



MARCH, 2025

The Epistle

A newsletter for the community of
St. Paul's United Methodist Church

A Word from Rev. Ron

It is the tale of human existence, from ancient history until today. Over and again, one of the worst things that God can seem to do to us is let us face the consequences of our own decisions, especially when we choose not to seek God's truth but try to twist that truth to fit our preconceptions. When we are reluctant, or outright refuse, to be challenged by God, God allows us to reap what we sow.

The hundreds of prophets in the court of King Ahab of Israel told him what he wanted to hear, prophesying he would be successful in battle. Only the prophet Micaiah dared speak the truth of the Lord. The king chose not to heed the lone prophet's warning, and raced to his own demise. (1 Kings 22)

The prophet Samuel tried to stand against the will of the people, who demanded of him a king "like the nations around us." Samuel warned the people that the king would abuse his power, taking advantage of their children and taxing them into slavery. "When that day comes," he warned, "you will cry out because of the king you chose for yourselves, but on that day the Lord won't answer you." "Nevertheless, we want a king!" the people demanded, and in time their king accomplished all the abuses that Samuel warned them of. (Samuel 8)

Repeatedly in the Gospels, Jesus challenges the false religiosity of the Pharisees and religious leaders, challenging them that they reject the truth of God's presence in favor of ritual devoid of its true meaning. (Cf. Matthew 23)

Timothy expressed this recurring tragedy in 2 Timothy 4:3: "There will come a time when people will not tolerate sound teaching. They will collect teachers who say what they want to hear because they are self-centered."

The season of Lent, which is just about to start, should be a season of truth, even if that truth challenges us. Liturgically, that truth has traditionally been expressed as our sinfulness before both the holiness of God and God's expected holiness of us. The season has been about naming and repenting of both individual and communal sin, acknowledging before God that we have not been obedient children, nor have we been an obedient church; that we have chosen to be self-centered rather than to place God at the center of all things. It should also be a season when we look at the world around us and lament how far we are from the kingdom of God.

I have to share that to do so today, to name the many lamentable ways in which our culture is failing, is risky business. Pastors' very livelihoods are regularly threatened if they are deemed too "political" - a declaration usually made by hypocritical Christians raising some party ideology ahead of actual Christian teachings.

And yet, be it Lent or any other time of year, Old Testament scholar and theologian Walter Brueggemann once wisely shared:

"The prophetic tasks of the church are to tell the truth in a society that lives in an illusion, grieve in a society that practices denial, and express hope in a society that lives in despair."

It's time we relearn and reclaim our prophetic tasks to tell the truth, to help people grieve, and to express and pursue hope; together. So as we move through this season of Lent, don't be surprised if you suddenly hear your pastor is being "political," because there is no place in our existence where the truth of God does not wish to shine, and what it can bring to light isn't always comfortable to us.

Thank goodness that part of the good news of Lent is that there is nothing so dark in this world, not even death itself, that the Light of the World cannot bring it into light and life.

What's Coming In Worship



Life is this strange, tender mix, isn't it? Joy and sorrow, love and loss, heartbreak and hope, all tangled together. This year, we invite you to embrace Lent as it is—raw, honest, and tender. This is the season that asks us to stop pretending we're holding it all together. It's a time to pause, sit with what's fragile and unfinished, and let God meet us in the hardest parts of our lives. Because when we stay with the hard part, something else happens: the good part begins to unfold, slowly but surely.

