

The Scroll

LENT 2023

Lent

St. Stephen's 
United Methodist Church
9203 Braddock Road • Burke VA, 22015
703-978-8724 • ststephensfairfax.org

The Season of Lent

Our “Dustiness”

Each year, it seems like we’ve just put away the Christmas decorations when we pull out the ashes for Lent. Yet here we are, we’ve eaten our Shrove Tuesday pancakes and been reminded of our “dustiness” (remember, from dust you were made, to dust you shall return), and begun our Lenten traditions. Lent is the season of preparation, to celebrate the fullness of the cross and of the empty tomb. To fully appreciate both of them, we must take a deeper look at our “dustiness.”

One aspect of our “dustiness” is remembering that we were God-made, formed out of the dust of the earth, God having given us life through His breath (spirit). Of course, that’s not how human reproduction continues, but the idea remains the same. You and I, and everyone who has ever been born or ever will be, are created in the image of God. And as followers of Jesus, our “dust” is spirit-filled and spirit-led. Still dust, but living and inspired.

Another aspect of our dust is the mess we collect throughout our lives, intentional or not. Some of it is heaped upon us by others, some (a good bit if we’re being honest) is of our own doing, and the rest is the result of us living imperfectly in an imperfect world. We are fallen beings in need of cleansing, redemption, and salvation. It’s why we need Jesus, the cross, and the empty tomb!

The last aspect of our dustiness is our mortality. Our days are limited. And as finite beings, unless Jesus returns beforehand, our bodies will return to their original state of dust. Let’s not waste them chasing empty pursuits, but fill them with the beauty of God’s way. And we know our stories don’t end there, trusting that through our faith in the one who saves us, we will be part of God’s new creation.

Out of God’s overflow of love, He formed humanity from dust.

In God’s abundant love, He sent His Son to rescue us from the “dustiness” of our daily lives.

Through God’s eternal love, though our forms return to dust at the end of our days, we are welcomed into the fullness of His presence as we step into eternity.

During the season of Lent, let’s commit to being honest with ourselves about our “stuff”, the good, the bad, and the ugly, but recognizing God’s great love for us even in our “dustiness.”

May your Lent be a blessing,

Pastor Spencer

This month marks the beginning of Lent. This season is a time of self-examination and reflection as we prepare for the coming of Easter. As I mentioned in our previous sermons, this season essentially begs the question, “Will you follow Jesus Christ to the cross?” Or in other words, what does it mean to be a faithful disciple of Christ who is called to self-denying *agape* love?

As you know, the Lenten season mirrors Jesus’ 40 days of fasting in the wilderness before beginning his ministry. This discipline of self-denial becomes the marker of Jesus’ life and ministry. So, in a way, we are imitating Jesus by following his way of life during Lent through our own discipline of self-denial as we prepare ourselves for and anticipate Good Friday—the ultimate expression of his self-sacrificial love—and Easter Sunday—the good news that his sacrificial love has prevailed and will continue to prevail over all, even over sin and death.

What does it mean to deny myself in today’s world? What does it look like for me to deny myself and carry the cross daily? Where in my life does the practice of self-denial require the most to honor God? I encourage us to wrestle with these questions as we enter this Lenten season together as co-followers of Christ.

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Minoo

*There are depths of love that I cannot know
till I cross the narrow sea;
There are heights of joy that I may not reach
till I rest in peace with thee.
Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,
to the cross where thou hast died;
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,
to thy precious, bleeding side.
(From I am Thine O Lord, UMH 419)*

Why We Sing

by Jonathan Aigner

"Sing all. See that you join with the congregation as frequently as you can. Let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you. If it is a cross to you, take it up, and you will find it a blessing."

– John Wesley

As a musician, the goal of excellence is implicit in any mention of music-making. That's not the issue for me. The problem is this underlying tone of enjoying music in worship. To me, enjoyment is never the supreme objective. I want to facilitate music that preaches, challenges, afflicts, inspires. Music that puts God's story on people's lips. Music that conveys a sense of urgency to the Christian life and worship. Music that gives the congregation a job.

If they enjoy it, splendid. But if that's the goal, why bother with any of it?

Sometimes work is fun. Often, it isn't. The reason we worship isn't to have Jesus fun. This is serious business, and though measures of joy, peace, exuberance, elation, humor all certainly have a place, we don't participate because we feel like it. Worship is work, and sometimes it isn't enjoyable, emotionally positive, or imminently fulfilling.

When I like the hymn, I sing. When my voice is sharp and clear, I sing. When I feel confident, I sing. When my faith is strong, I sing.

Not because I want to, but because I need to.

But that's the easy part, isn't it. The blessing Wesley is talking about isn't found in the fun musical experience. No, no, the blessing is found in the discipline of prayerful singing.

When I find the tune annoying, (Like BEACH SPRING. I hate BEACH SPRING.) I sing. **Not because I want to, but because I need to.**

When my voice is cloudy through illness and allergies, I sing. **Not because I want to, but because I need to.**

When my self-esteem is in the toilet, I sing. **Not because I want to, but because I need to.**

When the loudest voices are those of doubt, cynicism, and indifference, I sing. **Not because I want to, but because I need to.**

When I don't actually believe the things I'm singing, I sing. **Not because I want to, but because I need to.**

When I'm in the valleys of depression, anxiety, and perfectionism, I sing. **Not because I want to, but because I need to.**

When I'm broken by strained relationships, anger, and frustration, I sing. **Not because I want to, but because I need to.**

When I hate my neighbor, I sing. **Not because I want to, but because I need to.**

And I must keep on singing, through the good times and bad, because of the way the discipline shapes my life, and transforms me. Into a better Jonathan. Into a person that more closely resembles the image of God in which I'm made. Into a person, though still afflicted by the curse of sin and brokenness, who can faithfully live out the call to proclaim with my very life "Jesus is Lord, and everything else is baloney."

