

# Sierra Christian Church

*An Open and Affirming Congregation*

## Recognizing Lent For What It Surely Just Might Possibly Be (In Three Parts)

### I

When my husband was home from college for Spring/Easter break his freshman year, he had lunch with a close friend, a woman he had known since kindergarten and had helped through several high school heartbreaks by simply being her friend since they were five-years-old.

### Pastor's Pitch

At this lunch, she shared how she had found Jesus and was now saved, and begged John to declare Jesus Christ his Lord and Savior right there over his pastrami sandwich. My husband, ever nimble, changed the subject and didn't talk with her again until their 10-year high school reunion. He does not know if she will be at their upcoming 50<sup>th</sup>. For that matter, he doesn't know if he will be.

I open with this because he once asked me about being "saved" and "salvation." Since, as he had long understood it, Lent is about deprivation, the letting go or giving up of some comfortable thing, or habit, or food, or practice that hinders a person's relationship with God—the sacrifice meant to create space and to invite a deeper level of faith—is Lent then about "being saved." Is it about salvation?

According to the gospels, when Jesus was baptized by John, he heard a voice come out of heaven affirming his mission from God, and he left John the Baptist and went into the wilderness for forty days and nights, where "the angels ministered to him" and where the devil tempted him.

Although fundamentalists will accept all this at face value, as they conveniently do, the story is symbolic, not historical. When Jesus left John after being baptized by him, he set off on his mission accompanied by some friends. Having decided on a course of itinerant action he travelled about teaching and preaching God's love and justice, and those who heard and followed were captivated by him. One of the key ingredients in their encounter with him was that he was not egoistic; he did not insist on his own way, and he had no box into which he tried to force anyone into. The story—that of the temptation in the wilderness—described how he continually refused the



## PITCH

(Continued from page 1)

temptation to impose his will (on others) — no matter how pure. Think of what the devil throws at him. “You’re hungry. Command these stones to become bread. You want the world to see God’s power. Throw yourself off a high place so that God can save you. You want all the world to do God’s will. Make them! ...and bow down to me.”

These temptations represent the inclination to make the world as we want it to be. When Jesus encountered people he listened, he understood, he walked a path they could follow if they so chose. He did not command or impose or insist that others live according to his prescription. He showed them what they could be and invited them to become what at heart they already were. And so, his followers created a story to show that side of Jesus, a story about how he refused the temptation to impose his will and perception on others, instead inviting them to see reality in a new and non-egocentric way.

That’s what Lent is about. While it has become about self-deprivation because Jesus was denied earthly comforts while in the desert, and therefore so should we, I believe that what Jesus denied himself was the egocentricity that seems to gradually take hold of us as the years roll by, and in doing so invites us to follow him in denying such egoistic tendencies in ourselves.

Lent can be about giving up chocolate. It can also be about uncovering the blindness in our perception and being open to what others have to share with us. The irony is that when we give up our narrow and blinding perspective, a whole new world is opened to us, and life becomes expansive and joyful.

Christians do not have the market cornered on this. The Buddha knew it. Life is suffering, he said, and the cause of suffering is desire. When we desire, consciously or unconsciously, for the world to spin in our favor, we suffer.

The message from Jesus and the Buddha is clear: leave your cave, walk into the light, experience life anew. Whether we be Christian or Buddhist, agnostic or atheist, Lent is a good time to renew our unfolding process. There seems to be salvation in that, though not the kind John’s childhood friend was peddling at lunch those many years ago.

## II

But say I have it in mind to be traditional this Lenten season and let go or give up something that may — just may — interfere with my relationship with God. With apologies to my late mother-in-law who gave up chocolate every Lent, it needs to be something more real and essential than good candy, though she would challenge me in naming something that is. I choose to give up fear — experience has taught me that nothing interferes with my relationship to God than fear.

So, for Lent, I won’t necessarily give up jellybeans or Dove chocolates, but I am going to do my best to say “no” to fear.

--No, to engaging in all the manufactured, inconsequential wars of words that distract me from the greater work of loving people, of encouraging them, of seeing them. The world already has enough followers of Jesus who have declared war on so much of it.

--No, to the politics of terror that imagine a thousand threats lurking in neighborhoods and around corners and pouring over borders, all to perpetuate the necessary narrative of a sky that is always falling.