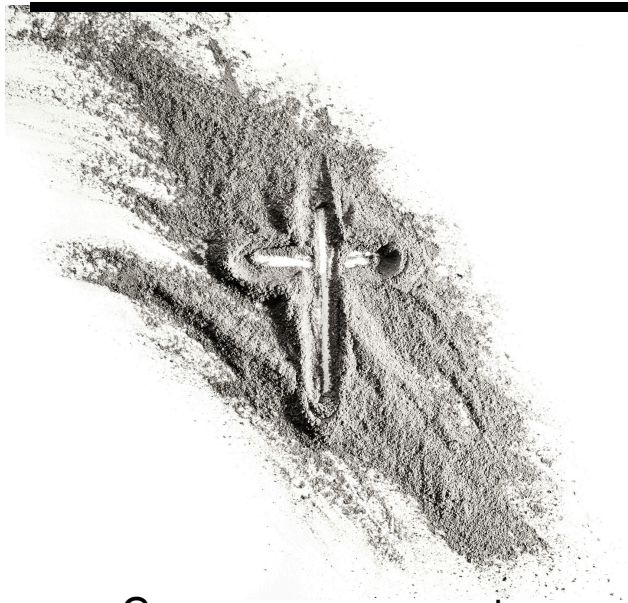
—Excerpt from "The Hardest Part"

From its start on Ash Wednesday, March 5, through to Easter Sunday, April 20, we invite you to join us and go deeper in your faith with "The Hardest Part." This series will include not just our weekly worship experiences and sermon, but will provide you access to daily devotional readings (and even a Spotify playlist) through a digital download.

The Hardest Part is developed by Kate Bowler; a four-time New York Times bestselling author, podcast host, and Professor of Religious History at Duke University. At 35 she was diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer, and as she faced her own mortality she wrote a frank and funny national bestselling memoir: *Everything Happens For A Reason (And Other Lies I've Loved)*. Partnering with several other clergy, Kate produces Lenten resources for churches and individuals that connect our spiritual aspirations to the weight we feel of the world around us.

You can download a digital edition of the daily devotional and/or small group guide by visiting:

<https://katebowler.com/seasonal/devotional/the-hardest-part/>



Come commemorate
Ash Wednesday, March 5,

- **St. Paul's UMC at 12noon**
- **Christ Church United Methodist at 6:30pm**

**Ash Wednesday,
March 5, 2025**

Ash Wednesday begins with human touch as oil and ashes are traced in the shape of a cross on our foreheads. From dust we were made; to dust we will return (Genesis 3:19). The intimacy of this symbolic act expresses God's invitation to "be reconciled" right here, right now, in this moment, no matter how ready we feel, for "now is the acceptable time" (2 Corinthians 6:2b). What does it mean to be reconciled to God? A reconciliation is an event that leads to restored relationships, where differences that once caused such pain and separation have now been resolved. Jesus has flung open the door and said, let nothing stand in your way. Come and see how loved and how precious you really are, in all of your humanity. Jesus will speak strength and love into all the places where you feel fragile and inadequate. He will speak hope into your fears and eternal life into your very mortality. For know this: you were never meant to do this alone.

—from "The Hardest Part: Sermon Guide"

Opportunities to Grow In Faith

THE HARDEST PART **Lenten Devotional for** **Individuals & Groups**

As shared on page 2, our Lenten worship series includes the option to download devotional materials both for individual and group use. You can access and download these materials by visiting:

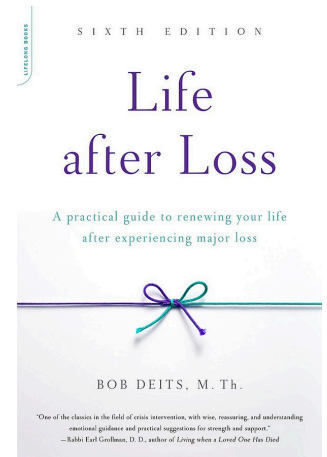
https://katebowler.com/seasonal_devotional/the-hardest-part/

Join with Rev. Ron and others from our congregation and community to read and discuss together the book *Life After Loss: A practical guide to renewing your life after experiencing major loss* by Bob Deits. This book provides wisdom and practical exercises for navigating the uncertain terrain of grief and recovery.

