

# The Messenger

Osceola Presbyterian Church

## Lift High The Cross

*By Pastor Bobbie Arrowsmith*

Lift high the cross! There is something gross about that too. It's just that we have put so much gold plating around it and hung it around so many necks as decoration that it no longer looks or sounds offensive. But it was a lowly Jewish carpenter who t on such a cross as a common criminal. Yes, the chief symbol of our church today, the cross, was the electric chair of the first century. s the apostle Paul saw the cross as a "scandal to Jews and folly to the Gentiles" because it was hard for them to accept a suffering redeemer, a wounded healer.



In the forty years of wandering in the wilderness the Israelites let out many complaints about God, as if God has not delivered them and saved them from the Egyptians. In punishment, we are told God sent poisonous serpents who slew many of the people. The people let out lamentation again and in response, God tells Moses to construct a bronze serpent, put it on the top of a pole, and let the people gaze upon it. And when they do, they are healed of the poisonous snake bites and saved from the serpents.

For the children of Israel the wilderness was that time between God's deliverance from Egypt and their entry into the Promised Land. Through all the moaning and complaining of the called ones, God remained faithful to the agreement (promise) that was made with them.

In our life, the wilderness is that time between the dying and rising of Christ and when Christ comes again. So we are now on our wilderness journey. We live in the in-between-time. In our wilderness trip, we too have our "snakes" with which to contend - snakes that poison our lives. We also do our share of groaning and complaining. Yes, we live in our wilderness too, only the geography is different.

So lift high the cross! Look upon this cross and see there the sign of our healing, the sign of our salvation. Among other things, the cross is the great symbol of God's continuing faithfulness to us. This God, who refused to give up on the Israelites of old, will not give up on the baptized ones of the present.

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Yes, lift high the cross! Let it remind us that our God knows that living can be hard, and our suffering can be great. Our God in Christ has experienced wilderness living. Our God in Christ has experienced snakes. God has appreciation and understanding of our feeble attempts to live and love in a wilderness.

So lift high the cross! The uplifted cross proclaims to us that God's love for us is not based upon our successes, our social standing, our bank account, our prestige, our position at work - not even on our grade averages at school. The cross is and remains the symbol of God's great and unconditional love for us; the empty cross is for us the symbol of Christ's triumph over death.

Lift high the cross! See - your Redeemer lives, and know "that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 11: 25)

Lift high the cross! Happy Easter!

*Pastor Bobbie*

## Easter Worship

Join us to celebrate Christ's Resurrection on Easter Sunday, March 31<sup>st</sup>!

6:30 am – Easter Sunrise Service on the front steps of the church (weather permitting; indoors in inclement weather). The service will be led by our youth and young adults. Breakfast will be served afterwards in Fellowship Hall.

10:00 am – Easter Worship Service led by Rev. Roberta Arrowsmith that includes Holy Communion and special music by the Chancel Choir.

Worshippers may attend services in person or on Zoom. For the Zoom app use Meeting ID: 835 0070 8532 (Password: OPC) or watch later via Osceola's Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/OsceolaNJ](http://www.facebook.com/OsceolaNJ)



## Tenebrae Service, March 28

The word “Tenebrae” is Latin for “shadows” or “darkness.” It is a service of extinguishing candles, one after the other, as the events of Holy Week unfold. The final candle is the Christ candle, which is not extinguished but instead is removed from the church until Easter Sunday.

The term “Maundy” comes from the Latin phrase “mandatum novum” which means “new commandment,” and thus Maundy Thursday celebrates the new commandment that Jesus gave at the Last Supper, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

Our Tenebrae service will be held in the narthex gathered together at tables as Jesus and the disciples were that night so long ago. join us, Maundy Thursday, March 28, 2024 at 7:00 pm. in the narthex.

## Spirituality Center, March 29

“Come away ...all by yourselves and rest a while.” (Mark 6:31)

Jesus knew the importance to make time to rest and meditate and have an intimate relationship with God.

