

Grace Notes



Monthly Publication of the Congregational Activities of Grace Lutheran Church in Newton, NC

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9:30am Sunday School 10:30am Worship Service with Communion

Volume 228, Number 3

MARCH 2025

Return to the Lord Your God, For He is Gracious and Merciful!

A note from Pastor Doug Hefner

During my first year at NCSU, while driving in this new larger city, I unknowingly turned down a one-way street going the wrong way. It didn't take long for me to notice, and I began to look for a way to correct. Of course, it didn't take long for a policeman to notice as well. I remember the moment vividly: blue lights, people looking at me as I pulled into a parking lot, feelings of fear and dread. Would this be my first ticket? The officer told me what I had done wrong. Upon seeing that I was a young college student at NC State (maybe he was a Wolfpack fan) he had mercy upon me and instructed me to be more careful in my driving. I received a warning. I lasted another 12 years before I got my first ticket for speeding... that's another story. During Lent, our Lord invites us to walk with Him on the journey to the cross and the empty tomb. It is a difficult journey as our Lord makes His way to the place where He will be betrayed, beaten, tortured, mocked, crucified and die. Along the way Jesus reminds us that we too are to take up our cross and follow Him, to live a life of sacrificial love, loving not only neighbor but our enemies as well. We are reminded of the cost of discipleship; we are called to lay up treasure in heaven by giving ourselves, our time, talent and treasure for the sake of the kingdom. It is a journey that tests the disciples to their very core – they are fearful and doubtful, they misunderstand, and eventually they fail by abandoning Jesus and denying that they know Jesus at all (Peter's denial). But it would be Jesus death on the cross and His resurrection that would truly open their eyes, hearts and lives to the glorious good news of the Gospel, God's amazing love for us in Christ!

That's why our Lenten Journey starts on Ash Wednesday with repentance (turn around and go in a new direction with a new mindset), the call to *"Return to the Lord your God,*

for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” Joel 2:13
We will confess our sins and receive the ashes to acknowledge our repentance of our sin, humility, and mortality. Our foreheads will be marked with ashes in the sign of the cross reminding us that God, who is gracious, merciful and abounding in steadfast love is calling us sinners to turn around and come home, to walk in fellowship with God and neighbor. (we will sing “Softly and Tenderly Jesus is calling, calling O sinner, come home, you who are weary, come home!) Martin Luther once said that all of the Christian life is one of repentance, a continual returning to God to repent and receive forgiveness, grace, love and renewal..

In Joel 2:12-13 the Lord declares that we should *“return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and with mourning and rend your hearts and not your garments.”* The community to which Joel was speaking was facing two crises: returning from exile to rebuild and a swarm of locusts that threatened their food supply and very lives. We all are facing various struggles and difficulties, some related to health, loss of a loved one, financial or relational issues, and the list goes on. What are we to do? Joel was led to say to the people of his day: “Return to the Lord your God...(why)... for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” Jesus offers us the same invitation in Matthew 11:28-30, *“Come unto me all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest* (shalom, well being, relationship, love and peace).” Let us find our strength, comfort and peace in our Lord as we face these struggles. In that same passage Jesus says, *“Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly and the burden I give is light.”* To be yoked with Jesus in ministry is to walk with Him on this journey of faith during Lent and always. We are called to share God’s love in Christ in Word and Deed through our baptism into Christ as His disciples in the world. Jesus said, “Love one another as I have loved you” and “by your love all will know that you are my disciples.” In this world of brokenness and sorrow, faithful disciples are needed to be the hands, feet and heart of our Lord for our neighbor.

As we return to the Lord and journey with Him in faith we will have many opportunities to experience God’s love and to share it with others. During the Sundays in Lent, I will present a sermon series called, *“Journeying with Jesus to the Cross and Empty Tomb.”* See the Worship Schedule for the themes for each Sunday. During our Midweek Lenten Worship Services (6:30pm) our theme will be *“Dinners with Jesus, Friend of Sinners!”* See the themes in the announcement for these services. An important part of our faith journey is taking the time to set aside to worship the Lord and be refreshed and restored

in Word and Sacrament. Please take the time to be a part of these services so that you may be renewed in your faith and discipleship.

When we experience God’s love in Christ, God transforms us in the Holy Spirit to be vessels of His love. Let us seek ways to demonstrate God’s love in our own lives, in our families and in our church and community. By doing so, God will be glorified and people will be blessed by the loving presence of Christ among us. I look forward to sharing in these times of worship, Bible Study, fellowship and service with you as we journey together with Christ in Lent and Easter. By doing so we will see Christ demonstrating God’s love for us and calling us to demonstrate His love in our lives of discipleship!