We will meet on 7 Monday afternoons, at 2:00pm, (Grief Group) through the season of Lent, beginning March 3 through April 14. For planning and hospitality purposes, please RSVP your intent to join us for this group by sending us an email or using the RSVP on our website:

<https://stpaulsumctucson.org/life-after-loss/>

Life After **Loss**



Mountain Pathways **(Discipleship Group)**

Mountain Pathways is a discipleship curriculum and small group experience created by Rev. Ron. We will be launching a small group of up to 12 participants led by Rev. Ron and a couple participants from our previous session. This is a year long experience - three sessions at the start and then monthly check-ins as participants pursue self-guided growth as followers of Jesus Christ. Watch for more information in coming weeks.



Special Gifts Campaign



You can help us strengthen the foundation of our congregation and its mission to be a generous community following Jesus for the good of the world! Last week we sent all of our members and regular attenders, by regular mail, a letter, information sheet, and pledge card regarding our short-term special gifts campaign, "Retire the Debt & Re-Floor the Gym."

We were excited to share, as we announced this campaign on Sunday, February 16, that at the launch, thanks to our early donors, we had already received commitments exceeding 50% of the goal! Please help us finish the goal, paying off our existing mortgage and investing in an upgraded sports floor for our busy gymnasium.

65th Anniversary Celebration

65 years. That's a long time. According to a quick Google search, we are one of the oldest churches on the east side of Tucson. That history can be seen in our buildings and our people.

You've heard it said that Tucson is the biggest small town you will ever see and is definitely true when it comes to our church. I have met so many people who do not currently go to our church but tell me that they grew up here, that they attended preschool here, that their best friend's mother's cousin was married here is just amazing.

I am an example of this. When news broke to my family and friends that I was moving back to Tucson, Shirley Maddox, who has been friends with my mom since elementary school reached out to let me know that you all were looking for a Church Secretary. I applied and crossed my fingers. In chatting with my mom about this job, she reminded me that she and my father were married here by Bob Diets and my sister and I were both baptized here in the late 1980's. We then grew up over at Christ Church United Methodist, where my grandma attended, but St. Paul's has been in my blood since birth.

There are many stories such as this in our church and in town. Memorial services usually bring in families who have not attended since they were small who remember things like services in the A-Frame or Brummet Hall or who have stories such as their father built the altar rails in the A-Frame or that their family was instrumental in the creation of the Memorial Garden.

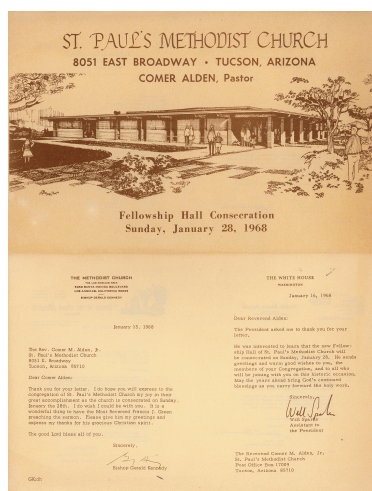
While the landscape of the neighborhood is changing, our part of it hasn't. We are still here to help, whether as a location for community meetings or as the only Food Bank location on the east side open all 5 days of the week. And while church looks different now than it did 10, 20, or even 65 years ago, our purpose hasn't. We are a generous community, following Jesus for the good of the world. Here's to another 65 years...and beyond.

Written by Megan Swanson, Church Administrative Assistant

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Photos from top to bottom:

The St. Paul's Logo made out of Rubik's Cubes by Luis Ortíz, Shared Director of Youth Ministries; image of the bulletin from the consecration of the Fellowship Hall, now known as Brummet Hall from 1968; image of Pasta donations for ICS, Feb 2025; image of Family Game Night, Feb 2025



Some Anniversary Memories

As a part of our celebration of our 65th Anniversary, we invited church members to share their memories, which we've shared in worship over the last several months. Here are just a few selections from those memories. Thank you all for sharing!

