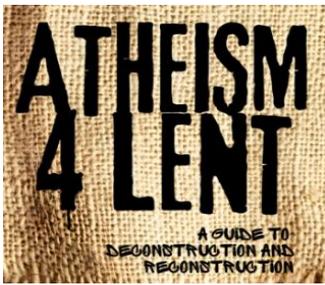




**ATHEISM
4 LENT**

A GUIDE TO
DECONSTRUCTION AND
RECONSTRUCTION





Lent is traditionally a time of fasting, reflection, and spiritual honesty. In this series, we create space for deep questioning and unflinching honesty — even doubt. Inspired by the provocative practice of Atheism for Lent (popularized by theologian Peter Rollins), we enter the wilderness of deconstruction — not to lose faith, but to encounter God beyond our idols and illusions. The goal isn't nihilism, but spiritual rebirth. What if we give up idolatry? What if we turn to ash false images of God and embrace the Living Word?

**Those who are able please stand*

PRELUDE "Beneath the Cross of Jesus" – arr. Christina Becket

Cathy Fafarak, Organ

WELCOME

***CALL TO WORSHIP**

Come, you who have been wounded by words meant to save.

We come seeking healing, not harm.

Come, you who have questioned, doubted, and wrestled with God.

We come trusting that God welcomes our questions.

Come, you who long for scripture to be a lamp and not a weapon.

We come ready for light that guides our steps.

The Living Word calls us into relationship, not fear.

We gather to worship the God who draws near.

Let us worship God,

with open hearts and open hands.

***OPENING HYMN**

"O for a Closer Bond with God"

BEATITUDO C.M.

William Cowper, 1769; alt.

John B. Dykes, 1875



1 O for a clos - er bond with God,
 2 Where is the bless - ed - ness we knew
 3 Re - turn, O ho - ly Dove, re - turn,
 4 The dear - est i - dols we have known,
 5 So shall our bond be close with God,



a calm and heav - enly frame, A light to shine up -
 when first our hearts were stirred? Where is the soul - re -
 sweet mes - sen - ger of peace! For - give our sins and
 as we our ways pur - sue; Help us to tear them
 calm and se - rene our frame; So pur - er light shall



on the road that leads us to the Lamb!
 fresh - ing view of Je - sus Christ, the Word?
 help us learn in Christ to find re - lease.
 from your throne, and wor - ship on - ly you.
 mark the road that leads us to the Lamb!

***CONFESSION**

We have gotten it wrong again, oh God.

It is safer to worship words we think are on the page, than live in relationship with you.

Help us recall the words of Martin Luther who stated, "The Bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid."

Help us worship you, the Living Word. Help us keep our sacred texts in their rightful place.

They point the way to you, They are no substitute for you.

In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

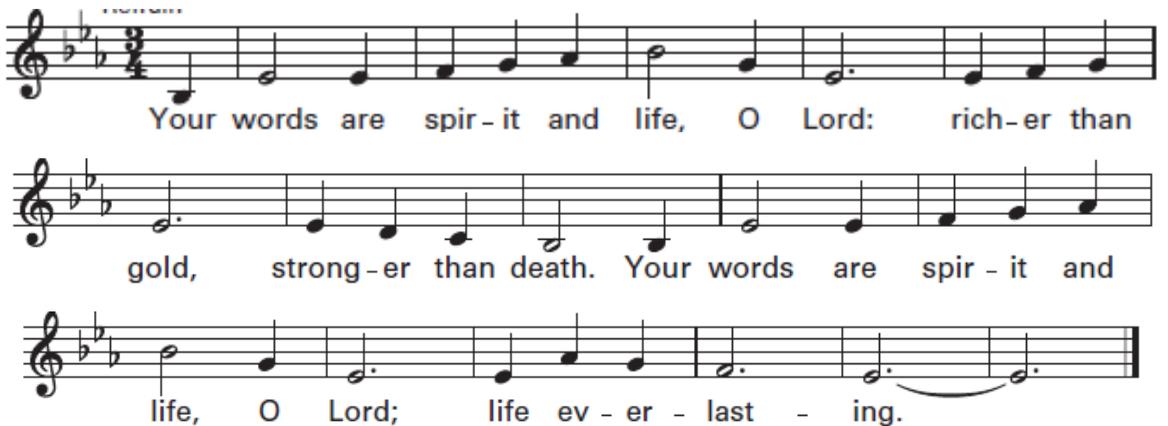
SCRIPTURE *Psalm 119:17-24 and 2 Timothy 3:14-17*

Alice Metzloff, Liturgist

SCRIPTURE RESPONSE

"Your Words are Spirit and Life"

Text and music © 1993, Bernadette Farrell. Published by OCP. All rights reserved.



