

# 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

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## *Thank God for the Man (Jesus) On the Middle Cross!*

### *Lent/Easter Letter from Pastor Doug Hefner*

*Luke 23:32-43* <sup>32</sup> Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. <sup>33</sup> When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>34</sup> Then Jesus said, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”**

<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” <sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?” <sup>41</sup> And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” <sup>42</sup> Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.” <sup>43</sup> He replied, **“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”**

We began our Lenten Journey with Jesus to the cross on Ash Wednesday (Feb.18) by receiving the ashes on our forehead in the shape of the cross. The ashes remind us of our mortality and sinfulness and need for repentance. We hear the haunting words that God said to Adam in Genesis 3: **“...you are dust and to dust you shall return.”** Our rebellion and sin brought death to us and to our world. If we stop the story there, we will only experience despair and hopelessness. God however had a plan of salvation that was put into place even before this- God would come among us in His Son and through the cross of His death and suffering, defeat sin and death and bring us salvation, a new beginning. And so, the ashes were marked on our foreheads in the shape of the cross reminding us of our baptism into Christ where God granted us salvation in Christ and claimed us as His beloved sons and daughters. The cross of Jesus gives us new life, hope, blessing,

perseverance, and identity as God's redeemed people sent forth with a mission to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

On Ash Wednesday I referred to the first question God asks in Scripture, ***"Where are you?"*** (Genesis 3) We know that sin separates us from God and one another. As God comes to enjoy fellowship with Adam and Eve in the garden, they are now hiding from God in their sin. God asks, "Where are you?" I don't think God wanted to know the location of Adam and Eve. Instead, it was more of a relational question, "Where are you with me? Where are you in our relationship?" That's a good question for us to ask as we journey with our Lord Jesus to the cross this Lent. Where are you/we with Jesus right now? Are we drifting away from Him? Are we inconsistent in our relationship with Him? Or do we have a deep abiding relationship with Jesus? Lent is a time to hear Jesus' call, ***"Come home, you who are weary, come home! Earnestly, tenderly Jesus is calling, calling O Sinner, Come Home."*** Jesus calls to us to come home- Jesus said, "Abide in Me." Jesus invites us to make our home in Him in worship (Word and Sacrament), by adding in God's Word, in prayer, in fasting, in almsgiving (offerings) , and acts of love and service.... as we take up our cross to follow Jesus!

We will continue this journey with our Lord Jesus to the Last Supper where he gave the disciples bread and wine, this is my body given for you, this is my blood shed for you. Jesus will wash their feet and give them a new commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you." Jesus will be betrayed, beaten, and put on trial. And we will see Him crucified for us as we gather on Good Friday. We will see and experience the deep and amazing love our Lord has for us as He goes to the cross for you and me and the whole world. In the passage above we see Jesus crucified between two criminals. Where are you....Some say this picture represents where people are with Jesus... As Jesus is hurting and bleeding, he cries out, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing!" One criminal **rejects** Jesus. The other criminal **repents and receives** Jesus. It is the Man on the middle cross who offers **redemption** to the whole world. Several years ago, I heard Rhett Walker share his faith and share some of his songs. Here is one of my favorite songs by him. Please take a moment and read the words.

### **"Man On The Middle Cross" by Rhett Walker**

1. I heard the preacher talking About three wooden crosses  
Upon a hill for everyone to see Two sinners on the outside  
Couldn't save themselves if they tried All I could think is man that sounds like me

***Chorus: I've been the one on the left full of guilt and regret Long-gone on the wrong side of living I've been the one on the right always looking for a fight Thinking I could never be forgiven I'm standing here today overwhelmed by grace 'Cause I know who paid my cost Thank God for the Man on the middle cross***

2. He didn't have to do it But for me He went through it  
A love like that I'll never understand Lord knows I don't deserve it  
And I know I couldn't earn it The mercy rained down on this desperate man ***Chorus***

3. The cross is where He went Oh but that ain't where He stayed  
He brought me back to life When He rose up outta that grave  
Someday I'll stand before Him And I'll see Jesus face to face  
I'll worship and adore Him For a life forever changed ***Chorus***

As Jesus calls out to us from the cross may we be the ones who repent and receive Jesus. The one criminal said, “*Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.*” *Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”* We can enjoy the foretaste of paradise as we walk in faith with Jesus now. For we know that wherever Jesus is, there is paradise, a new beginning, salvation, and a new loving relationship with the Lord that nothing can break or separate us from, not any trial, or power, or even death (Romans 8)

Please note the last stanza – that’s Easter Resurrection. Jesus didn’t stay on the cross or in the tomb. “He rose up outta that grave; Someday I’ll stand before Him and I’ll see Jesus face to face (until then) I’ll worship and adore Him for a life forever changed!” Indeed, our Lenten journey will take us to the cross and then through the cross, into the resurrection of Jesus! I look forward to walking in faith with you together with Jesus in this beautiful season of faith in Lent to Easter. Let us encourage one another and pray for one another as we journey with Jesus!