*Please see PITCH, page 2*



*Sierra Christian Church’s pastor is the Rev. Christine Pobanz-Hartmire. Her challenge to us is to embrace, the beautiful truth that everyone is always welcomed at Jesus’ table.*

### DO YOU WANT TO FAST THIS LENT?

*In the words of Pope Francis*

- Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
- Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.
- Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
- Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
- Fast from worries and have trust in God.
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
- Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy.
- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
- Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
- Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

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## PITCH

(Continued from page 2)

—No, to cheap theology that needs an ever-encroaching enemy in order to give itself validity.

—No, to the myth that we are at war with one another. I look around and see the way this cheap theology strives to keep people at a distance, where all they can do is hurl insults and shout dehumanizing slurs at one another.

—No, to an impotent spirituality that is so easily threatened by people and by circumstance that it always requires violent defense. (Christian Nationalism has so very little regard for, or adherence to, the humble, merciful ways of Jesus there is nothing Christian about it.) \*

For Lent I am trying to turn my back on fear so I can more freely embrace love. More love. That is what my faith requires of me, because, as we have been taught, love is far stronger than fear.

### III

Will any of this this “save” me as John’s childhood friend wished him to be saved? I don’t know. Maybe I could ask, “saved” from what?

Saved from my own anger, hurt and frustration about all of it?

Saved from my need to be right about this?

Saved from my selfish moments?

Saved from nihilistic thinking?

*—A yes to being as loud about the beauty I see outside my window as I am about the ugliness.*

*—A yes to finding the goodness in the world and proclaiming it wherever I can. A yes to recognizing that a faith without love is a lifeless and worthless thing.*

And if I *can* say “no” to these things even in small and momentary ways, there room for me to say “yes” to something else.

—A yes to healing more wounds than I inflict, and a yes to honoring the inherent worth of every person I know and meet.

—A yes to moving to the margins to meet people who are unheard and unseen and unloved.

—A yes to defaulting to humility instead of arrogance with those who oppose me, and a yes to building bridges and not walls between people who disagree.

—A yes to remembering how challenged we all are with the grief of something or someone lost to us.

—A yes to remembering the deep humanity of people, even when they act inhumanely.

—A yes to being as loud about the beauty I see outside my window as I am about the ugliness.

—A yes to finding the goodness in the world and proclaiming it wherever I can. A yes to recognizing that a faith without love is a lifeless and worthless thing.

Saved from thinking that I can get everything I need delivered by Amazon Prime the next day?

I am not an etymologist, but I know that the root word for salvation in Greek is *sozo*, which means wholeness. I can work with that. I could use the repairing of fractured relationships. I could use the reunification of mind, body, and spirit. I could use every reminder possible that I am *already* whole. There isn’t a supplement or elimination diet, or self-help book that can make me what I already am: Saved. Whole. Loved.

I think this is what Jesus came here to show and offer us. Loving God and our neighbor is wholeness.

I wish I could travel back in time to whisper in John’s ear when his friend was doing her best to distract him with talk of being saved and salvation. I would suggest he tell her, “Why, I was just saved again this morning.”

Or better yet, “But I already was, some 1,975 years ago.”

Here’s to Lent! Here’s to being whole!

\* (More on this in future Pastor Pitches)

## Pulpit Supply Upcoming

On the one Sunday each month that Pastor Christine is off doing whatever it is she chooses to do on those Sundays, the Sierra Christian Church pulpit will be admirably “supplied:”

March 17: Rev. Ted Firch (Zoom only)

April 14 Rev. Kevin Raidy (Hybrid)

**SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 2024 AT NOON**

## SAVE THE DATE

JOIN POOR AND IMPACTED PEOPLE, CLERGY, AND ADVOCATES IN YOUR STATE!

# MASS POOR PEOPLE'S & LOW-WAGE WORKERS' STATE HOUSE ASSEMBLIES & TO THE POLLS

A DAY OF NATIONALLY-COORDINATED, SIMULTANEOUS DIRECT ACTION ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

**CALLING ALL PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN & DEMAND**  
LIVING WAGES, HEALTHCARE, VOTING RIGHTS & STOPPING VOTER SUPPRESSION, EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL, WORKER/LABOR RIGHTS, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, ACCESS TO HOUSING, FULLY-FUNDED PUBLIC EDUCATION, ABOLISHING POVERTY, AND THE UNITY OF LOVE, NOT THE DIVISION OF HATE.


BRING THE DEMANDS OF 140 MILLION POOR & LOW-WEALTH PEOPLE DIRECTLY TO LAWMAKERS AT STATE CAPITOLS. EVERYBODY IN, NOBODY OUT!

