as a shining example to the solution: the Psalms. All one has to do is read a couple chapters of Psalms to see that the book is full of people trying to outwardly express the deep examinations of their hearts. The same psalmists who glorify and praise God in one breath... lament and wish to be dead or the death of enemies in the next. The psalmists share their concerns, their worries, their sin, their hurts, their doubts, their fears, their rage, AND their celebrations, praise, and joy with the Lord. The Psalms act as a kind of model for how our lives could look if we stopped all the distractions and compartmentalizing and just bared all our inner selves before God. In "The Deeply Formed Life," Vilodas writes that we are called to examine our lives like this because God wants our lives to be free from all the stuff that holds us back from loving him and others. In a very real sense God wants us to dig into all that is below the surface in our lives (all the stuff that is in the dark), and to take it out so that the light of Christ can shine on it.

The bad news is that this sort of examination is hard (for all the reasons mentioned already). But the good news is that this sort of examination is not complicated. We just need to remember the word "why." What would happen if we used the word "why" as we went over our days with the Lord in prayer?

- Why did I do that, again?
- Why did what that one person say make me feel that way?
- Why did that scare me? Why did that make me feel anxious?
- Why did that fill me with such giddiness?
- Why do I love that so much?
- Why did I enjoy watching that person suffer a little?
- Why did that fill me with such relief?
- Why do I always react this way to that person?
- Why do I seem to act that way in these kind of situations?

If we truly want to put our lives into the light of Christ, then I bet that every hour of our day has at least a small handful of things that we do and say that we should be asking "why" about with Christ. Let me give you an example. I am someone who often tears up during movies. My kids have asked me why I do it. And I've always just answered, "Well I just do." This is just the kind of answer that keeps my baggage

below the surface. Recently, I've been talking with God some about why I cry sometimes during movies. Recently, when I teared up watching a mother and child be reunited in a movie, I realized that those tears had to do with:

- fears I have about my children not growing up healthy and happy
- concerns I have about me and those I love being alone or ignored
- worries I have about the world becoming more disconnected from one another.

Would I ever grow in Christ the way I want to, if I allowed these sort of worries to just remain sitting below the surface?

This month marks the start of the season of Lent. It is a time where we prepare our hearts for Christ's resurrection, reflecting on how Jesus brings light and new life into our lives. Lent is the perfect season to take some time and ask some hard "why" questions. Then maybe like the psalmists, we might get a little better at offering Christ all of our fears, doubts, pain, joy, and praise.

Sincerely in Christ,
Pastor James



Worship in February

During the season of Lent we will be starting a new sermon series entitled, "The Lord is Our Shepherd." Psalm 23 is a well known Psalm for very good reasons. Not only does the Psalm masterfully help us understand what God is like, it also serves to help us understand what Christ, the Good Shepherd, did for us through his life, death, and resurrection. We invite you to join us during the season of Lent as we walk through Psalm 23 verse by verse and explore some of how our Good Shepherd cares for us.

Continued Lectionary Series: Epiphany is Here

February 7; Mark 1:29-39, "Epiphany- Hide & Go Seek"

-Celebration of the Lord's Supper

February 14; Mark 9: 2-9, "Epiphany- Not See but Listen"

-Transfiguration Sunday; Valentines Day

New Lent Series: The Lord is Our Shepherd

February 21; Psalm 23:1 & Philippians 4:10-19, "With the Lord as your shepherd, what more do you want? "

February 28; Psalm 23:2-3 & Isaiah 49:8-13, "Blue/Green Color Blind"

March 7; Psalm 23:4a & Jonah 2, "No Wrong Turns?"

March 14; Psalm 23:4b & Hebrews 12: 7-11, "Good Cop/Bad Cop"

March 21; Psalm 23:5b & Revelation 19:5-10, "Anointed By God"

March 28; Psalm 23:5a & Mark 11: 1-19, "A Party for Your Enemies"

-Palm Sunday

April 4; Psalm 23: 6 & Matthew 28, "Secure Forever"

-Resurrection of the Lord



Ashes and Lent

In the book "The Weight of Glory," C.S. Lewis writes that all of us "... are far too easily pleased." Lewis argues that because of sin most of us notice the goodies right in front of us before we notice the unsurpassing goodness of God. Lewis believes that all of us are motivated by desire and most of us put more effort toward the things we want the most. Unfortunately, sin often causes us to focus our attention on the wrong goodies. Lewis writes that often we are like children, "who want to go on making mud pies in a slum because [we] cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea." Lewis notes: "If we consider the unblushing... staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us."

Ash Wednesday is a time for us to remember that before God we are nothing more than ashes and then Lent follows as a time to help refocus on the rightness, the bigness, and the goodness of Christ with all of who we are. This year at Union we are doing a number of things to help start the Season of Lent off right.