In about 1965 I went on a "Mission of the Church" trip to California where I joined other teens from AZ and California and we toured different towns to see how the church was ministering to the people of the world. We went to the fields of Delano to talk to Cesar Chavez about migrant workers situation, before he was famous. We went to Glade Methodist Church in San Francisco to see how the church was ministering to the Gay Community. It was very eye opening to me.

-Ruth Ann Lynn

We started attending St. Paul's in the spring of 1983. That year, and for a few years after, on the Sunday that began Advent, the manger scene was placed on the altar by the woman who made it, Ethel Laubsher. Ethel was a senior citizen by that time. She took great pride in placing each piece in exactly the right spot; it was a labor of love.

-Al & Pat Vreeland

We held one sunrise service held outside on the grass, led by youth who portrayed Jesus's resurrection. As the boy who was portraying Jesus reached his hand to the sky, the sun touched his fingertips.

-Juli Sale

I remember that day when St. Paul's UMC Tucson sent money for the construction of the first motor road in John Dean Town, Liberia. I and my entire community feel the positive impact of the church. I remember the construction of a clinic, a school in John Dean Town. These facilities are saving lives and providing opportunities for future generations. This is truly a ministry of Jesus Christ.

-Jerry Gita, principal of Gretta Moffat School

One song I remember hearing Grace Multiplied perform was a song called "10,000 Reasons". I particularly am fond of the chorus when it urges you to "Sing like never before, O My Soul, I'll worship your holy name". And how the song is like the beginning of life to the end, when it comes to following Jesus. To this day, my heart is full when I hear Grace Multiplied play that song in worship.

-Daniel Cyburt

My best memory is more of a feeling, the feeling of family and being home and I hope we can make anyone new feel the same.

-Barb Longo

Come see *Freaky Friday!* (a special invitation)

Hello! I would like to invite each of you to the Sabino High School production of *Freaky Friday: The Musical!* I am in the ensemble of this show, and I am super excited to get to perform in the big

auditorium, especially with my friends. The production will be on **March 4, 5, and 6 at 6pm**. Only \$15!

You can also mark your calendars for our next show, *Failure: A Love Story*. For this show, I am stoked to be the assistant director!! This show will be May 7, 8, and 9 at 6pm.

-Kate Bartlow

In January, members of our Church Council, Staff Parish Relations Committee, and Board of Trustees, and other church members gathered for a strategic planning retreat, laying the ground work for strategic planning utilizing a method rooted in Design Thinking.

Since the retreat some of our church leaders have been at work on the first phase of the Design Thinking process: researching the hopes and dreams, feelings and needs of "families with children" living in our community.

Strategic Planning

These leaders will present what they have heard and learned at our March Church Council meeting on Tuesday, March 18. Our work will transition to ideation, brainstorming as many ministry ideas and initiatives as we can generate. Our hope is to be prototyping new means of being in ministry with families in our local community by the beginning of the new school year.

CHILDREN & FAMILY MINISTRIES



Vacation Bible School True North - March 10-14, 2025

Join us as we take on the ultimate Alaskan adventure where northern lights glow over majestic mountains, racing rivers, and glistening glaciers. As kids trek the tundra (ages 3 years to 5th grade), they'll explore how easy it is to lose sight of what's true in our world today. Pointing them toward Jesus, True North will show them that he is a faithful friend we can always trust. He is our True North! Register on our website today!



AMAZING GRACE AN INTERGENERATIONAL EASTER EVENT

Come join the discovery and fun of St. Paul's FREE Amazing Grace Easter event on Palm Sunday, April 13th 9 am – 11 am. This will be a time of interactive celebration, remembrance, prayer and praise in the form of family/group conversations, crafts and food. Everyone is welcome! Invite your family and friends!