WE MUST CHALLENGE POVERTY BEING THE 4TH LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN THIS COUNTRY!

WE MUST ACTIVATE 85 MILLION POOR & LOW-WEALTH ELIGIBLE VOTERS!

WE WON'T BE SILENT ANYMORE!

REPAIRERS OF THE FAITH KAIROS CENTER



*Women's Spring Renewal*

*Bringing in the Sheaves*

MARCH 9TH at MAYFAIR CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
KEYNOTE: REV. DR. LAURAJEAN TORGERSO

Click here to Register

## Disciples Narrative Project Set for March

The Disciples Church Narrative Project is scheduled for March 1-2 at Lafayette Christian Church. Registration will be \$25.00 to cover the cost of dinner Friday evening and lunch Saturday afternoon.

Friday evening will be devoted to meeting the leaders of the project, including David Anderson Hooker, and to "Story Hour." Up to seven Disciple will tell stories of "aha" moments, lessons learned, and insights gained. Saturday will focus on conversations about how we tell our story in a way that helps the region to continue defining our mission in a way that helps us grow. All are welcome!

A further explanation of the CNP can be found here: <https://disciples.org/churchnarrativeproject/>.

## Labyrinth Journey Scheduled for Palm Sunday

Diane Wilson will again be leading a journey through Sierra Christian's labyrinth on Palm Sunday, March 24th, after worship. Please join us for this time-tested journey designed to lead us to a spiritual "center."

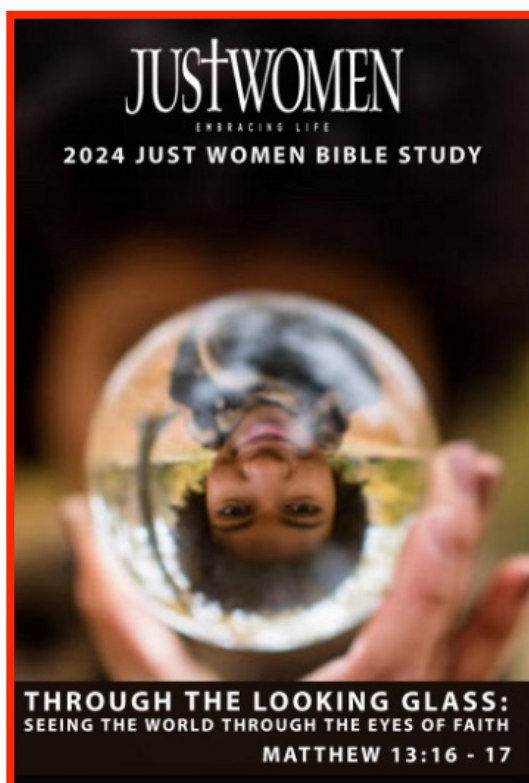


## Prayers & Celebrations

- Lisa Coe has a birthday on March 28th
- March 29 is Joy Reed's birthday!
- Prayers for Iris Pobanz and her family. She is on hospice.
- Prayers for Janet Peck and her family. She, too, is on hospice.
- Continued positive thoughts for Cliff and Connie Cole, who though 100 miles away in Fresno have never felt closer as they carve out their new lives and with friends in the raisin capital of the world.
- Continued healing prayers for Jack Rollins, Maureen's husband. His hand is recovering while Maureen chops up the tree branches that fell in last month's storm.
- We celebrate democracy on March 5! Vote! Vote! Vote!
- Prayers for better blood sugar counts for Gaye Wilhelm.

## Some Notes Worth Noting

1. Books that Bind now meets every other month. The book club will next meet Thursday, April 18 at 6:30 pm on Zoom. We are reading, "Hello Beautiful," by Ann Napolitano
2. The Men's Fellowship Breakfast is scheduled for Saturday, March 2, at 9 am, on Zoom.
3. Lunch with Janet Peck is scheduled for March 12. It's a brown bag affair. Reach out to Joy Reed if you have any questions.
4. The 2024 Annual Gathering will take place at First Christian Church in Concord on April 19-20, 2024. For more information, please contact Leslie Taylor at [Leslie@concordfcc.net](mailto:Leslie@concordfcc.net).
5. Sierra's Board of Directors meets March 13 on Zoom. 6:30 pm



**PRE-ORDERS**  
FOR

**\$21**

*Just Women*  
2024

BEGIN  
**TODAY!!!**

**12 LESSONS | AMAZING WRITERS | FEATURE ARTICLES**

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\*\*ALL ORDERS MUST BE RECEIVED IN OFFICE BY DECEMBER 20TH  
TO QUALIFY FOR FREE SHIPPING\*\*