On Good Friday, March 29, Osceola church will be set up as a Spirituality Center. A Spirituality Center is a place set apart to experience and experiment with ancient spiritual practices and contemporary resources for spiritual exploration and encounter with God. Like worship, it is a place for the head and the heart. It is a sacred space, holy ground and a time set apart. Those who come to the Center are invited to be comfortable, to rest and renew, to pray, to experiment with different spiritual disciplines such as writing prayers, listening to music while reading prayers and Biblical passages or praying the labyrinth.

The Spirituality Center is self-guided and self-paced. It is offered to everyone as a place to come and contemplate the meaning of Christ sacrifice on one’s life. The Center will be available Good Friday, March 29, 2:00 pm to 6:30 pm.

## Session News

Exciting things are happening at Osceola! There are new opportunities to serve, new people to welcome, and a new Bible study! Join us in praising and serving the Lord at Osceola. Speak to any of the elders, and/or keep an eye out for more information!

## Nominating Committee Update

The Nominating Committee began its work with a meeting on Sunday, March 3rd, and met again on March 17. There are openings for Elders and Deacons, if you are interested in serving as a leader. There are also 3 openings for the Budget Committee, 2 for the Auditing Committee, and 3 for members of the congregation-at-large for next year’s Nominating Committee. In addition, we need someone to serve as the Assistant Financial Secretary (to take the place of Don Dodson, who has moved out of state).

If you are interested in serving in any of these positions, please speak to Carol Riddlestorffer, Beth Parks, Fredy Reyes, or Rosa Tamayo.

## Lenten Services

Our weekly Lenten services this year focused on “The Witnesses of Holy Week.” Soup and fellowship were shared in Fellowship Hall before everyone met in the Sanctuary to learn more about Pontius Pilate, Peter, Judas, Simon of Cyrene, and Joseph of Arimathea and their roles in Jesus’ Passion. The Lenten journey continues as we enter Holy Week with special services on Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.



## High School Art Drive Supports Church Collection

Recently, Osceola’s Deacons have been collecting items to support Imagine, a Union County-based grief counseling service. They received a donation of art supplies from the National Honor Society at Arthur L. Johnson High School in Clark in support of those efforts. For more information, check out the [article written by the high school newspaper staff at TAPinto Clark](#).



## Learning About Lent

Throughout Lent, our Sunday School classes have been learning more about the events that led up to Jesus' crucifixion. Despite all his teachings of love, there were groups who were threatened by Jesus and sought to have Him killed. Once again, our theme of John 3:16-17 helps us to understand that Jesus' death was all part of God's amazing plan and that His death allowed for His resurrection and our salvation from sin.



Each week of Lent, the students collected special food items for our Food Pantry. They made special Easter crafts that will be included in the Food Pantry's Easter food boxes.

As we enter Holy Week, the children will participate in the "palm procession" during Palm Sunday worship. There will be NO Sunday School classes on Easter Sunday, March 31st but classes will resume on April 7th when we will rejoice that our Lord has risen from the dead!

## Osceola's Youth Serve

Osceola's Youth Group worked on several service projects this month. The youth helped prepare chicken soup for one of our Lenten Soup and Service nights. All the chopping got done quickly and no fingers were injured during the preparation! The youth also made Easter treat bags and homemade Easter cards to be included in the Food Pantry's Easter distribution boxes. After all their hard work, it was time for some fun and the group went bowling on March 19th.



Some of our youth will join some young adults in leading Osceola's Easter Sunrise Service. The next Youth Group meetings are scheduled for April 9<sup>th</sup> and April 23<sup>rd</sup>.

## Food Pantry Receives Donations



There has been an increase in our donations recently as we have received numerous collections from the community. Most recently, we received a cart full of canned goods from a Clark Brownie Troop. We also received donations from the Mission Commission's Advent offering and our Sunday School classes had a special food collection for Lent.

February's distribution included health items such as shampoo, conditioner, soaps, toothpaste, and tissues. March will be our Easter distribution that will include some "holiday fixin's" and ShopRite gift cards. We will also include Easter crafts, cards and treat bags from our Sunday School classes and Youth Group. We know this will bring some Easter joy to all our families!

Items needed:

Canned fruit

Canned pasta

Cereal

Pasta Sauce

Canned beans

Jelly

Cleaning products

Laundry detergent

Paper products