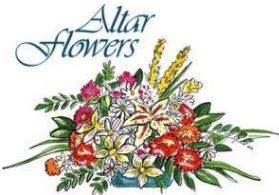
God’s Blessings, Peace and Joy be with you, Pastor Doug Hefner

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WORSHIP ASSISTANTS FOR MARCH

✝ Lector	Todd Childers
✝ Ushers	Jason Yoder & Jeff Scronce
✝ Communion Assistants	Rick & Cindy Bivens
✝ Altar Preparation	Rick & Cindy Bivens
✝ Offering Tabulators	Todd Childers, Gary Leatherman

*Please be mindful of your commitment to serve. If you are unable to fulfill that commitment, be reminded that it is **your** responsibility to find someone to serve in your place.*



FLOWER CHART FOR MARCH

2/2 OPEN	2/16 LENT – NO FLOWERS
2/9 LENT – NO FLOWERS	2/23 LENT – NO FLOWERS

If you wish to place flowers on a given Sunday, please list your name on the chart in the narthex. *You are responsible for ordering the flowers from a florist of your choice.* The liturgical color of the day is listed to assist you in selecting flowers appropriate for that Sunday. Please notify the Church Office by the Tuesday prior to your selected Sunday to ensure correct information is printed in the bulletin.

ATTENDANCE AND GIVING TO OUR LORD'S WORK FOR FEBRUARY

	2/2/25	2/9/25	2/16/25	2/23/25
Sunday School	5	16	7	10
Worship	27	43	38	48
General Fund Offerings	\$1,180	\$4,400	\$1,796	\$2,100

Needed Each Week = \$3,507

General Fund Offerings, February 2025 = \$9,476

General Fund Expenses, February 2025 = \$15,246

Difference = -\$5,770 (expenses exceeded offerings)

ASHURE FOOD MINISTRY We are doing great things at Grace in helping feed the hungry in our own community. So far **166 pounds** have been donated this year. Let's try to donate 2,000 in 2025! That would be around 170 pounds per month. We can do it! Let's come together to help reach this goal! Ashure has not requested a specific item for the month of March so any item will be appreciated.

MARCH MADNESS CHALLENGE – March Madness is back at Ashure Food Ministry! Let's make a difference together! This challenge isn't just about basketball – it's about coming together to help those facing food or financial crisis in Catawba County. Businesses, churches, schools, and individuals can compete by collecting food or funds under the banner of their favorite NCAA basketball team. Last year, we collected over 42,000 pounds of food and raised over \$12,000! Let's make this year even bigger!

How to get involved:

Individuals: Pick your favorite NCAA team and donate

Groups:

1. Set up a food or funds collection area in your office, church, or community. Provide boxes for each team represented.
2. Rally your crew and start collecting! Get in the game at ashureministry.org/mmc.

Season of Lent Worship Schedule for 2025

9:15am Sunday School; 10:30am Worship Service with Communion

March 2, 2025 Transfiguration of Our Lord Sunday Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Psalm 99; Hebrews 3:1-6; Luke 9:28-36. The story of the Transfiguration of Jesus reminds us that we need those mountain-top experiences that make Christ known to us in a clearer way so that we can go back down the mountain to be an epiphany, to make God known in the living out of our faith in word and deed.

March 5, 2025 Ash Wednesday Holy Communion. We will begin the Season of Lent with the Ash Wednesday Service which will include Confession, the Imposition of Ashes, Prayers, Scripture, and Holy Communion. There will be an abbreviated service at 12noon and the full service at 7:00pm.

March 9, 2025 First Sunday in Lent Luke 4:1-13 Jesus is tempted in the wilderness by the devil. The three temptations remind us of our calling: not bread alone, but by God's Word; don't test God but trust God; and the path of servant discipleship (theology of the cross) over the popular, easy way (theology of glory). As Israel was overcome in the wilderness, Jesus overcame in the wilderness.

March 16, 2025 Second Sunday in Lent Jeremiah 26:8-15; Psalm 4; Philippians 3:17- 4:1; Luke 13:31-35 In Luke 13 we see Jesus' great passion for us as He looks over the city of Jerusalem and says "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing." Jesus died for us to show us His great love and continues to invite us to come under His wings of refuge and love.

March 23, 2025 Third Sunday in Lent Ezekiel 33:7-20; Psalm 85; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9 In the Gospel reading Jesus tells the story the parable of the barren fig tree. After three years of no fruit, the owner wanted to cut the tree down. However, the vinedresser asked for another year to till the ground and fertilize the tree. We are offered the same grace in Christ the true Vine and the Vinedresser. Let us yield to the power of His Spirit working in our lives to prepare our hearts and lives to bear fruit for our Lord.