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at  
[www.discipleswomen.org](http://www.discipleswomen.org)



## There's Always Room for More: Lunch with Janet Peck

It's lunch with Janet Peck time. January's lunch was such a delight for Janet and everyone who attended, we're doing it again — Tuesday, March 12, 11:30 a.m. Bring a sack lunch and join Pastor Christine and others for lunch with Janet Peck at Eskaton, Roseville, 1650 Eskaton Loop. Use the second parking lot on your right after entering the grounds. If you can't make this one, plan on lunch with Janet another time at your convenience. Questions? Call or text Joy, 916-709-5416



### CGC Workdays

Apr 12, 2024 - Apr 13, 2024

Location: Community of the Great Commission

[Click Here for More Information](#)

**"To be hopeful in bad times is based on the fact that human history is not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand Utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory."**

~HOWARD ZINN

### Two Guys in Alaska & God

There are these two guys sitting together in a bar in the remote Alaskan wilderness. One of the guys is a religious sort, the other is an atheist, and the two are arguing about the existence of God with that special intensity that comes after about the fourth beer.

And the atheist says: "Look, it's not like I don't have actual reasons for not believing in God. It's not like I haven't ever experimented with the whole God and prayer thing. Just last month I got caught away from the camp in that terrible blizzard, and I was totally lost and I couldn't see a thing, and it was fifty below, and so I tried it: I fell to my knees in the snow and cried out 'Oh, God, if there is a God, I'm lost in this blizzard, and I'm gonna die if you don't help me.'"

The religious guy looks at the atheist all puzzled. "Well then you must believe now," he says, "After all, here you are, alive."

The atheist just rolls his eyes. "No, man, all that happened was a couple Eskimos happened to come wandering by and showed me the way back to camp."

Guess it all boils down to perspective.

## Sierra Christian Church Monthly Calendar

# March 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31  Easter Sunday					1	2  9 am Men's Fellowship Breakfast
3  10:30 am Worship	4	5	6	7	8	9
10  10:30 am Worship	11	12	13  Board of Directors 6:30 pm on Zoom	14	15	16
17  10:30 am Worship Zoom Only Rev. Ted Firch	18	19	20	21	22	23
24  <u>Palm Sunday</u> 10:30 am Worship	25	26	27	28	29	30

## Annual Gathering 2024 Set

Annual Gathering 2024 will take place at First Christian Church in Concord on April 19-20, 2024, and will be a joint effort from East Bay churches! Volunteers from Lafayette Christian Church, First Christian Church in Vallejo, and First Christian Church in Vacaville will work with members of FCC-Concord to make this Annual Gathering a wonderful experience for all. Any members of other East Bay churches who would like to participate in planning the Annual Gathering, please contact Leslie Taylor (Leslie@concordfcc.net). Planning Team meetings have started.

## Some Significant March Dates in History

**March 1, 1954**— Yellowstone becomes the the nation's first national park. More than 3 million people visit Yellowstone each year.

**March 1, 1969**— 1969 – New York Yankees legend Mickey Mantle announces his retirement from baseball due to persistent knee injuries. He finished his 18-season career with 536 home runs and a .298 batting average. He played in 12 World Series, winning 8, and hit a record 18 World Series home runs. He died in 1995 at the age of 63 from liver cancer, a result of years of alcoholism, a disease that also claimed the lives of 2 of his 3 sons.

**March 2, 1976**— Bob Lurie and Bud Herseth bought the San Francisco Giants for \$8 million, saving it from being moved to Toronto.

**March 2, 1872**— California's first public library opened its doors in San Francisco. The library was founded by the San Francisco Mercantile Library Association, which had been in operation since 1850. The public library movement gained momentum in California in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and today there are over 1,100 public libraries in the state.

**March 3, 1855**— The U.S. Congress appropriated \$30,000 for an experiment using camels as pack animals to cross the desert to California. The experiment ended but the camel barns are still standing in Benicia, in Solano County.

**March 3, 1933**— Thousands of women marched in Washington D.C., demanding the right to vote one day before President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration.

**March 4, 1975**— The California Supreme Court struck down the state's death penalty statute as unconstitutional. The decision was based on the court's finding that the law was applied in an arbitrary and capricious manner, and that it violated the state's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment. The ruling was later overturned by a voter initiative in 1978, reinstating the death penalty in California.

