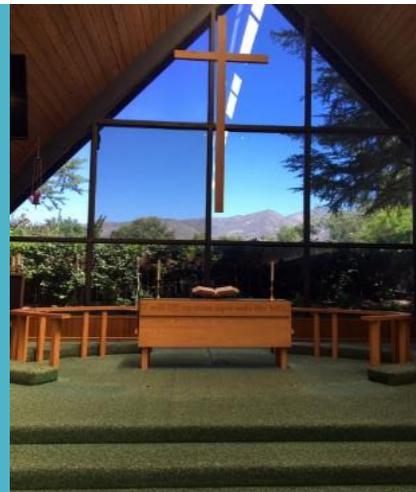


Ojai United Methodist Church

Staying in the Loop

March 14, 2021



*“Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and shield.
Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.
Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.”*
(Psalm 33:20-22, NRSV)

Pastor Jaime’s Mid-Week Devotions on YouTube

Below is the Youtube link for Pastor Jaime’s Mid-week Devotion from last Wednesday (March 10th). This video devotion is also posted on OUMC’s Facebook Page.

Simply click on the link below and it should take you right to the video! Or copy this link and paste it into your Internet browser.

Pastor Jaime’s Mid-Week Devotion (from March 10th):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5ev6J1LH4o&t=1s>

Spend Every Sunday Morning with Pastor Jaime!

Below is the Zoom information for Sunday, March 21st’s Worship & Fellowship gathering. It will also be sent via email later this week:

To join this Zoom gathering by telephone, dial:

+1 669 900 9128 (don’t forget to press the # key when you are prompted!)

Meeting ID: 873 1214 9999

To join by computer, click on the following link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87312149999>

Meeting ID: 873 1214 9999

Scriptures for March 21: Psalm 22:1-2; 12-21; John 18:1-11

JOURNEY TO THE CROSS: FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

GIVE. Because we believe that “everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand,” this week, find ways to give. Some ideas include collecting everyone’s change at the end of the day, selling a homemade product, hosting a (virtual) game night, or use your creativity to think of something that meets a need you see around you!

How Did Lilies Come to Be Easter Lilies?

The Easter lily is a relatively new tradition - first brought to the United States in 1882 from Bermuda. The large, pure-white blossoms remind Christians of the pure, new life that comes through the Resurrection of Jesus.

According to legend, when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, the flowers bowed their heads in grief and pity. "But the proud lily would not bow its lovely white head.

"The next day, the lily discovered that Jesus was going to be crucified. The flower felt so miserable about how it had acted ... that it bowed its head in shame. To honor the Lord Jesus and to show its sorrow, the lily has grown with a down-turned blossom ever since that first Good Friday. (Courtesy: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/why-eggs-why-lilies-easter-traditions-explained>).

How Do the Birds and Bees Symbolize Resurrection?

The robin, a very common bird in the U.S., has a red breast and a legend to explain it. Seems that once a gray robin flew to Christ's crown of thorns to draw out a thorn, and when it did, a drop of Christ's blood fell on its breast, leaving a stain forevermore.

Bees

It takes lots of buzzing bees to spread the pollen and make flowers grow. The honey these creatures create is a biblical symbol of God's favor. The Torah agrees, for it describes God's promised land again and again as "flowing with milk and honey." (Courtesy: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/spring-symbols-remind-us-of-resurrection>).

Pray Unceasingly...

Although we are not currently able to gather in person to worship or pray, we most certainly can still pray together! As the Apostle Paul wrote in his Epistle to the Romans (Chapter 8), "*Nothing can separate us from the love of God through Christ Jesus.*" Prayer connects us all, as God's Children. And nothing can ever separate us!

This week let us be in prayer for each other and for our dear brothers and sisters listed below.

For strength and health: Jennie Leidig (recovering from a bad fall); Linda Aldous (back surgery on March 16th); Kevin Ball (Jean Ball's grandson, who suffered a stroke); Lyle (Nancy Dennis' brother, suffering from Multiple Myeloma); Brandon (brother of Linda Aldous & Carol Longhom's friend diagnosed with cancer); Brenda Nelson and Bob Murphy (Marie Forrest's cousins); Jesse Rusch; Lisa (Doreen's niece); Katie (friend of Soni Wright); Carol Longhom; Aleena (granddaughter of the Dennis's); Linda Harris; Laurie King; Stella Lorraine Preston.

Our homebound friends: Lorayn Nelson, Robin Chambliss, Bob Unruhe, Norma Mitrany, Elaine Nelson, Allen Spencer, Lynn Hernandez, Jeanne Keyser, Pauline Larwood.