March 30, 2025 Fourth Sunday in Lent Isaiah 12:1-6; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32. In the gospel for this Sunday Jesus tells one of the most beautiful and power parables (parable of the prodigal son) to teach us about the love, grace and forgiveness of God.

Wednesday Night Worship During the Lenten Season

“Dinners with Jesus, Friend of Sinners”

Matthew 11: Jesus said, ¹⁸“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a **friend of tax collectors and sinners!**’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

On Wednesdays during Lent (March 12, 19, 26, April 2, and April 9) you are invited to **Worship at 6:30pm in the Grace Union Church**. Our worship will include a Vespers service with Lenten/Evening hymns and a dramatic presentation of a person from encountered the great love of Christ on the way to the cross. We will hear the story of people who understood why Jesus was called “Friend of sinners”! As Jesus forgave sins, shared fellowship over food, and healed many he was given a label that he was proud to wear **“Friend of sinners”** (see Matthew 11). Jesus said that he did not come to call the righteous but rather the sinners. As the Great Physician, Jesus came for the sick not the well. Of course, we know that none are righteous before God and none are without the sickness of sin. Indeed, we are all sinners in need of the Savior. But thanks be to God that we are not left abandoned in our sin, helpless and hopeless. Jesus comes to befriend us with His love and grace by laying down His life for us. He suffered and died on the cross to forgive, restore and renew us! To call us His friends!

In Luke’s gospel we find Jesus loving, welcoming and teaching in the midst of a fellowship meal. We will look at each one of these “Dinners with Jesus” as we encounter Jesus, Friend of sinners, who loves and redeems us. In Bible times, to eat with someone was a way to be in relationship together and to nurture that relationship. The meal was a time to bless one another through hospitality and the sharing of food together. All of these meals lead to the ultimate meal of grace, the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion, which we will celebrate on Maundy Thursday.

Wednesday, March 12 – ***Dinner with Jesus in the Home of Simon the Pharisee, Luke 7:36-50***

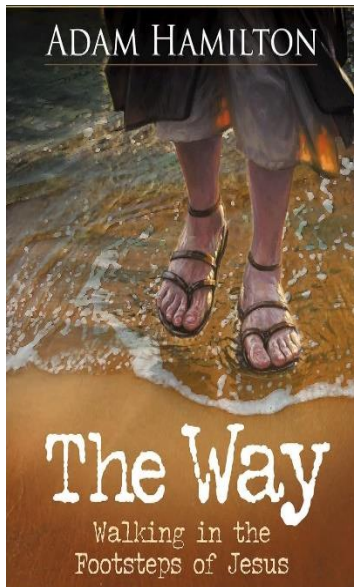
Wednesday, March 19 – ***Dinner with Jesus with a Hungry Crowd of 5000+, Luke 9:10-27***

Wednesday, March 26 – *Dinner with Jesus in the Home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, Luke 10:38-42*

Wednesday, April 2 – *Dinner with Jesus in the Home of Another Pharisee, Luke 14:1-14*

Wednesday, April 9 – *Dinner with Jesus in the Home of Zacchaeus the Tax Collector, Luke 19*

Mark your calendars now and invite family, friends, neighbors and coworkers!



Bible Studies During Sunday School: The Way – Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus and Twenty Four Hours that Changed the World

Travel with Adam Hamilton as he retraces the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Fascinating video from his personal travels to the Holy Land give you a “first-person” experience while his biblical wisdom and historical knowledge provide thoughtful and insightful commentary. As we walk with Jesus in the Holy Lands we will experience the following 1. *Jesus’ Baptism and Temptation*, 2. *The Healing Ministry of Jesus*, 3. *Jesus Proclaiming the Kingdom*, 4. *Jesus Calming the Storm*, 5. *Jesus Loving Sinners, Outcasts, and the Poor*, 6. *Jesus’ Final Week*.

FRED T. FOARD SENIOR LUNCHEON will be held at on Wednesday March 5th at Plateau Methodist Church. All are invited!

THE GRACE PRAYER BREAKFAST will be held on **Saturday, March 8th at 9:00am** at Four Peas in a Pod Restaurant on Highway 70 in Conover. Great food and great fellowship! Please come and bring a friend!

THE NEXT MEETING OF THE LEADERSHIP MINISTRY BOARD is scheduled for **Monday, March 17th at 6:00 pm.** Board meeting notes for the February meeting will be available as an insert in the next bulletin.

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