Special Events

FAMILY WORSHIP SERVICE Sunday March 30th at 9:30 am

Proverbs 22:6

*Train up a child in the way he should go;
even when he is old he will not depart
from it.*

At St. Paul's we love children, youth and families and have made a commitment to supporting every person in every type of family. To this end, we will be including families in our 5th Sunday, 9:30 am service (the first one for 2025 is March 30th). We will teach children how to worship, include youth in serving and show parents how to be the primary faith teacher in their students' lives. Each service will include several learning styles and engaging, creative worship designed to make an impact on our younger (or young at heart!) members. This is a great alternative service for those who are learning to worship (any age), those who are wiggly and giggly, those who want more participation in worship and those ready to try a new way of worshiping. To get involved or for questions contact Heather at:

FamilyMinistries@StPaulsUMCTucson.net
or 520-296-6149.

Shared Youth Ministry Update

Belong - Believe - Serve

Late January & February Events:

- **January 26 – Confirmation Class Kickoff:** Students started their faith journey by learning about the Bible's connection to Jewish traditions and receiving their own personalized Bibles.
- **February 2 – Wesley Cup District Event:** Youth from five UMC churches competed in fun team challenges, including OddBall and Trivia Tic-Tac-Toe, learned about faith and teamwork, and our youth won the right to keep the Wesley Cup trophy for the next four months.
- **February 9 – Fellowship Square Visit:** Students visited their “adopted grandparent,” set up a hummingbird feeder, and reflected on the importance of companionship and care for others.
- **February 16 – Bowling Competition:** At Round1, students enjoyed bowling, pizza, and friendly competition, with some showing excellent skills and others trying bowling for the first time. Earlier that day, students in the **second Confirmation Class** explored the United Methodist Church's history, heritage, theology, and social commitments, deepening their understanding of faith.
- **February 23 – Volleyball & Pickleball at Desert Skies:** Youth played volleyball and pickleball, building confidence, teamwork, and trust while having fun and cheering each other on.



March - Upcoming Events:

- **March 2 – Flandrau Science Center & Planetarium Visit:** Students will explore science exhibits and hands-on activities while learning about astronomy and STEM topics.
- **March 9 – Movie Night at Christ Church:** Students will watch a faith-based, inspirational movie with themes of overcoming challenges and personal growth, providing relevant and important lessons for their journey.
- **March 16 or 23 – Echo the Story Discussion:** A large-group faith formation session focusing on exploring biblical themes and reflections.
- **March 23 or 30 – Potential Sabino Canyon Hike/Walk:** An outdoor adventure where students can experience nature while building friendships and discussing faith.

Confirmation Classes & Sunday School

- **Next Confirmation Class – March 30:** Confirmands (five) will explore the question "What is a Christian?" as part of their faith journey.
- **Echo the Story – Sunday School at 9:30 AM:** We launched this curriculum in February and hope to make it a permanent part of the 9:30 AM service with the support of volunteers.

Want to join us? Do you have teaching skills to share with our youth? Reach out to us to learn more about ways to get involved! We are planning a 24-hour camping trip, service projects, a mission trip, and more.

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March Birthdays

If we missed yours, please let the office know!

Wally Burlingame 03/06	Karen Gutierrez 03/18
Barb Sheley 03/06	Bonnie Fickas 03/20
Dennis Barger 03/06	Evelyn 03/21
Tommy Sanford 03/08	McKenna Carroll 03/22
Felida Ashley 03/09	Althea Curtis 03/22
Lynn Bryant 03/11	Eden Bracey 03/24
Norene Norris 03/12	Daniel Cyburt 03/25
Pam Down 03/14	Lois Finley 03/26
	Lily Danloe 03/29

Special Thanks!

Special Thanks to Joann Hubbard and Cindy Barger for pouring through boxes and files of historical items to find fun things to share at our anniversary celebration.

Also special thanks to those who provided food and treats; to Heather Stein, director of Family Ministries, Luis Ortíz, Shared Director of Youth Ministries; the United Women of Faith; the musicians led by Crystal Stark and Shirley Maddox; and everyone who participated. On to 70!