

NeedhamUCC

FOCUS Newsletter • March 2025



As we enter the church season of Lent, it should never go without saying, or asking:

What is Lent?

From Rev. John: “I will contradict something I said in the past (and if we can’t change our minds, well, really, what is the point?). Lent is *not* a 40-day self-improvement challenge, like a New Year’s Resolution to go to the gym or Dry January. It’s not about what we can do for ourselves if we really try but about what can and has and will do for us. It’s an opportunity to put ourselves in the way of God’s hard truth and amazing grace, particularly in the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, to soak it all up, and trust that somewhere in there, in us, the power of the Holy Spirit is at work challenging us, comforting us, empowering us, and blessing us so that we may, in turn become more of the blessing to the world God intends us to be.”



Lent 2025

Step by Step: A Slow Walk Through Holy Week Sundays, March 2-April 20

Most years, it seems, Holy Week goes by in a blur. It’s Palm Sunday one moment, Jesus is entering Jerusalem to the acclaim of the crowds, and the next it’s Easter, with Jesus already killed, buried, and raised before we know it. We barely get time to acknowledge the *what* of his death much less the *why*, which is every bit as important, if not more so. What was it about what Jesus said and did and how he said and did it that so infuriated the powers and principalities of his day? What about the Gospel he lived and preached earned him the murderous enmity not just of the Roman imperial authorities but also the religious leaders of his own people? To engage these questions

more deeply, we’ll spend the season of Lent walking slowly through the events of Holy Week. We’ll take an entire Sunday worship service to explore each of the days of Holy Week in turn from Palm Sunday to Easter. (See calendar below.) This Lent, join us on this slow, intentional journey to the cross and the heart of our faith.

Lenten Reading Group:

Entering the Passion of Jesus

Wednesdays, 3/5-4/9 @ Noon-1pm online via Zoom at

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85113249091>

As we take our slow walk through Holy Week this Lent, we’ll follow along with Biblical scholar and engaging guide Prof. Amy-Jill “A.J.” Levine, Rabbi Stanley M. Kessler Distinguished Professor of New Testament and Jewish Studies at UCC-related Hartford International University for Religion and Peace, in her book *Entering the Passion of Jesus*. (We have copies available for you at the church. Just ask. You also can purchase a hard copy, Kindle, or Audible audiobook at

<https://a.co/d/2HNDXal>)

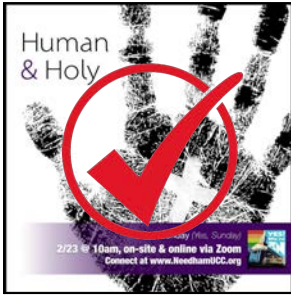


ENTERING THE PASSION of JESUS



NOTE: For our next meeting on Wednesday, 3/12, we’ll be discussing Chapter 2.

“Step by Step” Worship Schedule For Lent 2025



“Ash Sunday”

Human & Holy

2/23 @ 10am, on-site & online via Zoom

“Ash Sunday.” You heard that right. This year, as we prepare for our “slow walk through Holy Week,” observing one of the days of Jesus’ last week each Sunday during Lent, we’re taking a whole worship service to rethink and re-feel our way through Ash Wednesday. Maybe remembering that we’re all only human AND that being human is a gift from God is just what we need in this moment to keep us grounded, rooted, real... and oddly hopeful.



“Palm Sunday”

Hosanna

3/2 @ 10am, on-site & online via Zoom

We kick off our step-by-step Lenten journey through Holy Week with an early Palm Sunday. It looks a lot like a parade, with people cheering and waving palms and strewing the road with their cloaks. The sort of event where politicians kiss babies for votes. But this isn't a parade. The people are crying out for salvation, justice, and liberation. And Jesus isn't a politician, he's a prophet and something more. Follow him through Holy Week to find out where his collision course with the powers that be will take him and why. (Matthew 21:1-11) *This service will*

include a celebration of holy communion.