Your words are spir - it and life, O Lord: rich - er than
 gold, strong - er than death. Your words are spir - it and
 life, O Lord; life ev - er - last - ing.

MESSAGE FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY OF GOD

Stacie Yates

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE Joys and Concerns, Pastoral Prayer

PRAYER RESPONSE

"I Want Jesus to Walk with Me" (vs. 3)

SOJOURNER 8.8.8.9.

African-American Spiritual;

harmonized by J. Jefferson Cleveland & Verolga Nix, 1981 © 1981 The United Methodist Publishing House

Unison

3. When I'm trou - bled, Lord, walk with me.
When I'm trou - bled, Lord, walk with me.
When my head is bowed in sor - row,
O, I want Je - sus to walk with me.

SERMON "Weaponized"

The Rev. Dr. Luke Lindon

ANTHEM "Let Us Break Bread Together" – arr. Craig Courtney

Chancel Choir

SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

All are welcome at the Lord's Table. You do not need to be a member of the United Church of Christ to partake in the Holy Sacrament. All bread served is gluten free.

This table does not belong to a book,
though a book tells us how it began.

Scripture hands us the memory.

It tells us of bread taken, blessed, broken, shared.

It tells us of a cup poured out in love and risk.

It tells us a story we would not otherwise know.

But words alone are a thin substitute.

You cannot eat a paragraph. You cannot drink a metaphor.

So today, we do not stop at reading the story.

We step into it.

This is Christ's table, where the covenant is not merely remembered but received.

Where faith is not only believed but tasted.

All are welcome here.

Not because you understand everything, but because you are hungry for grace.

Words of Institution

On the night when fear pressed in and betrayal lingered in the room, Jesus took bread.

He did not explain it.

He held it.

He broke it.

He gave it.

And he said, "This is my body, given for you."

In the same way, he took the cup, saying,

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for you and for many."

A covenant not sealed in ink, but in shared life.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim not just a story from the past, but a living promise still unfolding among us.

Prayer of the Table

God of story and substance, we give you thanks for the scriptures that carry memory across generations, that tell us who we have been and who you are calling us to be.

Yet we thank you even more that you did not leave us with words alone.

You gave us bread for our hands,

wine for our lips,

neighbors for our tables.

You gave us a covenant that moves through bodies and community,

through chewing and swallowing,

through gathering and sharing.

Pour out your Spirit upon us and upon these simple gifts, that they may become for us not symbols held at a distance but grace received up close. Amen.

The Sacrament of Communion

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY

There is an offering plate if you feel led to deposit your envelope or an offering there. You can also give through our Realm app or get the link to give by texting UCCMEDINA to 73256. You can also give through VENMO. Thank you for your prayerful consideration!

UCC Medina
@uccmedina



venmo

Offertory Invitation

In a world where words are often used to divide, we offer a different witness.

We give not to prove our faith, but to practice it.

Our gifts support a community where questions are welcome,

where love is wider than certainty, and where scripture is held with humility and care.

As you give, may your offering be an act of trust in the God who still speaks through grace, compassion, and community.

*Doxology (words, Ruth Duck, ©2005, GIA Publications)

Praise God, the Source of life and birth; Praise God, the Word, who came to earth;

Praise God, the Spirit, holy flame; All glory, honor to God's Name! Amen.

*Prayer of Dedication

Holy God,

Receive these gifts as signs of our longing to live faithfully and gently.

May what we offer be used to heal what has been wounded,

to illuminate paths of justice and mercy,

and to draw neighbors closer to one another and to you.

Keep us from confusing the signpost for the destination,

and lead us always toward the Living Word made known in love.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

*CLOSING HYMN

"Open My Eyes, That I May See"

Words & Music by Clara H. Scott, 1895

OPEN MY EYES 8.8.9.8. w/ refrain



1. O - pen my eyes, that I may see glimps-es of truth thou
2. O - pen my ears, that I may hear voic - es of truth thou
3. O - pen my mouth, and let me bear glad - ly the warm truth



hast for me; place in my hands the won - der - ful key
send - est clear; and while the wave - notes fall on my ear,
ev - ery-where; o - pen my heart and let me pre - pare

Refrain



that shall un - clasp and set me free.
ev - ery-thing false will dis - ap - pear. Si - lent - ly now I
love with thy chil - dren thus to share.



wait for thee, read - y, my God, thy will to see.



O - pen my eyes,
O - pen my ears, il - lu - mine me, Spir - it di - vine!
O - pen my heart,

***ANNOUNCEMENTS**

***BENEDICTION**

Go now into the wilderness of Lent.

Do not be afraid of the questions.

Do not rush the answers.

May the God who meets us in dust and ashes

strip away what is false,

and breathe new life where hope feels thin.

Remember:

we are dust, and deeply loved.