Special Service to Burn Ashes for Ash Wednesday

On **Sunday, February 7, at 10:30 AM**, we plan to hold a special service to prepare ashes for Ash Wednesday between our outdoor and indoor services. We will sing hymns, burn palms (provided) and pray over the ashes. For this Sunday only, our outdoor service will begin at **10 AM** instead of 9 AM so that those coming to the outdoor and the 11 AM indoor service will be able to attend. If it is raining, this event and Outdoor Service time change will move to Sunday, February 14. Please note that we will be celebrating the Lord's Supper at both services on February 7th regardless of the weather.

Ash Wednesday

On **Wednesday, February 17** the imposition of ashes will be dispensed in a drive-through format in front of the church from **6:30 until 8 AM** and from **5:30 until 7 PM**. The ashes will be provided in individual containers (due to Covid 19). We will not have a traditional Ash Wednesday service. Please feel free to invite anyone you think might want to come by!

Ephipany God Sightings

Have you “seen” God or God’s love manifested in some way this week? Below are the beautiful God sightings that have been shared this month. We pray you will enjoy and be blessed by the way God has manifested Himself through nature, children and others. If you have seen Christ working through someone or have seen the majesty of God; His love, His peace, His mercy, please share with us on the website (www.unionpresbyterianchurch.com/godsightings), with the Sunday bulletin inserts or call/email the church office. We thank our God for showing us His majesty in some wonderful ways that we can “see!”

Connection was made with Mrs. Miriam MacDowell, age 94, whose husband, Reverend Norman MacDowell, served as pastor at Union Presbyterian Church in the 1960s. It reminded me of how long God has used this church in the community. Pastor James Holeman

Regardless of political affiliation, I saw the hand of God in the inauguration through a beautiful rendition of Amazing Grace and through prayers still offered to Almighty God. Nancy Newman

Beautiful snow falling; moonlight across the lake at night and sunrise in the morning.

Larry & Janice's engagement...healing after grief!

Finding out Eric's surgeon is a Christian!

Peace internally during storms of life.

The beauty of the snow!...seeing the Creator's work.

Love & support from the community for Eric & Jennifer - truly God is Love!

Watching grandchildren's excitement as they saw 7 deer playing in the snow in our backyard! Creation gifts!

Anonymous

Found myself in a situation where a family needed monetary help that really stretched my finances. However, I still felt God wanted me to give what was in my possession. What I did not know was that God, through another (who was not aware of the circumstances) would provide for me just as He provided for that family who needed help. Would you believe that the amount was pretty much the same! That was a definite God-sighting to me.....God showing His love for that family and meeting their need and at the same time, meeting my need! How great is our God! Anonymous

Watched one of my children yesterday with no prompting- stop the important thing he was doing to do something silly (but meant a lot to another of my children). Then to hear them come out and say that they loved one another! God was definitely at work!! Anonymous

Seeing God at work in the lives of the 2 individuals who got engaged at Union last week! -Anonymous

This last Sunday... I saw the love of Christ in a checker at Harris Teeter. I had never met her before. But as she asked about my family and kids, I could tell that she really cared about what I shared. It was "more than" just small talk for her if that makes sense and it made my day. -Pastor James

A beautiful sunrise last Monday! Anonymous

Being part of the care for an aging parent can be stressful at times and fulfilling at others. As the plan for mother changed so did the process for assistance for the long term. God put special people in our lives for support and guidance, some of whom were going through things with their aging parents. We shared our feelings with others and allowed them to do the same. We saw God walking with us and understand in a more reassuring way, he was/is always involved in the process. Thanks be to God! Billy & Susan Wilson

Seeing the unity and feeling God's presence at the installation of our new elders.

Hearing children's laughter as they ran and played together. Billy Jordan

I saw and heard the power of God in the Thunderstorm last night! Pastor James

tings in January

Our Blessing Box has become a God Sighting Box! I often check when I drive by, especially Sunday morning. Last Sunday, it had been emptied, which is not unusual. When I opened the door to restock, to my surprise there was \$107, under a rock. Honestly, I was surprised that the money had not been taken. (Oh me of little faith!) What started as a box for students at Forestview has quickly become a needed box for the community. It is being used by more than we ever imagined and often! Since that day, there have been left several donations in the box. What a blessing! Tammy Biddix

This morning in my devotions, reading about the resurrection of Jesus after the crucifixion, the women went to the tomb and were met by an angel that told them Jesus was alive - He had risen from the dead. I was trying to image what those women must have felt in that moment and in thinking about it, I imagined myself going to my mother's grave and being met by an angel who said my mother was not dead, but she was alive! And the epiphany of what the resurrection of Jesus really meant to me personally hit me....my mother is ALIVE (her body laid in the grave 13 years ago will be resurrected at the appointed time)because JESUS IS ALIVE and all who believe in Him even though their bodies have died, they are ALIVE and even their bodies will live again one day! Hallelujah! Anonymous

God Sighting! Today, while taking temperatures at a business entrance, I overheard two men talking. One asked, had the other still been able to help serve meals to those in need, during the crazy times. His reply was, Yes, it has been tough and we have had to "hunker down" and work harder than ever! The joy in his voice was amazing! Bless those who are still working to serve others, especially in these trying times! Anonymous

