



First Presbyterian Church Portsmouth, Ohio

The Rev. Lisa R. Eye, Pastor
Mr. R. L. Mohl, Liturgist
Ms. Michele Imes, Director of Music
Dr. Phillip Roberts, Organist/Musician

We do not expect life in the wilderness. It is easy to think of the wilderness as empty, barren, and dead. But the truth is, there is life in wilderness, in desert, in the arctic. In every place we dismiss as hopeless, there is life. As our journey through Lent draws near to Easter, we hear two stories of new life given when all hope of life is gone. Ezekiel tells of a dramatic vision of being led to a valley of dry bones where he is asked, "Mortal, can these bones live?" Common sense tells us he should answer, "Of course not!" But God tells him to prophesy to the bones and they will live. Mary and Martha are grieving for their brother, Lazarus, when Jesus arrives after Lazarus' body has already been in the tomb several days. Even so, Jesus cries, "Lazarus, come out!" Grief and hopelessness are real, but so is the new life offered to us in Christ.

***O people of God, hope in the Lord!
For with God there is steadfast love and great power to redeem.
(Psalm 130:7)***

Gathering Around the Word

Welcoming the Community

Mr. R. L. Mohl

Announcements & Celebrations

Mr. Mohl

Prelude

Dr. Phillip Roberts

**Call to Worship*

Mr. Mohl

We have been in the wilderness—

Discerning and working, seeking and dreaming.

We have been in the wilderness—

Grieving and wondering, praying and hoping.

We have been in the wilderness—

Longing, creating and waiting.

We have been in the wilderness, but we have not been alone;
for God walks with us, every step of the way.

Let us worship God.

**Prayer of the Day*

Mr. Mohl

**Hymn (see p. 5)*

Wilderness Gifts Us a Holy Disruption

**Call to Confession*

**Prayer of Confession (unison)*

God of all that is, seen and unseen, when you ask us if dry bones can live, we are skeptical, wary of looking foolish preaching to the long dead and unsure that your Spirit is really enough to bring sinew and breath to places of loss and desolation. Forgive our lack of trust and help us to proclaim your life-giving power with courage, no matter the circumstances. Silence in us any voice but yours until that time when Christ returns and death and crying and mourning are no more.

Amen. *(Silent prayer)*

**Declaration of Forgiveness*

Rev. Eye

God makes us a promise: “I will put my spirit within you and you shall live.” The one who showed Ezekiel that a valley of dry bones could live again will bring us newness of life through Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life. Believe the Good News, through Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!

Thanks be to God! Amen!

**Response #581*

Glory Be to the Father

GTG

**Sharing the Peace*

Rev. Eye

The Peace of Christ be with you all. **And also with you.**

Hearing and Proclaiming the Word

Prayer for Illumination

Rev. Eye

Old Testament Scripture

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

The word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon

*The Wilderness:
A Place of Grief and a Place of Resilient New Life*

The Rev. Lisa R. Eye

Responding to the Word

**Hymn# 826*

Abide with Me

GTG

**Affirmation of Faith (unison)*

Rev. Eye

**We believe in a wilderness God—
Who breathed life into dust,
turned seeds into flowers,
and flooded the sky with stars.
We believe in a wilderness God—
Who went hungry in the desert,
walked barefoot on the water,
and taught from the mountainside.
We believe in a wilderness God—
Whose love could be described
as nothing short of wild.
So with confidence and hope,
we long to follow our wilderness God
who walks with people on their darkest nights,
who sings hope into places of grief, isolation, and suffering,
and who exists in the form of untamed joy,
relentless love, and impossible hope.
Step by step, may it be so. Amen.**

Prayers of the People & The Lord's Prayer

Rev. Eye

...Receive all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, as together we pray as Jesus taught his disciples to pray, saying, **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 sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

Invitation to the Offering

Mr. Mohl

Offering Instrumental

Dr. Roberts

**Doxology #606*

Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow

GTG

**Thanksgiving & Dedication (unison)*

Mr. Mohl

**Holy God, giver of life, we thank you for raising us up and joining us together as one people, your people, flesh and bone in the body of Christ. As you have delivered us from death, use our lives and all that we have gathered to proclaim the good news of new life in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Call to Mission

*Hymn #250

In the Bulb There Is a Flower

GTG

*Congregational Charge & Benediction

Rev. Eye

*Sending Song #543

God, Be the Love to Search and Keep Me, verse 1

GTG

*God, be the love to search and keep me;
God, be the prayer to move my voice;
God, be the strength to now uphold me:
O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me,*

Acolyte Recessional

Postlude

(Please be seated for the postlude.)