Go in peace.

Amen.

***CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE "God Be With You"**

God be with you 'til we meet again; By His counsels guide uphold you;

With His sheep securely fold you; God be with you 'til we meet again.

***POSTLUDE "Toccatà in g minor" – Johann Pachelbel/ed. By C.H. Trevor Cathy Fafrak, organ**

****Please join us for Coffee Hour in Fellowship Hall following the service****

Coffee Hour is hosted this week by Alice Metzloff

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THE PILGRIM MESSENGER

MARCH 1, 2026

**“WELCOMING, LOVING, SERVING, WHERE GOD HAS NO LIMITS.
MORE THAN CHURCH ON SUNDAY!”**

Live streaming of the 10:30 a.m. Sanctuary service is available at www.uccmedina.org/live

March 1 thru March 8, 2026 WEEK AT A GLANCE

- Sun** Blake Donations List Posted
8:15 am Chapel Worship
9:00 am Gathering Worship
9:00 am 3rd Grade Bible Class
9:45 am Chancel Choir Rehearsal
10:00 am Children’s Choir Rehearsal
10:30 am Sanctuary Worship
10:30 am Jesus Vibes
3:00 pm Vibes Video Crew
4:30 pm Youth Group
- Mon** 8:00 am Men’s Breakfast
- Tues**
- Wed** 10:30 am Quilters
6:15 pm Choir Rehearsal
6:30 pm Gathering Band
7:00 pm Trial of Judas-Lenten Series
- Thurs** 6:30 pm Bible Study
- Fri**
- Sat** **SPRING AHEAD! Don’t miss church!
Set your clock 1 hour ahead**
- Sun** Blake Donations Due
8:15 am Chapel Worship
9:00 am Gathering Worship
9:45 am Chancel Choir Rehearsal
10:00 am Children’s Choir Rehearsal
10:30 am Sanctuary Worship
10:30 am Jesus Vibes
10:30 am Teen Church
11:45 am Mission Team
2:30 pm Confirmation Class
Trip to Islamic Center

MEN’S BREAKFAST

Mark your calendars for the next Men’s Breakfast on Monday, March 2nd at Buehler’s River Styx at 8:00 am. We hope to see you there!

Worship Highlights: 8:15, 9:00 & 10:30 am

Scripture: Psalm 119: 17-24 & 2 Timothy 3: 14-17

Sermon: “Weaponized” - Rev. Dr. Luke Lindon

Communion Table Flowers: The flowers are given by Claire Nicholson in memory of Phillip Nicholson.

ATHEISM FOR LENT

Lent is traditionally a time of fasting, reflection, and spiritual honesty. In this series, we create space for deep questioning and unflinching honesty- even doubt. Inspired by the provocative practice of Atheism for Lent (popularized by theologian Peter Rollins), we enter the wilderness of deconstruction – not to lose faith, but to encounter God beyond our idols and illusions. The goal isn’t nihilism, but spiritual rebirth. What if we give up our idolatry? What if we turn to ash false images of God and embrace the Living Word? Sundays in Lent...

WEDNESDAYS DURING LENT “Trial of Judas”

March 4th - March 25th

Join us every Wednesday evening at 7 pm during Lent for an Interactive Readers Theatre. We will meet in Fellowship Hall along with members of St. Matthew and St. Paul for our Lenten Study, “The Trial of Judas”.

SIGN UP TO SPONSOR FLOWERS

We have several spots open to sponsor Communion Table flowers. Please sign up in the east room hallway if you would like to sponsor a week.

THE PRAYGROUND IS OPEN!

In our efforts to be welcoming to visitors and members of all ages and stages, the DELT committee has created a Prayground area for parents and caregivers of infants and young children. Located in a corner of the East Room with visual access to the pulpits and choir loft, it provides a space for parents & caregivers to be able to nurse or entertain their little ones and still be able to be a part of the service without disruption to others in the pews. It offers a rocker and other comfortable seating, plus blankets, books and toys geared toward little ones two and under.

DONATION OF THE MONTH

March donation of the month will be for Cups Collective. Let's help restock them with paper plates (6 or 9 inch), paper bowls (12oz), to go containers, disposable coffee cups (8oz), napkins and paper towels.

Be The Neighbor Registration Due March 1st



Register on Realm for this summer's teen mission trip by March 1st! This year we're heading to Tucson, AZ from July 12th-17th to learn about immigrant welcome. Registration is open to

students entering 9th grade and up, and the cost is \$400 per person. Adults who are willing to chaperone are strongly encouraged to join us for this unique serving and learning experience! Find out more at: www.betheneighbor.org/tucson.

SPIRIT MOVES YOGA CLASS

Gather every Monday from 6-7pm for Spirit Moves Yoga. This free weekly class is offered to individuals of all ages and ability levels including chair yoga. The class will be held in the Fellowship Hall and is offered to members, non-members and open to the community.

