

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Matthew 4:1

Dear Edwards Church Community,

When Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 22, I will be as ready as I can be to lead us – truth be told, it will be more like “help us all to explore and reconsider” than lead us – through a series of sermons on traditional Christian ideas that are so familiar to some and so off putting to others that they often are left unnamed or treated as no-go topics.



Christ in the Wilderness!
 by Ivan Nickolaevich
 Kramskoi

I have in mind sermons and post sermon conversations about sin, repentance, forgiveness (all part of any relationship!), life, death, resurrection, and the forms of death required for varieties of new life to emerge. I am sure other things will come up as we go.

The 40 days of Lent are based on the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness facing his temptations. It was his spiritual retreat in preparation for what was to follow: a period of intense service in a ministry of feeding, healing, teaching and bringing new life to others.

My evolving plan to discuss traditional Christian concepts – some of them considered cornerstones of the faith – will, I hope, become an invitation to renewal for all of us, a time of letting go and letting new life emerge. This is, after all, the pattern of life as we know it. We all get to decide how to face it.

On Thursday, February 16, I will attend the online program offered by Historic Northampton, *Religion and Slavery in Colonial New England*. The program is described on the Historic Northampton website:

From 1729 until 1750, Northampton’s minister was Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), an internationally known philosopher, theologian, and leader of the Great Awakening spiritual revival. While in Northampton, he enslaved three people—Venus, Leah, and Rose. After his move to Stockbridge in 1751, he enslaved three others—a married couple named Joseph and Sue, and a boy named Titus. In his writings and from the pulpit, Edwards defended the practice of slavery. How and why could a minister uphold the ownership of people and deny basic human rights?

In this presentation, Dr. Kenneth Minkema will examine some of the theological and religious justifications for, and critiques of, slavery and the slave trade, as they were expressed from the colonial incursion in the early seventeenth century to the eighteenth century when Jonathan Edwards and his followers were active.

You too can register: <https://www.historicnorthampton.org/programs.html>. In fact, Jeff Olmsted will host a “watch party” that evening in the sanctuary, using our large screen monitor.



Jonathan Edwards²

Our church bears the name of Jonathan Edwards. I do not know how the church decided to take his name, but I imagine it was in honor of the pastoral service and powerful preaching and teaching he provided for a generation at what is now First Churches, the church from which 99 members obtained permission to withdraw and form a new church called Edwards Church. I approach learning more about the history of Northampton and Edwards the way I approach renewing my acquaintance with the Christian tradition.

Christianity was given to me soon after I was born into a family with a strong Christian identity. As an adult I have chosen to make that tradition my own in a way that is still related, but different than my family of origin. Whether you were born in the valley or, like me, came as an adult, let’s learn together about Christianity and our namesake, Jonathan Edwards.

In faith, with hope, for love,
Michael

1. Kramskoi, Ivan Nikolaevich, 1837-1887. Christ in the Wilderness, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=54297> [retrieved January 30, 2023]. Original source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org>
2. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, New York Public Library, EM2578. The New York Public Library believes that this item is in the public domain under the laws of the United States.

From the Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Beloved of God, *

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Colossians 3:12-14 (NRSV)

Attributed to Paul and often a scripture read the first Sunday after Christmas in Year A of the lectionary cycle, I was drawn to this passage in Colossians as we move through the Season after Epiphany, Jesus' Transfiguration, and into Lent. Throughout the forty days of Lent, like many of you, I hope to be intentional about something(s) in my spiritual life. While it is still a few weeks away, I have begun the process of reflecting on what that might look like for me this year:

Holy One,

When and where I see the suffering of others, may my actions be clothed and guided by Jesus' spirit of compassion and meekness that I may not add to the suffering but strive to relieve it.

When my spirit becomes overwhelmed by the injustices and all I perceive as wrong in this world, may your Holy Spirit clothe it with courage to be an instrument of your love and justice.

When my spirit wants desperately to be right, may it be clothed with humility allowing me to listen deeply, respecting and honoring other opinions while walking the path you would have me take.