Dr. Roberts

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We are glad you are here and want you to feel welcome as you share in worship!

*The asterisk indicates that worshippers are invited to rise in body or in spirit, as able.

Bold text indicates that the congregation is invited to speak.

GTG refers to *Glory to God*, the hymnal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

THE PRAYER LIST IS POSTED ON THE BULLETIN BOARD IN THE EDUCATION ANNEX

Let us pray for our ability to be faithful disciples, family, and friends; our church, pastor, the session, deacons, committees, lay leadership, our ministry, outreach, and stewardship; the Boney Fiddle community and its churches, schools, the city of Portsmouth and its leadership, state and national leadership, and those who are incarcerated.

Building Update: The first phase of the sanctuary work – the structural repair – has been completed! We will return to Fellowship Hall for worship and other activities beginning Palm Sunday while the second phase – ceiling restoration, painting, and cleaning – takes place. Help is needed this Friday, March 27 at 10:00 a.m. to prepare the Fellowship Hall for worship.

The Annual Yard Sale is April 23, 24 & 25. Table set up will take place after worship on Sunday, April 19 with organization of donations on April 20, 21 & 22 beginning at 9:00 am. Come when you can and work as long as you can. Lunch provided.



Wilderness Gifts Us a Holy Disruption

A Hymn for the Wilderness

Text: Stephen M. Fearing, 2019

Tune: O QUANTA QUALIA

Meter: 11.11.11.11

Music: Paris Antiphoner, 1681

Harm. La Feillée's Méthode du plain-chant, 1808

Piano

1. Wild - er - ness gifts us a ho - ly dis - rup - tion;
2. Bless - ed dis - com - fort re - news all our fo - cus;
3. Sac - red and dang - er - ous, wild, wide, and wond - rous,
4. Come, you God's peo - ple, the time's now for learn - ing.

Pno.

5
dri - ven by Spi - rit to wan - der in wait - ing.
dares us to plow through the din of dis - trac - tion.
wild - er - ness trains us for Christ's res - ur - ec - tion.
Lent is the jour - ney of Je - sus' temp - ta - tion

Pno.

9
Here we are tempt - ed by ev - il's cor - rup - tion;
Then in God's time we shall bloom like the cro - cus,
What seems so scarce is, for God, tru - ly bound - less.
Wild - er - ness brings with it truth and dis - cern - ing.

Pno.

13
trust - ing in God to con - tin - ue cre - a - ting.
root - ed in gard - ens of grace - guid - ed act - ion.
Noth - ing's so harsh to es - cape God's af - fec - tion.
Then at the tomb will we find our sal - va - tion.



Presbyterians have participated in the One Great Hour of Sharing since it began in 1949 following World War II, when leaders of several denominations made appeals for relief and reconstruction in areas devastated by the war. Today, OGHHS is the largest of the three church-wide special offerings in the PC(U.S.A.). As we celebrate the season of Lent, Presbyterians respond to Christ's call to ministries of compassion for the most vulnerable around the world who suffer due to disaster, hunger, poverty, climate change, and immigration/migration. The offering provides us a way to share

God's love with our neighbors in need by providing them with safety, sustenance and hope. The offering will be received on Easter Sunday. You can find "fish" coin boxes to collect your gifts, offering envelopes, and more information about how the gifts will be used on the table in the hallway. Thank you for prayerfully considering how we can *do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.*

Church & Community Calendar for March/April

Sunday, March 22: Worship at 11:00 a.m.; Regular Deacons meeting following worship

Wednesday, March 25: Lenten Dinner & Bible Study in the Lounge at 5:00 p.m.