“Holy Monday”

No

3/9 @ 10am, on-site & online via Zoom

One of Jesus’ first acts upon entering Jerusalem was to visit the great Temple; after all, Jesus was a faithful Jew. What he found there disturbed him greatly—but exactly what was it that earned his strong, even violent rebuke? For 2000 years, Christians have tried to fill in that blank, more often than not with our own subtle or not-so-subtle anti-Jewish sentiment. Renowned Jewish New Testament scholar A.J. Levine helps us understand Jesus’ resounding “No!” in the Temple and asks us to consider how it might still apply to the Church today. (Matthew 21:12-17)



“Holy Tuesday”

Controversies

3/16 @ 10am, on-site & online via Zoom

Jesus continues to wear out his welcome in Jerusalem. The various power blocs within the religious leadership of the day pepper him with questions, often trick questions, hoping to discredit him and his disciples in the eyes of the faithful without drawing the attention of the occupying Romans. But Jesus is never one to shy away from controversy for the sake of a larger and more loving Gospel, which angers those powers enough they begin to look for a way to shuffle him off the public stage, permanently. (Mark 11:27-12:34)



“Holy Wednesday”

Prepared

3/23 @ 10am, on-site & online via Zoom

As the plot against Jesus thickens, he takes time at the home of friends to enjoy their company and prepare his spirit for all that is to come. It’s there that a woman anoints him with costly perfume that soothes both his aching feet and his aching heart, much to the consternation of Judas, who has his own preparations to make to betray Jesus into the hands of the authorities. (Mark 14:1-11)



“Maundy Thursday”

Gathering

3/30 @ 10am, on-site & online via Zoom

Jesus gathers for the last time with these disciples whom he insists on calling friends, though most will doon desert, deny, and betray him. But he is determined not just to tell them but show them what the Beloved Community he dreams of and will die for should be: Leaders should serve. Members should love. And the bonds of holy friendship with God and one another should extend right down to our body and blood, God’s body and blood, offered not just for some, but for all. (John 13:1-16; Luke 22:14-27) *This service will include the sacrament of Holy Communion.*



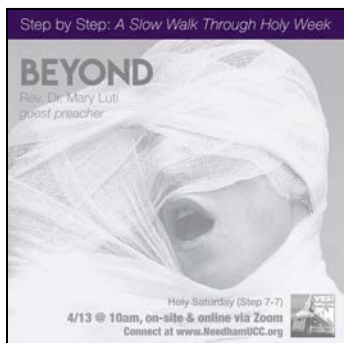
“Good Friday”

Stations of the Cross:

A Multi-Sensory + Intergenerational Time of Reflection

4/6 @ 10am, on-site & online via Zoom

The entire congregation, kids included, will be invited to explore a series of age-appropriate hands-on activity stations designed to help us feel our way into this story of the disciples losing their best friend and their dreams for the future. How do we grieve? How do we hold on to hope? How do we support one another in our losses? This will include a traditional “Stations of the Cross” to walk, as well as beautiful music and a slide-show of nearly 2000 years of Good Friday art.

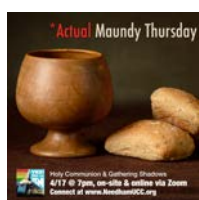


“Holy Saturday”

Beyond, with Guest Preacher Rev. Dr. Mary Luti

4/13 @ 10am, on-site & online via Zoom

Holy Saturday is perhaps the least observed of all the days of Holy Week. After all, what happened once Jesus was laid in the tomb? Nothing. That’s what dead means. But that’s exactly what Holy Saturday asks us to sit with: nothing. What do we do with nothing, absence, a vacuum? How do we have faith in the face of the apparent triumph of evil, when our hope is dead? That may be the most important question of all. (Matthew 27:57-66)



*Pssst! Because this worship service is so meaningful to so many in our congregation, we will celebrate an ***Actual Maundy Thursday service, complete with communion and tenebrae, the gathering of shadows, on actual Maundy Thursday, 4/17 @ 7pm, on-site & online via Zoom.***



Easter Sunday

Resurrection is for Everyone

4/20 @ 10am, on-site & online via Zoom

After a very long Holy Week, indeed, we arrive at Easter Sunday and Jesus’ resurrection. But the two Mary’s only catch a glimpse of him in the garden. Even on Easter, Jesus seems busy, like he’s got work to do, which he does: bringing resurrection to the whole wide world, to all the dry bones, all the walking dead, all the helpless and hopeless, even to us. Because despite what we’ve been taught, resurrection isn’t just Jesus’ superpower. It’s God’s gift for everyone. (Matthew 28:1-10; Ezekiel 37:1-14) *This service will include the blooming of the cross.*