**March 7, 1976**— The California Supreme Court ruled in the case of *In re Marriage of Brown* that California's community property law applied to same-sex couples, making California the first state to grant rights to same-sex couples in property division.

**March 8, 2017**— The "Day Without a Woman" strike took place, with women around the country walking off their jobs and refraining from making purchases, in protest of gender inequality and

*Please see HISTORY, page 10*

### Instructions on Living in a Broken World

lean into community  
seek out love  
applaud the good you see  
keep paying attention  
talk to your neighbors  
dance to the music and embrace art  
look for love and small joys  
take breaks and relish in nourishing your body  
donate what you can  
linger at the dinner table with friends  
check in with your people  
let yourself grieve  
love one another as deeply as you can  
  
the storm is upon us and we must hold on  
  
don't give up, we're here together.

still we rise

and perhaps  
what made her beautiful  
was not her appearance  
or what she achieved,  
but in her love  
and in her courage,  
and her audacity  
to believe:  
no matter  
the darkness  
around her,  
Light ran wild  
within her,  
and that was the way  
she came alive,  
and it showed up  
in everything.

LIFE IS SHORT  
AND WE DO NOT HAVE  
MUCH TIME TO  
GLADDEN  
THE HEARTS  
OF THOSE WHO  
TRAVEL WITH US  
SO BE SWIFT TO LOVE  
MAKE HASTE TO BE KIND  
AND GO IN PEACE  
TO LOVE AND SERVE  
THE LORD

ALAN J. FREDRICKS, APRIL 1991



# HISTORY

*(Continued from page 2)*

discrimination.

**March 9, 1959**— Barbie, made by Mattel in El Segundo, debuted at the American International Toy Fair in New York. Today she is one of the most famous dolls in history—she's even a movie star!

**March 10, 1968**— Pro boxing legend Muhammad Ali was stripped of his heavyweight title after refusing to be drafted into the military for the Vietnam War. The decision sparked controversy and outrage, and Ali was ultimately vindicated years later when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that his objection to the war was a legitimate expression of his religious beliefs.

**March 11, 1974**— Rhino Record Store, in Claremont, gave people \$.05 to take home Danny Bonaduce's solo album. It was the only album by the former Partridge Family TV actor.

**March 11, 2011**— A tsunami from the earthquake off Japan caused some \$17.1 million in damage to the Santa Cruz harbor and \$4 million to private boats. Governor Jerry Brown issued an emergency declaration for the harbor.

**March 16, 1864**— Alpine County was established in the Sierra Nevada between Lake Tahoe and Yosemite National Park. It is the least populated county in the state with 1,515 residents. Markleeville is the county seat.

**March 17, 1860**— Japanese diplomats arrived in San Francisco to ratify the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation. This was Japan's first diplomatic mission to the U.S.

**March 17, 1992**— The voice of Woody Woodpecker, Grace Stafford Lantz, known by her stage name Grace Stafford, died.

**March 18, 1848**— The California Star reported that the population of San Francisco was 575 males, 177 females and 60 children, not including Indians and Mexicans.

**March 19, 1875**— Tiburcio Vasquez, legendary bandit, was hanged in San Jose. He rustled cattle, robbed and killed from Sonoma to Los Angeles and escaped from San Quentin prison four times. Vasquez claimed he was defending Mexican-American rights. He was literate, charming, played guitar and danced skillfully.

**March 21, 1942**— Manzanar Detention Camp opened. This detention camp in the Owens Valley was part of the incarceration of nearly 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry during World War II. "Farewell to Manzanar." Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's 1973 memoir, poignantly depicts life in Manzanar and reflects on the national cost of the internment.

**March 21, 1993**— Cesar Chavez died in his sleep while in San Luis, Arizona. He was 66.

**March 23, 1868**— University of California was established when the governor signed into law the Organic Act "to Create and Organize the University of California."

**March 31, 1975**— The UCLA Bruins beat the Kentucky Wildcats for the NCAA Championship, 92-55. It was coach John Wooden's final game and UCLA's 10th NCAA championship in 12 years.

**Do Not! We Repeat, Do Not!  
Forget**



**To turn your clocks  
AHEAD ONE HOUR before going to  
bed on Saturday, March 10**

**Board of Directors meets Wed., March 13, 6:30 pm on Zoom**  
**Men's Fellowship gathers Sat., March 2, 9:00 am on Zoom**