Friday, March 27: Cleaning & Set-Up Fellowship Hall for Worship at 10:00

Sunday, March 29: Palm/Passion Sunday at 11:00 a.m. in Fellowship Hall

Thursday, April 2: Shared Maundy Thursday Worship at Second Presbyterian Church at 6:00 p.m.;

this communion service is designed to commemorate Jesus' new commandment to love one another as he has loved us and to remember his "last supper" with his disciples; Rev. Lisa Eye preaching

Friday, April 3: Good Friday Service at Second Presbyterian Church at 6:00 p.m.;

The Chancel Choir & Friends (including members of First Presbyterian) directed by Dr. Stanley Workman will perform "The Crucifixion – A Meditation on the Sacred Passion of the Holy Redeemer," an oratorio for soloists, choir and organ, composed by prominent English composer, John Stainer, in 1887, with text by Anglican priest,

W. J. Sparrow Simpson. It is based on the traditional format of the great Passions of Johann Sebastian Bach, featuring a Biblical narrative interspersed with choruses, solos & duets, and hymns reflecting on the Passion story.

Sunday, April 5: Easter Day/Resurrection of the Lord/Communion at 11:00 a.m.

Wednesday, April 8: Regular Session meeting at 1:00 p.m.

Thursday, April 9: Armbrust Student Loan Committee Meeting via Zoom at 5:00 p.m.

Thursday, April 23 – Saturday, April 25: Annual Yard Sale in Fellowship Hall

Church Contact Information

Church Office Hours: Tuesday-Thursday, 10:00 am–4:00 pm

Virginia M. Stinnett, Admin. Aid/Church Secretary—Email: vistinnett.fpcport@gmail.com; Phone: (740) 353-4259

Bev Phipps, Treasurer—Email: bevphipp1stpres@gmail.com; Phone: (740) 353-4259

Rev. Lisa R. Eye, Pastor—Email: leyefirstpresportsmouth@gmail.com; Pastor's Study: (740) 529-7177

Rev. Eye ordinarily works from her home study on Mondays and observes Fridays as sabbath time.

In case of pastoral emergency, she may be reached at (859) 329-9026.



First Presbyterian Church

221 Court St., Portsmouth, OH 45662

(740) 353-4259 Church Office

Email: firstpresportsmouthoh@gmail.com

Website: www.firstpresportsmouthoh.com

YouTube: www.youtube.com/@firstconnections4806

Facebook: <https://facebook.com/firstpresbyterianchurchportsmouthohio>



Wilder + ness “state of the wild”

Lent begins in the wilderness. The Spirit guides Jesus into the wilderness where he comes face to face with temptation and struggle. Yet, in his forty days of fasting, resisting, and wandering, Jesus is shaped and formed for ministry. Similarly, through the wilderness of Lent, we are invited to surrender to the wild leadings of the Spirit. We rarely enter the wilderness willingly, but hopefully through our wandering we remember who we are and whose we are. The wilderness can become sacred even if it remains dangerous. There is no wilderness space too harsh or threatening for God’s love. Welcome to the wilderness journey.

5th Sunday in Lent

Valley of Dry Bones

by Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Inspired by Ezekiel 37:1-14 | Graphic Image | sanctifiedart.org