PERIOD PARTY*

*It's (not) exactly what you think it is

Collecting & repackaging menstrual products for neighbors in need



Sunday, 3/16 @ 12 Noon
at the church, 1154 Great Plain Ave
Connect at www.NeedhamUCC.org

Period Party

3/16 @ Noon, in the Fellowship Hall

When you're living unhoused or in a shelter, there are so many questions to think about, so many needs to be met; but there's at least one we don't often consider: "Where am I going to get the products I need to deal with my monthly period cleanly and safely?" So we're partnering with Circle of Hope here in Needham to address this need. We're collecting pads, tampons, pantyliners, & hygiene wipes, all individually wrapped.

TO DONATE, please use this link to our Amazon Wishlist:

https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/30Z0RG31PP9WG?ref=wl_share

(This ensures we get exactly the products we need.) To donate money to the effort, go to www.NeedhamUCC.org/paypal and click on the PayPal link, then select "Period Party" from the dropdown menu; or you can write a check to the church with "Period Party" in the memo line. **TO PARTICIPATE:** Join

us for the Period Party after worship on 3/16 to help repackage those donations into individual bags for distribution. Our goal is to assemble 1000 kits, and many hands make light work.



Children of all ages are always welcome in worship!

Quiet books and soft toys are available in the family room in the foyer outside the sanctuary doors. All bathrooms have changing tables. Pre-K children who are potty trained are welcome to join our elementary Sunday school activities. Sunday School is offered on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month, unless otherwise announced.

Sunday School Calendar

Sunday, March 9

10am Sunday School (Pre-K-Gr. 5)

Sunday, March 23

10am Sunday School (Pre-K-Gr. 5)

Sunday, April 13

10am Sunday School (Pre-K-Gr. 5)

Sunday, April 27

10am Sunday School (Pre-K-Gr. 5)

Help teach kids about church, faith, and the God of love and justice you know!

It's up to us to make sure our kids know they're loved by God, along with the rest of the world and all creation. Part of that work is holding space for them in the life of our church, especially during the Sunday school time that is set aside just for them. **We need your help to do that as a Sunday school teacher or helper** (we need two unrelated folks doing that to make sure it's a safe space). The lessons are prepared with all necessary materials in a single box ready to go. All you need is an open heart and a willingness to volunteer. **To get more info, email your questions to childrenandyouth@needhamucc.org. To sign up, simply go to <https://shorturl.at/UaLJk>**



SAVE THE DATE!

Just-4-Fun Egg Hunt

4/12 on the church lawn or indoors in case of inclement weather

Our annual **Just-4-Fun Egg Hunt** is coming up Saturday, 4/12 @ 9am-Noon. Once again, we'll be running two hunts, one "Sensory Friendlier" version with a quieter setting and a smaller crowd for children with sensory sensitivities and another "Bells & Whistles" version with more kids and more music and a visit from the Big Bunny. **Keep your ears open for lots of ways to volunteer**, from donating candy (via our approved Amazon wishlist to stuffing eggs to helping out the day of the hunt (particularly if we need to move indoors.)

If you'd like to get started donating, you can do that at

https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/1C1RQ0VXIOBRU?ref_=wl_share



Next: Before Worship Sunday, 3/16

Men's Fellowship

3rd Sundays @ 9am, church dining room and via Zoom

We welcome all men of the church for fellowship and discussion of the day's scripture and sermon focus. Questions? Contact John Baldwin, jsbaldwin@comcast.net or Rob Dunlavey, rob@robd.com



Weekly Prayer Group

Tuesdays @ 12 Noon via Zoom at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84372854861>

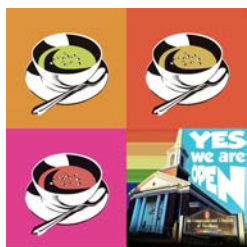
In church we often talk about prayer as if everybody knows what prayer is. But prayer can look and feel very different for different people in different situations. Above all, prayer is a practice, and practices take practice. Join us as we practice praying together.