When my spirit is wounded, may I extend forgiveness and seek reconciliation. When my spirit has wounded another's may I seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

When I get frustrated with individuals or with little things that come up, may my spirit be clothed with patience.

When my spirit is weary, may it be renewed by the seeds of kindness I see planted by others and with renewed energy, may I plant seeds of kindness as well.

When my spirit is restless, may it be reminded of those places and people with whom I experience Sabbath renewal, honor and attend to it.

I pray this Holy One in the name of your Son, Jesus, who was himself clothed in your love, grace and desire for all people and all of creation. Amen.

*The reflection for this issue of the Spire came to be the morning of January 24th as I was engaged in the practice of Lectio Divina (divine reading) on the following passage from Isaiah 48:6-7:

*Now I am revealing new things to you
Things hidden and unknown to you
Created just now, this very moment.
Of these things you have heard nothing until now.
So that you cannot say, Oh yes, I knew this.*

The phrases: Created just now, this very moment. Of these things you have heard nothing until now., shimmered for me as I had absolutely no idea how I would begin. Writers block you might say. Meditatively walking around the sanctuary, the values of the Colossians passage spoke to my soul and returning to my office, I started writing away on a blank piece of paper. There is still more reflection to sit and pray with.

*As we journey into and through Lent, may we do so aware of and open to the transformative love of God we are all clothed in,
Deb*



Transitional Director of Music

Some of you may have noticed that we did not sing “You Have Come To the Lakeshore” on January 22, even though it was in the bulletin. Between the time we designed the service and Sunday morning, we heard from a congregant that the writer of this well-loved song, a Spanish priest, has been “credibly accused” of molesting children, and that many churches have stopped using the song for this reason. We decided to do the same.

Breaking Bread

The Thriving Congregations Team (see list at end) is excited to invite all members of our community – and we mean all, whether formal church member or relatively new visitor or somewhat regular attender – to participate in a six-month activity, in which groups of 7 +/- people will gather approximately once per month to share a meal and conversation. It is our goal to encourage the development of more and deeper connections between and among people in the church community.

We intend to keep this easy and accessible, while being just structured enough to encourage moving beyond learning names and dietary preferences. A group could pick a particular theme or topic to explore, or just get to know each other for a couple of months and then develop a focus. Menus will need to accommodate vegetarian, vegan, gluten free and other dietary restrictions and preferences. We will encourage a “pot luck” approach and not require that everyone bring something each time. We are open to grouping you geographically or otherwise, and we are really hoping for inter-generational groups. There will be organizational and other support for the groups. Interested? Have questions? Contact Deb Moore at ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org or (413) 584-5500 (ext. 303). Dig in!

Thriving Congregations Team

Sarah Briggs

Jim Stokes-Buckles

Sheri Cheung

Deb Moore

Melissa Mattison

Michael McSherry

Karen Pohlman

Scholarship Recipients

Dear Edwards Church Scholarship Committee,

I would like to express my immense gratitude for the scholarship you have awarded me. It truly means a lot to me and my family.

I have appreciated, and will always appreciate, the kind and welcoming community of Edwards Church. It will never be lost on me that I am extremely fortunate to be welcomed by all of you.

With much gratitude,
Christian Kroll

Dear Scholarship Committee,

Thank you very much for the scholarship. This is a big help and step forward for me so that I can complete college and pursue my dream of helping save the oceans.

Sincerely,
Jensen Kroll Jr.

Dear Edwards Church Community,

I'm writing to you as the bells ring in the afternoon outside the Oxford University library, with deep appreciation for your support as I continue this academic adventure (The library is pictured below, but it's much less sunny today!)

Thank you so much for the generous scholarship, which will allow me to fully embrace all the university has to offer. With the scholarship, I've enrolled in another term of extracurricular French classes. With this financial support I plan to join the Oxford Union, where I will be able to see some of the most impactful leaders in many sectors speak each week. The assistance you've provided me is truly offering me memorable and influential opportunities here at Oxford which are helping both my academic and personal growth.