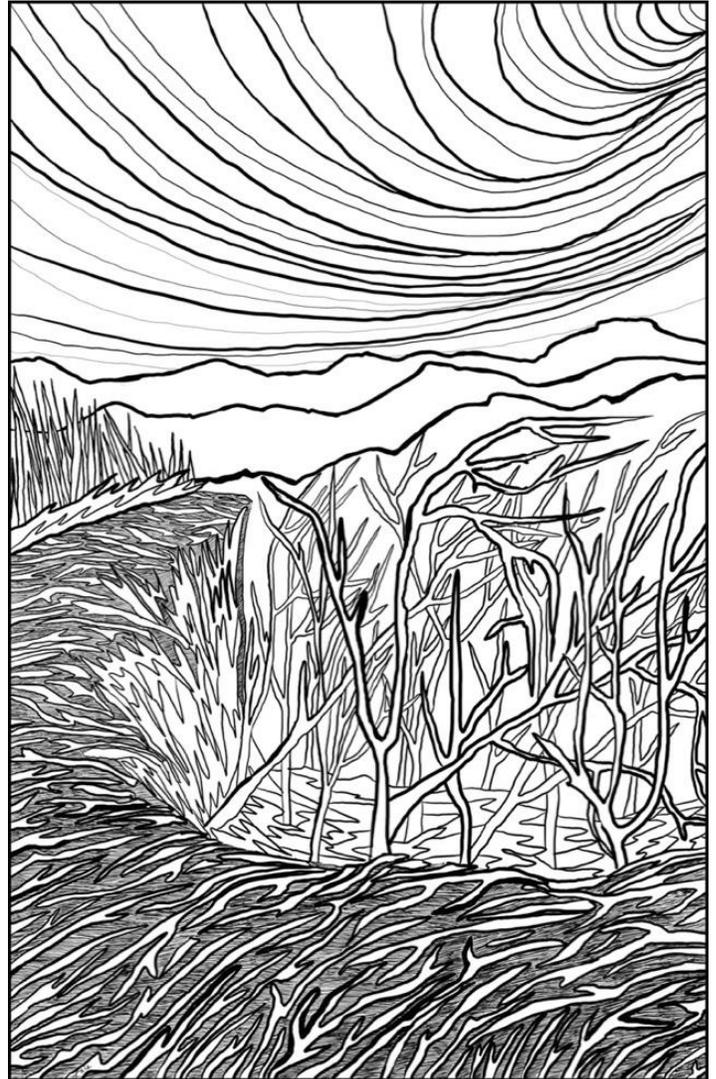
Artist Statement: I grew up and live in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Almost all of the time, the woody wilderness is a place of retreat and restoration for me. I love the smell of trails laden with soggy leaves. I will never tire of seeing mountains crowned with morning mist. I feel most at ease with a purple ridgeline in view—from office windows, or traffic stop lights. And yet, there is a place in my geographical wilderness that haunts me.

To get to it, you have to drive down a gravel road that cuts deep into the valley that eventually flattens into the foothills. The gravel road lowers in elevation with every switchback, dropping you into the belly of the mountains. The valley is mostly empty, besides a few wooded homes. An old railroad, carved through stone and hillside, snakes through the rise and fall of the land. The railroad was built hazardously, through dynamite blasts and hand-dug tunnels, by five hundred prisoners and slaves in the 1800s. Nearly a hundred and twenty of the workers died in the process.

The place I visit is an old logging road off the gravel way, now a wide walking path used mostly by bear hunters and lone hikers like me. The path meanders and eventually opens to a mountain view. Not long ago, heavy rains and landslides reshaped the mountainside into a graveyard of leaning trees and displaced earth. Sticks and broken limbs litter the ground, dry as bones. The wind carries the echoes of the past, of lives lost and workers abused. Here, the wilderness tells the story of death and decay.

Can these bones live?

Staring into the valley of the dry bones, I am stirred by the sight and convicted by the question.





Unbind Me

by Lauren Wright Pittman

Inspired by John 11:1-45 | Graphic Image | sanctifiedart.org

Artist Statement: Jesus' humanity is apparent in this narrative. Here is a greatly disturbed man convincing himself of God's providence as he bears guilt and grieves the loss of his close friend: "I thank you for having heard me. I knew you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here so that they may believe that you sent me" (John 11:42). Or so that I may believe, I imagine Jesus thinking.

I imaged Jesus in sorrowful hues, tearfully imploring his friend to come out, while the crowd bears down on his shoulders. Perhaps things got too real. Did he feel the creeping chills of his own fate while standing at the mouth of the tomb? Did he feel responsible?

Jesus seems bound by the weight of his divinity and the demands of his ministry. "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you" (John 11:8). "Lord if you had been there, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21, 32). "Could not this man who opened the blind man's eyes, have done something to keep Lazarus from dying?" (John 11:37). I wonder if as Jesus exclaims, "Unbind him, and let him go," he thinks to himself, "Who will unbind me?"

No matter our vocation, we can find comfort that even Jesus felt overwhelmed by the gravity of his call. When we stumble under this great weight, God strains and weeps with us, but also longs for us to be set free from the pressure. God accompanies us with open hands, ready to unbind us as we learn to lean confidence on God's provision. We've got to be unbound in order to release others from that which keeps us in spiritual death—that which obscures and steals abundant life.

Wilderness

...is a place of grief

...generates life in unexpected places

...is a place of new life—resilient life

...is a place where death is inevitable

...can be a place of exile

Even then, God is with us in the wilderness.