Mindful Meditation

Sundays @ 7pm via Zoom at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/79920727588>

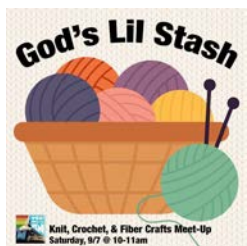
What is mindful meditation? *Focusing on being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment. Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress.* Join these longtime practitioners online each Sunday.



Monthly Soup Lunch

First Thursdays @ 12 Noon in the church library

Please join us in the library once a month to share a simple soup lunch and enjoy one another's company. We will gather on the first Thursday of the month at noon in the Library. The more, the merrier. Everyone is welcome! **Our next lunch will be Thursday, 4/3.**



God's Little Stash Knitting, Crochet, & Crafts Meet-Up

1st Saturdays @ 10-11:30am, in the Reception Room Next: Saturday, 4/5

Join Rev. John and knitters, crocheters, and anyone with a portable craft from around the congregation for a purely social time to sit and knit and stitch and chat. In the reception room between the church office and the sanctuary. Bring your favorite WIP (Work In Progress).



Congregational Meeting With the Renovation Team and LDa Architects

3/23, @ 11:11am, on-site & online

The Renovation Team of Tom Mollerus, Isabell Wells, Paul Brown and Lynn Gotwals have been working with LDa to consult on the plan to install an accessible elevator and install new bathrooms (including accessible bathrooms) on the main floor. In February, we met with LDa to walk through the renovations with the new plans and choose the finishing elements such as bathroom faucets, carpet and paint colors. In March, LDa will meet with the Town Building Department to introduce the renovation and discuss obtaining permits for the construction. **And on 3/23, we want to meet with you, the congregation!**



From the Environmental Ministries Team

Are you new to gardening? Consider taking classes at the Needham Community Farm.

Monday Night Collective Growers - NEW!

Starting March 31 @ 5:30pm

Location: Needham Community Farm Beds, 145 Pine St

Number of classes: 10 or 20 week registration option

This NEW class offers beginner gardening class instruction in a community setting. Ideal for beginner individuals and/or

families!! Class will be located on the Farm. Participants will share responsibility of growing food in communal beds while taking home produce and foundational gardening skills! Seeds, seedlings, and tools are provided.

Wednesday Night Independent Growers - UPDATED!

Location: Community Garden Beds, 145 Pine St

Time: 5:30-7

Number of classes: 12

Our signature Gardening Class has moved to the Community Garden Beds! At this new location, students can enjoy improved pest control and more accessible gardening beds. Ideal for independent gardeners who are excited about the joys and responsibilities of caring for their own garden bed, with expert advice to match. Virtual Gardening Class Learn to garden from the comfort of your home with our virtual gardening class! This class is designed for all gardeners-whether you are just starting your gardening journey or you are years in, we are here to answer your questions and share foundational gardening knowledge!



Check out the website for more information. <https://www.needhamfarm.org/class-details-and-registration>



From the Open and Affirming Ministry Team

Happy 25th Anniversary!!!



A Time Such as This

Twenty-five years in, we are in a time when our ONA Covenant and our commitment to love and justice of Jesus have never been more crucial. Organizations and individuals are on high alert. People are terrified. There is genuine fear of genocide (yes, attempts to *erase transgender people* qualifies!).

GLSEN (Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network) said today:

We are in a very difficult moment in history. Many of us feel a deep sense of loss and concern for our country and the future of our young people. Many people, especially vulnerable students, are feeling afraid.

GLAAD (formerly *Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation*)

posted on January 7, 2025, some examples of language that is now permitted on the platforms of META, including:

- Claims that LGBTQ+ people are “mentally ill” or “abnormal.”
- Calling trans and nonbinary people “it.”
- References to “women as household objects or property.”

Read more... <https://glaad.org/releases/meta-removes-anti-lgbtq-hate-speech-policies-ends-fact-checking/>

The ONA Ministry Team recommends these sites to learn more about the climate the president’s executive orders and some corporate actions are having onboard the LGBTQ and other marginalized communities. You can join the organizations and get information alerts, as well as find out about their resources and programs.