COSTA RICA MISSION TRIP

The 2026 Costa Rica Mission Team will be leaving on 2/28/26. We will be building for a wonderful family of 4: Blanca, her husband David, and their 4 and 6-year-old boys Caleb and Ian. We have a team of 17, so in addition to building the home for our host family, we will also be laying cement floors in 3 other homes. On behalf of the entire team, I would sincerely like to thank both the Mission and the Endowment Teams for their generous donations. Without their support, along with the support of the Congregation, this build would not be possible. Keep the U.S. team, the local team, and our host family in your prayers during our trip.

MISSION OPPORTUNITY!



Grab your hammer, work gloves, and safety glasses! On May 9th at 8:00 AM, our church—in partnership with Zion ELC and other local congregations—will join a Habitat for Humanity Wall Build in Valley City.

This is a meaningful chance to help a single mother and her teenage son move closer to a home of their own. Scan the QR code or click the link to sign up - there are a limited number of slots. Please contact Patrick Acurio through the church office if you have any questions. <https://signupgenius.com/habitat>
Thank you for showing God's love in action to our neighbors!

Join us at Medina Brewing Company for our next **Beer 'n Hymns!**

Medina UCC Beer 'n Hymns presents 

★ **CABIN FEVER** ★

MAR 23 7PM Medina Brewing Company
Farmer's Exchange
320 S Court St, Medina

12 05693 3053 4

HOLY WEEK

Palm Sunday – March 29th at 8:00, 9:00 & 10:30 a.m.
Children's Palm Parade at 10:30 a.m. service

Maundy Thursday service in Fellowship Hall on April 2nd @ 7pm

Good Friday we will show a documentary in Fellowship Hall on April 3rd @ 7pm
“**Bad Faith**” - *directed by Stephen Ujlaki and Chris Jones.*

Easter Worship

7:00 am Easter Sunrise Service @ Spring Grove Chapel
8:15 am Chapel Worship
9:00 am Gathering Praise
10:30 am Sanctuary Worship

The deadline for submission of articles for NEXT Sunday's Messenger is this Sunday at 11:30 am
Please submit articles to the church office at office@uccmedina.org
CHURCH OFFICE HOURS: 9 am – 3 pm MONDAY THRU THURSDAY; FRIDAY 9 am – 12 pm

PASTORAL STAFF

Rev. Dr. Luke Lindon, Senior Minister - luke@uccmedina.org
Rev. Meghan Malone, Associate Pastor of Youth & Mission - meghan@uccmedina.org
Karen Brocco-Kish, Visitation Pastor – karenb7777@aol.com

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Jennifer Vilimonovic, Director of Hobby Horse Preschool and Children's Choir – jen@uccmedina.org
Jack Sharpe, Maintenance & Custodian

John 3:1-17

Bold Blessing

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. — John 3:16

Twenty-seven words. That's all John uses to tell us about this life of faith. It's short, sweet and powerful. So much so that German Reformer Martin Luther labeled the 27 words "the heart of the Bible, the Gospel in miniature." But could it really be that simple?

I asked that question once when I found myself singing a Vacation Bible School song about John 3:16 in front of 20 sugared-up children. As I belted out the biblical truth about God loving the world — complete with the choral refrain "he is the truth, the way, the life"— I wondered what those words would mean someday to the little voices that joined me off key.

Would remembering God's limitless love for them be the very thing that would save them? And how many would go beyond the way-too commercialized Gospel soundbite of John 3:16 to grapple alongside Nicodemus, the educated Pharisee who was told by Jesus that "no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above?"

While it would be wonderful for 27 words to be the Gospel in miniature, we know there's more to this life of faith. There are dark nights of the soul as well as glorious epiphanies.

Through it all, we question God's love more often than we like to admit, and we find it down right frightening to surrender to the Spirit. As Jesus explained to Nicodemus it is the second birth of the Spirit, not flesh, that will help us see a bit better the reign of God. But the Spirit, Jesus says, will blow where it chooses.

And that is okay. Really. Read my words again. It is okay to allow the Spirit to blow you in the God direction. Go to the unknown and unwelcomed places knowing that as you are guided by the Spirit. God's bold blessing is forever with you. That is the blessing of a love so strong and steadfast that no harm will ever come to you.

Now that's the song I wish I belted out for those children at Vacation Bible School — a song of being born in the Spirit and of living unafraid of life's twisting and changing paths, for there's always an abundance of God's redemptive love for them — and for you.

Loving and merciful God, on this second Sunday in Lent may we feel the Spirit winds whipping in our lives, leading us to be born again into new creations that are awakened to the never-ending God opportunities. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.