For our Covenant Churches: Crescenta Valley UMC (Montrose) and Pastor Paul Tangonan; Eastern Sierra Cooperative Parish: Bishop First UMC, Big Pine: Community UMC, Independence: Pioneer Memorial UMC, and Pastors David and Anna Crews Camphouse.

For our Church Leadership: North District Office; Rev. Jim Powell; staff and district leaders; Cal-Pac Conference; Bishop Grant Hagiya; staff and conference leaders.

Other prayers:

All those effected by COVID-19; all people in the work field battling and working with COVID-19 head on; all who are quarantined; all who are alone in hospitals; all who are facing financial issues due to loss of jobs and/or unemployment; all who are feeling anxious and uncertain; all who are navigating how to remain connected with loved ones; Immigrants and their families; a sense of community among students; our UMC Denomination; Veterans—those serving and their families; Ojai's Homeless neighbors; the continued actions of justice in the Black Lives Matter movement; the young people who are demanding change with respect, peace, and their powerful voices; for the mental health and stability of all people during these trying times...

GOD... IN YOUR MERCY... HEAR OUR PRAYERS. AMEN!

From the Pastor's Desk...



Today, silence seems to elude us. As a society, we wake up to the buzzing, music, and news programs of our radios. Then we walk outdoors into a noisy world - the clamor and commotion of cars; the roar and angry honks of overloaded highway traffic, and the endless “white noise” of crowds and conversations. Even when we duck into elevators or grocery stores, “Muzak” tags along - we can’t hide from it! Sadly, we even play into it ourselves with the endless chatter of movies and video games not only on our TVs but now on our iPhones, Smartphones, Bluetooth, Droids, MP3 players, iPods, and iPads. And we take these handy, portable devices with us everywhere we go. We act as if we’re *afraid* there won’t be enough for us to listen to... *in the stillness*.

In the heart of the temple, within its inner-most sanctuary was the “Holy of Holies,” where only the High Priests were allowed to visit. And within the Holy of Holies, separated by partitions and curtains, sat the Ark of the Covenant itself. The Ark comprised part of the throne - the “kapporeth” or “mercy seat” - that was nothing more than a flat slab of gold resting on the top of the Ark. So whenever the High Priests would enter the Holy of Holies, all that greeted them was a blank slab of open space. The most sacred space where God was in the midst of the Hebrew people was empty. Empty and *silent!* What the Israelites carried with them, throughout those 40 years in the wilderness and protected with their very lives, was a seat with nothing visible *on* it, but everything *in* it. Later, when Jews made the pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem to experience God’s mercy and comfort, in reality, they visited an empty space... a “holy absence” and a “holy silence.”

Jesus’ cleansing of the temple - chasing out the animals as well as the money changers and overturning their tables - is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and in the Gnostic Gospel of John. Jesus’s rampage in the temple was partly a reaction against the intrusions of unholy images into this sanctuary, but also “unholy *noise*.” Jesus saw the temple site was gradually being transformed from a center of spirituality into a place where the hustle and bustle drowned out any possibility for God to be heard above the hubbub. Jesus sought to restore the temple to a place of worship, where persons could again hear God speaking in their midst.

During this Lenten season we seek to renew our commitments to God and to Christ, remembering how easily the noise and pressures of our harried lives drown out the steady influence of God’s voice within us. First Kings 19:11-2 related just such an experience in the life of the great prophet, Elijah. Despite his great accomplishments for God there came a time when his faith fell apart, because Jezebel vowed to take his life. And, gripped by fear, Elijah fled for his life and returned to the holy mountain, to the place where tradition said God had spoken to his people. And Elijah returned to the mountain, expecting God to bolster his faith by speaking out of the earthquake, wind, and fire. And he is told to “go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then we read, “Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire, but after the fire... *a sound of sheer silence*.” And Elijah perceived it!

At the most critical time in his life, Jesus sought the quiet seclusion of the Garden of Gethsemane. There he found the indomitable power to pray, “Not *my* will - but *yours* - be done.” Our culture expects God to proclaim God’s self at the top of God’s lungs - but God appears to us, not with clanging symbols or blaring trumpets, or thundering timpani, but in the still small voice.... in the sounds of silence.

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Jaime

A Reflection on Methodism by John Wesley

“I am not afraid that the people call Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America.

But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power.

And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.”



~ Scripture to Remember ~

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

(Matthew 11:28)



Got a question?

Seeking support or conversation?

Contact Pastor Jaime anytime!

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