My first term at Oxford has been a whirlwind! I officially matriculated to the university and began my studies in the Master of Science in Global Governance and Diplomacy. I have found wonderful community within the Rhodes Scholarship, which brings together 100 scholars from all across the globe. Every day I learn from those around me. Through it all, I have been grateful to think of Northampton and the cheer with which you all sent me off with!

With gratitude and good wishes for the new year,
Elena Frogameni



Dear Edwards Church Scholarship Committee,

Thank you very much for supporting my education at Smith College! I am honored to be a recipient of an Edwards Church Scholarship. I appreciate all of the support the church has provided me. I am looking forward to my upcoming semester at Smith and the experience that are in store for me!

Sincerely,
Rose McCollough

Rainbow Contra of Western Mass

The next Rainbow Contra Dance of 2023 will be February 4th, 7-10 pm at First Churches of Northampton (enter on Center St.). Admission: \$10-15; Students \$5-10; cash or VENMO. Proof of vax, booster, and N95, KN95, or KF94 mask required. Caller: Tim VanEgmond. Band: Crossover Duo: Carol Bittenson on fiddle, Alex Cumming on accordion/piano. Rainbow Contra is a participating member of Lavender Country and Folk Dancers (lcfid.org) and is committed to creating an environment that's fun and inclusive of all members of the LGBTQI community, friends, and allies. No partner or experience is necessary. Dances are taught. Please bring clean bottom shoes to protect the wooden dance floor and refrain from wearing highly scented products. All dances are smoke, drug, and alcohol free.

SNEUCC Young Voices Project

For youth or young adults (ages 14- 29). Do you love to write or create? We want to hear your thoughts on discipleship and faith *and* we want to share your wisdom with the wider Southern New England Conference. Reflect on a recent experience and how it relates to your faith and send a draft to Debby Kirk at kirkd@sneucc.org. To find out more information about this project *and to read our own Kristin Rivers reflection* visit: <https://www.sneucc.org/blogdetail/follow-the-nudge-17187982>.

UCC New England Women's Celebration XI

From God's fullness we have all received grace upon grace. John 1:16

Dates - March 17 - 19, 2023

Location - DoubleTree by Hilton in Manchester, NH

Keynote Speakers: Dr. Marcia McFee, Rev. Dr. Velda Love, Rev. Karoline Lewis, PhD

Full registration fee \$125.00 - (Friday, Saturday and Sunday)

Saturday only registration fee - \$100.00

(Note: registration fee does not include meals or accommodations)

For more information and to register visit: www.uccwc.org

YOUTH GROUP

All youth in Grades 6-12 are welcome to be part of the Edwards Church Youth Group and to invite a friend.

Here is our upcoming schedule:

February 19 – CPR training with Mark Dion
in Addis Hall

Church School

Here is what we will be exploring in February:

February 5 - Communion Sunday. Worship is intergenerational so all ages may share in the Sacrament together.