***God bless you and God’s peace be with you, Pastor Doug Hefner***

**Worship Themes and Schedule 9:15 AM Bible Study and 10:30AM Worship**  
**March 1, 2026 Second Sunday in Lent Genesis 12:1-9; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-8, 13-17; John 3:1-17** In John 3 we meet a pharisee named Nicodemus who comes to Jesus at night seeking illumination about Jesus and his purpose. Nicodemus and we get an amazing response from our Lord with the good news that we can be born anew from above in Spirit and water, that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. This will be

accomplished through Jesus being lifted up on the cross where He will draw all people unto Himself in love, grace, and mercy.

**March 8, 2026 3rd Sun in Lent –Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95:1-9; Romans 5:1-8; John 4:5-26 [27-30, 39-42]** In Exodus 17 the people thirsted in the wilderness and in their desperation wondered “Is God among us or not?” Mercifully God granted the unfaithful people the water they needed. In John 4 a thirsty woman who comes to the well to get water receives an even greater gift: the Living Water, Jesus Christ! As we hunger and thirst for righteousness, for strength and assurance in our journey, may we receive the gift that Jesus offers us, himself, the living water. Jesus said, “whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

**March 15, 2026 4th Sun in Lent – Isaiah 42:14-21; Psalm 142; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41** In John 9 Jesus and his disciples encounter a blind man who had been blind from birth. While the disciples discuss whose sin is to blame for the man’s misfortune, Jesus is more concerned with healing him and opening his eyes to see the Light of the World, Jesus. Jesus heals the man and the man sees the light and is led to faith as Jesus reveals to Him that He is the Messiah. What a blessing it is to have our eyes of faith opened to see Jesus and his Light in our world. We are called likewise to share this Good News so that others may come to see the love, grace and mercy of God in Christ.

**March 22, 2026 5th Sun in Lent – Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:1-11; John 11:1-45 [46-53]** Sometimes it seems that our journey in this life drains the life right out of us, especially if we are facing some sort of crisis on top of the everyday struggles. God called Ezekiel to encourage the exiles by reminding them that God can bring new life to dead and breathless dusty bones. In the gospel Jesus announces that He is “the Resurrection and the Life” as he brings Lazarus back from the dead. May our faith, hope and life be renewed in Christ as we journey with Him and receive His love, grace and mercy that breathes new life into us and our ministry in the world around us.

**March 29, 2026 Palm/Passion Sunday *The Greatest Love Story: The Passion of Christ***, Philippians 2, Gospel of Matthew’s Passion Story. Our service will begin with the Palm Procession as we remember Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The people praised Him and shouted Hosanna which means “Lord save us.” Later in this week that we call the first Holy Week, Jesus did save us, through his Passion “suffering” as he went to the cross for us to bear our sins, punishment and death.

**April 2, 2026 Maundy Thursday, 6:30pm** *What Feast of Love* John 13 will be our gospel for the evening as it recalls the beautiful story of the Last Supper and the Washing of the Feet with Jesus' call to love one another as he has loved us. On this night we will remember the new commandment (Maundy means commandment) to love one another as Christ loves us. In Word and Sacrament and in the washing of the feet we will remember Jesus' love and call to love.

**April 3, 2026, Good Friday Tenebrae Service, 6:30pm, Jesus Seven Last Words of Love from the Cross** Tenebrae is Latin for "shadows" and in this service we will remember the darkness of sin and death that Jesus endured for us on the cross. Through Scripture, prayer and reflection we will give thanks for God's love poured out for us in Jesus and the cross He bore for you and me.