GLAAD - <https://glaad.org/>

GLAAD has a program called “Protect this Kid” <https://protectthiskid.com/>
<https://act.glaad.org/page/52123/subscribe/1>

PFLAG (national) - <https://pflag.org/>
<https://pflag.org/jointhefight/>

Greater Boston PFLAG - <https://www.gbflag.org/>
<https://www.gbflag.org/resources>



Invitation to Hear from our New State Representative, Josh Tarsky on Immigration Issues

Monday, 3/10 @ 7pm, Linden & Fellowship Hall

Please join the Needham Area Immigration Justice Task Force's meeting Monday, 3/10 @ 7:15pm in Linden & Fellowship Hall at church to hear Josh Tarsky, our new State Rep, who will address five pending legislative bills affecting immigrant families. Click here for information on the five bills he will be discussing. You will be able to attend this meeting on Zoom or in person at the church. Enter through the Linden St. entrance. For Zoom attendance,

register in advance, after which you will receive a confirmation email containing a link to join the meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/Bnyf6EgxThu9XzS0lbQ1dg>



From the Guatemala Partnership

FEBRUARY DELEGATION RECAP

Bursting with friendship, connection, and learning, our February delegation of 16 travelers to Santa María Tzejá included these highlights:

- Third Annual Library Fair: Dozens of children joined the delegates for read-alouds, origami, coloring, lawn games, chess matches, Mayan Uno and other card games, mini-foosball and more.

- Massacre Commemoration: The community gathered to remember the 1982 genocidal violence. Middle school students performed a thoughtful play about the history of their community from its founding in the 1970s to the present moment of hope and community development.

- Youth: We were fortunate to have 6 youth on the delegation who brought special energy, playing with kids, offering workshops, and exploring local sites.

- Skill Shares: Delegates delighted in learning how to make chocolate, from cacao bean to sweetened chocolate bar, in a community home. In addition, delegation members led workshops in the middle school on first aid, self-defense, poetry, birding, and critical thinking. Stay tuned for our Report Back via Zoom later this month to hear travelers' first-hand stories and reflections! Date and time will be announced.



Library Fair with Children

Delegate Roasting Cacao Beans



Plan NOW to Join Us for our Annual Women's Retreat

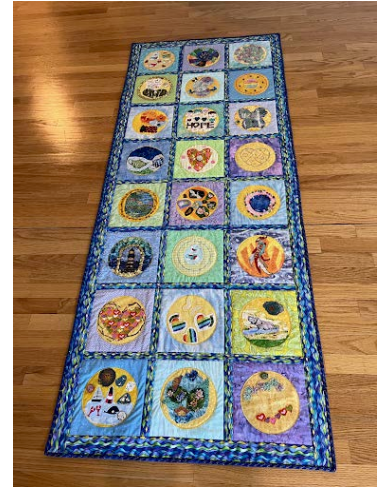
Friday, 5/9 @ 3pm - Saturday, 5/10 @ 3pm

Mark your calendars and join a wonderful community of women for an overnight stay and three meals at the beautiful UCC Craigville Retreat Center in Centerville on Cape Cod. The theme this year is "Rooted Resilience: Shining and Sharing Your Light". The space can hold up to 23 people and the cost per person is \$155 in a dorm-like setting. Events include beach walks, yoga, music, group discussions, a craft, a communion service and overall camaraderie.

To join us, please mail or drop off a check made out to the Congregational Church of Needham, with "Women's Retreat" in the memo section, as well as a note listing your email address, phone number, and any food allergies or dietary restrictions you may have. Since space is limited, reserve your spot now.

Questions? Feel free to contact the planning group: Carol Brown at walshbrown1@gmail.com, Cici Hunt at cicihunt@gmail.com, Janet Jankowiak at janetjankowiak@comcast.net, Carol Oberle at coberle1@verizon.net, or Stephanie Oddleifson at soddleifson@gmail.com.

Here is a quilt we made at last year's Women's Retreat. Each of us created and embellished fabric circles with a technique called "Slow Stitching". The quilt was later assembled and completed by Janet Jankowiak and Chris Rowan. "Circles of Hope" will be hung at church for all to enjoy!



FOCUS newsletter contributions are always welcome!

Please submit materials by e-mail to office@needhamucc.org.

Our next issue deadline is Monday, March 31, 2025



Rev. John MacIver Gage, *senior minister*

Valerie Becker, *music director*

Robin Bevilacqua, *church administrator*

Cindy Sullivan, *finance administrator*

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Tom Mollerus, *moderator*

Board of Deacons: Linda Bauer, *chair*

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