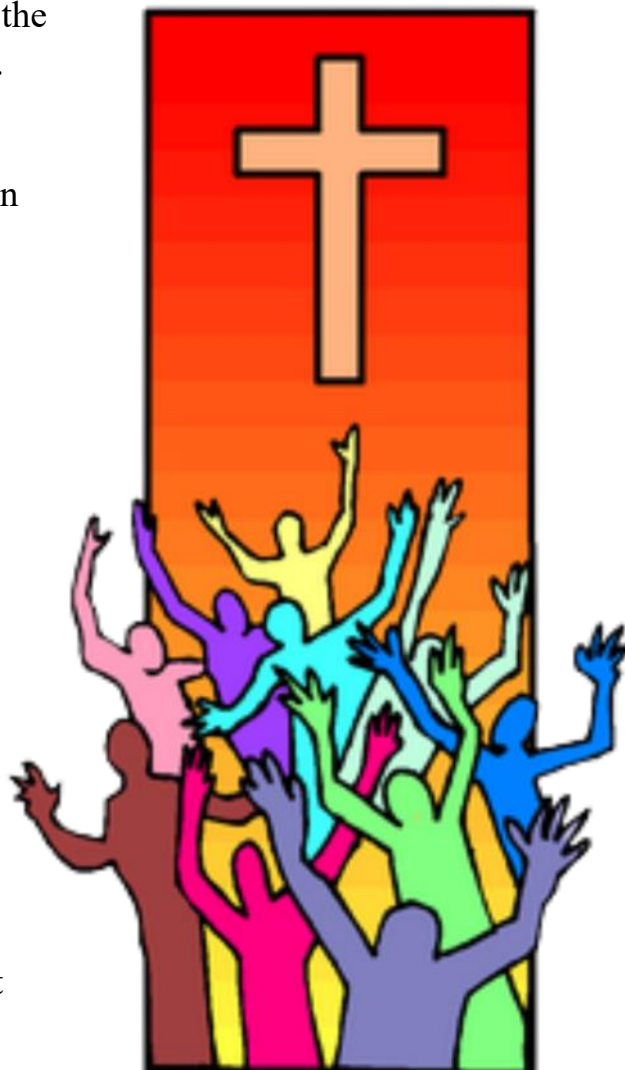
February 12 - The Great Commandment

February 19 - Jesus is Transfigured?

February 26 - We Enter the Season of Lent

Young Adults

This ministry with our college students and other young adults will meet via Zoom on February 5th at 1:00pm.



Prayer Shawl Ministry

All knitters, crocheters, and weavers are welcome to join this ministry team which meets on the second and fourth Tuesday of the month via Zoom from 3:00 – 4:00 p.m. If you would like to join us, please email Deb Moore at ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org.

If you or someone you know would like a prayer shawl, please contact the church office at info@edwardschurchnorthampton.org to arrange a time for pick-up or delivery of a shawl.

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Marc Abel, Ruby Smith, Sandra Rossi, Dan Shanahan, Deanna O'Connor, Kimberly Schlichting, Luke Longstreeth, Margaret Allen, Tracy Teague, Marc Waller, Brian Swift, Ana Haughey



Note: In an effort to protect the digital identities of our community members, we will no longer publish dates of birth in the newsletter. Contact the church office directly if you would like to obtain this information.

Is your birthday missing? We'd like to include everyone, so please call the church office and let us know your birthday!

Pastoral Care

There is no substitute for personal contact. We have enjoyed meeting in person with many folks in the community. There need not be a special reason to meet. We appreciate simply staying in touch. We can sit inside or out, take a walk, whatever is comfortable. Please email anytime or call us at the church office (413) 584-5500 or on our cell phones.

Michael minister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org cell: 413-531-9729
Deb ffminister@edwardschurchnorthampton.org cell: 413-275-5507

February 2013

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 12 Bible Study 6:30 Thriving Congregations 7 Building & Grounds	2 7 Sit & Sing	3	4
5 10 Worship 1 Young Adults 4 On That Note	6 7:30 Valley Jazz Voices	7 7 Wise Guys 7 Gamblers Anon 7:15 ECM	8 12 Bible Study 5:30 Friends of the Homeless	9 7 Sit & Sing	10	11
12 10 Worship 1 Northampton Music Center 4 On That Note	13 5 ONA 5:30 Friends of the Homeless 7:30 Valley Jazz Voices 7:30 Eavesdrop	14 7 Wise Guys 7 Gamblers Anon 3 Prayer Shawl	15 12 Bible Study 6 Investment SPIRE submission deadline	16 4 Care & Visitation 6 Finance 7 Watch Party for "Religion & Slavery in Colonial New England"	17 7:30 Music at the Crossroads	18
19 10 Worship 11:30 Youth Group 4 On That Note	20 7:30 Valley Jazz Voices	21 6:30 FF COP 7 Wise Guys 7 Gamblers Anon 7:15 Outreach	22 12 Bible Study 7 Ash Wednesday Service	23 7 Sit & Sing	24	25
26 10 Worship 4 On That Note	27 7:30 Valley Jazz Voices	28 3 Prayer Shawl 7 Wise Guys 7 Gamblers Anon				