I heard a wonderful woman of God say, "I can hardly wait to get to my Bible reading in the mornings!" Anonymous

I am always so blessed when God chooses to reveal Himself in the physical realm. He loves to use people who are willing to allow God, through their obedience to the directive of the Holy Spirit, to manifest Himself as a God who loves us. While sitting on palliative care wing of the hospital with Becky Staggs, I "saw" God work in an incredible way. Outside of Randy's room, we were sitting, talking and making phone calls when the dinner food trays were being delivered to the rooms. The young woman making the deliveries saw Becky's sorrow and asked if she would like to have a hug! There could have been no better timing or place for such an awesome touch of God in Becky's life. She hugged us both (with our permission) and went on about her business of delivering dinners. When Randy went home to be with the Lord, and before leaving the hospital, Becky received a beautiful card from the same young woman and signed by other staff members and enclosed were meal tickets to the cafeteria for Becky's family. I could only see the hand of God reaching out to Becky in a very painful time....He was saying, through people who would respond to His call, "I love you!" And Becky heard Him! Nancy Newman

My God sighting was a song this morning. As I was driving to Church in the rain I was having a "pity party" which I don't usually do. I was thinking I would have to sit in my car isolated from friends and listen to the service and how unfair all the happenings in our country this past year - the isolations, the deaths, the fears, the loss of so many things we all hold dear. I arrived and parked so I could hear the service and was given my bulletin. As I opened my bulletin, an insert was the first thing I saw. To my surprise, this was my greatest blessing today. It was the words to a song entitled **"Our God is in Control."** The first verse:

This is not how it should be
This is not how it could be
This is how it is
And our God is in control

What a great reminder! God is in control, always on time and provides what we need! Thank you Pastor James! Martha Simmons



FINANCIAL REPORT AS OF DECEMBER, 2020

	<u>December</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
Revenue	\$20,672	\$222,436
Expenses	<u>25,555</u>	<u>211,882</u>
	-4,883	10,554

Monthly Budget Requirements \$19,124

If you have any questions regarding the financial information of the Church, please feel free to contact Martha Simmons, Disbursing Treasurer, or any member of the Finance Committee. Martha is responsible for disbursements only. Questions regarding your financial giving to the Church should be directed to Jason Morrison, Treasurer.

February 7

Unity
8210 Unity Church Road
Denver, NC 28037
unity@unitypres.org

February 21

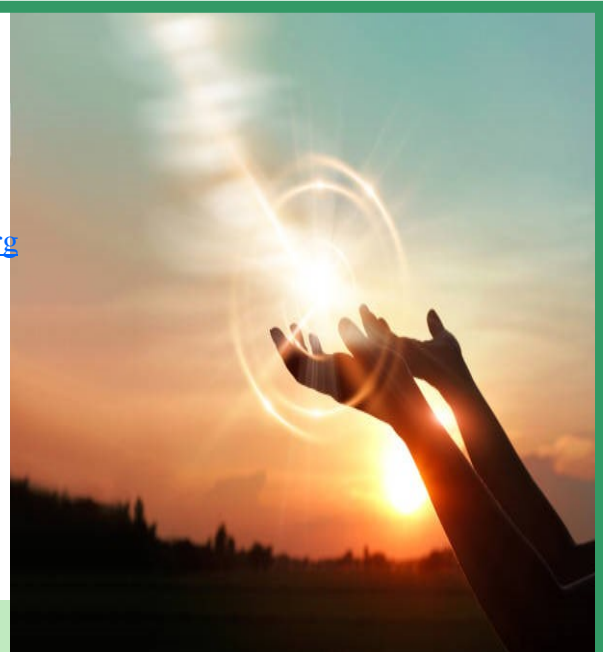
Waldensian
109 Main Street East
Valdese, NC 28690
office@waldensianpresbyterian.org

February 14

Vians Valley
P.O. Box 202
Bakersville, NC 28705



February 28

Walnut
254 Barnard Road,
Marshall, NC 28753
genelinton@klive.com



PRESBYTERY PRAYER CALENDAR



SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2 10 AM Bible Study	3	4	5	6
7 COMMUNION 10 AM Worship 10:30 AM Burning of Ashes 2:30 PM SOC	8	9 10 AM Bible Study 6 PM C & T 6 PM B & G	10	11	12	13
14 After 9 AM service W & C 2:30 PM W & S Valentine's Day 	15	16 10 AM Bible Study	17  Drive By Ashes 6:30 -8 AM 5:30—7 PM	18	19	20
21 Session Meeting	22	23 10 AM Bible Study	24	25	26	27
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Union Presbyterian Church

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U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 8
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Reverend James Holeman
Pastor

Sherry Maples
Music Director/Accompanist

Nancy Newman
Administrative Assistant

Church Hours
9:00 AM—1:00 PM
Tuesday—Friday
Office Closed Monday and Saturday

SAVE THE DATES

February 7	Communion
February 17	Ash Wednesday
March 28	Palm Sunday
April 4	Easter Sunday