**April 5, 2026, Easter Sunday** *Christ Triumphs Over Sin and Death: Christ is Risen, He is Risen Indeed!* Easter Sunrise 7am (Begin in cemetery and move to Grace Union Church), Easter Breakfast 8am in the Fellowship Hall; 9:15am Sunday School, Easter Day Service at 10:30a in the Sanctuary. Acts 10, 1 Corinthians 15, John 20, Matthew 28, Luke 24

### **Introducing Jesus: Son of God, Messiah, Lord, and Savior of the World!**

During Sunday School (9:15AM), Midweek Lent Service (6:30PM), and Holy Week, Pastor Doug will present video clips focusing on Jesus from the amazing, powerful, inspirational series called *The Chosen*. Each gathering will have prayers, some singing/praising, Scripture reading, and a short dramatic video clip highlighting our Scripture for that gathering. This is for all ages! Some have termed a gathering like this as *Intergenerational*. In other words, bring your whole family! (especially children and youth!) There will be 12 studies! We will gather at 9:15am on Sunday mornings 2/22, 3/1, 3/8, 3/22, and 3/29. At 6:30pm on Wednesdays 2/25, 3/4, 3/11, 3/18, 3/25. And on Maundy Thursday, 4/2 at 6:30pm and Good Friday, 6:30pm. Maundy Thursday and Good Friday will be held in the Sanctuary as part of our worship service on these days.

### **MINISTRY TEAMS**

Please note that on 3/15 we will gather at 9:15am for Ministry Team Sunday. All four ministry teams will meet that morning. Coffee and a light breakfast will be provided.

**Resurrection Celebration with Easter Egg Hunt** – Last year we gave this a try since it is one of our goals to welcome the community (especially children, youth and their families). This could be a great outreach opportunity, not to mention fun for our



**ATTENDANCE AND GIVING TO OUR LORD'S WORK FOR FEBRUARY**

	1/28/25	2/1/26	2/8/26	2/15/26	2/22/26
<b>Sunday School</b>	0	0	10	6	17
<b>Worship</b>	0	0	48	45	49
<b>General Fund Offerings</b>	\$0	\$0	\$5,300	\$1,860	\$1,970

**FRED T. FOARD SENIOR LUNCHEON** will be held on Wednesday, March 4<sup>th</sup> at 12:00 noon at Ebenezer United Methodist Church. All are invited!

**THE GRACE PRAYER BREAKFAST** will be held on Saturday, March 14<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm.

**THE GRACE PRAYER LUNCHEON** will be held on Wednesday, March 18<sup>th</sup> at 12:00 noon in Fellowship Hall. All are invited!

**Blessing Box Is Up and Running and Blessing Others**



Months ago, Sherry Biggerstaff was led by God to seek a way to be a blessing and to help Grace be a blessing to our community, especially for those in need. She asked the Board if they would approve of a Blessing Box. Since that day she has helped us see the beautiful ministry that a Blessing Box can be for our community, especially those in need of food. Allen Biggerstaff then built the blessing box and as you can see from the picture, it turned out wonderful. The Blessing Box has been up for about 2 weeks and already people are bringing food and picking up food. Here are a few guidelines for the

donations: All food items need to be nonperishable and not opened or repackaged. You can donate other items besides food like hygiene supplies, cleaning supplies, and baby needs such as diapers, etc. You may drop items off directly at the Blessing Box. If the Box is

filled please put your donation in the plastic tote on the parsonage porch. If the church is open, there is a shelf in the second Sunday School room on the left that will also be an overflow storage area. The food in the overflow will then be placed as needed in the Blessing Box.



The Discipleship Ministry Team will be the group in charge of this ministry. However, we need everyone in the church to donate as you are able and to help restock/check the Blessing Box.

It has been proposed that a different ministry team take leadership for a different week of the month. For example,

Week 1: Stewardship Finance Ministry Team

Week 2: Discipleship Ministry Team

Week 3: Worship Ministry Team

Week 4: Stewardship Property Ministry Team

Week 5: if there is a week 5, the Discipleship MT will cover.

If you have any questions or suggestions, please see Sherry Biggerstaff or Pastor. Thank you to those who have donated and will donate. Grace has been greatly blessed and we have many who want to be a blessing through this ministry. We are indeed blessed to be a blessing! Thank you and God bless you!

**ASHURE MINISTRY FOOD ASK** is to participate in the annual March Madness Challenge. March Madness will soon be returning to Ashure Ministry! The 8th Annual March Madness Challenge is almost upon us. Every year we ask fans to donate either food or money on behalf of their favorite college basketball team to see which fan base has the most team spirit and the biggest heart! Every year continues to be more exciting and crazier than the last, and we expect nothing different this year.

Collections will begin on March 1st and run through 11:59:59 PM on Wednesday, April 8th. Food is always a slam dunk for us, so it will count as 1 pound = 2 points. However, money helps us score even more, so it will count as \$1 = 3 points. The team with the most points at the end of the period wins the challenge! We will also announce the church, office, business, school, or other organization scoring the greatest number of points! The announcements will be made on April 10th.

Thank you for your enthusiastic participation over the previous years. They were great, but we're always hoping to run up the score. So, reach down deep, find your team spirit, and let's go MAD!