Don't let yourself off the hook. Don't let me off the hook, either.

May we keep singing, friends. Until the song becomes our prayer, and our prayer becomes God's prayer for the world.

Amen.

What is Lent?

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon word "lencten", meaning "lengthen" and refers to the lengthening days of spring. This

Sundays in Lent are not counted in the forty days because each Sunday represents a "mini-Easter."

period of forty days represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his ministry.

Lent is a time of repentance, fasting, and preparation for the coming of Easter. It

is a time of self-examination and reflection. In the early church, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by new converts and then became a time of penance for all Christians. Today, Christians focus on a deepening relationship with God, growing as disciples, and extending ourselves, often choosing to give up something or to give of ourselves for others.

Sundays in Lent are not counted in the forty days because each Sunday represents a "mini-Easter." This is why you will see the designation "Sunday in Lent" rather than "Sunday of Lent" in the naming of these Sundays. On each Lord's Day in Lent, while Lenten fasts continue, the reverent spirit of Lent is tempered with joyful anticipation of the Resurrection.

Endowment Fund Opportunity

Many endowment gifts are easy to make and do not require the help of an attorney.

1. Make St. Stephen's UMC Permanent Endowment Fund the beneficiary of your qualified retirement plan such as an IRA, 401(k), 403(b), or SEP. Just fill out a Change of Beneficiary Form from your plan provider.
2. Make St. Stephen's UMC Permanent Endowment Fund the beneficiary of a checking or savings account upon your death. Ask your bank for a Payment On Death Form.
3. Make St. Stephen's UMC Permanent Endowment Fund the beneficiary of a life insurance policy. Request a Change of Beneficiary Form from your insurance company. If you don't need your policy anymore, transfer ownership of the policy to The St. Stephen's UMC Permanent Endowment Fund, and you can qualify for an income tax deduction.

United Women in Faith Sunday was celebrated on January 22nd with music by the Maranatha Choir and awards presentations. We are delighted to announce that the Special Mission Awards were presented to Mike Keppler and Kate Theodore and Outstanding Service Awards were presented to Ed Baird and Vickie Bateman. Our church is blessed by the work of these servant leaders!



United
Women
in Faith

This winter we are staying active and want to connect with you. We extend invitations to:

- **Chair Yoga** – 6 week class for women, on Thursdays from 9:30 to 10:30 am (probably starting February 9th). We'll be led by Allyn Hammel. Please register by contacting the church office or Allyn. Free! Fun!
- **Help Host Our Homeless Neighbors** – This year our church will be providing fellowship, food, and shelter for our homeless neighbors the week March 12th to 19th. We'll need help with set up, dinners, breakfasts, and more.
- **More to Come!** Be on the lookout for more Pop-Up Events and opportunities to gather in prayer and fellowship!

March Missions

Hypothermia Sheltering 2023

Your help is needed March 12-19 when St. Stephen's serves as a shelter for our neighbors who are experiencing homelessness. Each evening we host 30 to 50 of our homeless neighbors for dinner, overnight and breakfast. FACETS will provide staff case managers, but many volunteers are needed to make this happen. Please consider helping with meals, visiting with our guests and providing supplies. **Please use this SignUp Genius to volunteer.**



Donations are also needed including: travel size toiletries; new men's or women's underwear or socks; gently used shoes, sweatshirts, and jeans; and \$5 or \$10 McDonald's gift cards (for guests to use on Sunday afternoons when the Lamb Center and shelters are not open). Thanks!

Lamb Center

March is St. Stephen's Month to Donate Supplies

Please consider donating any of the following items to the Lamb Center, a day shelter in Fairfax for our homeless neighbors that provides laundry, showers, meals, case management, Bible studies, dental and health services, and much more. The Lamb Center is also looking for volunteers to help out with laundry or with serving breakfast or lunch. Collection bins will be in the Gathering Space in March.

Items to donate: large boxes of cereal, cans of coffee (no decaf), plastic spoons and forks, coffee stirrers, paper napkins, packs of cookies, packs of Cup of Noodles, and laundry detergent.



Palm Crosses

Volunteers are needed to make 150 palm crosses for our Palm Sunday service. This cross-making event will take place in the Gathering Place on Saturday, April 1, at 10:30 a.m. No experience is necessary. Instruction will be given for those unfamiliar with the process. Come join your St. Stephen's friends for this fun and important Lenten activity.



Children's Ministries

SHINE!

Our youngest Outreach volunteers have been busy!

This group of 1st and 2nd graders meets one Friday a month to focus on the needs of others. This Winter they have baked and decorated cookies to give to neighbors who live alone, made fleece hats for guests at the Hypothermia Shelter and painted Christmas ornaments for individuals living in a senior center. St. Stephen's is very proud of our youngest volunteers and are very grateful to have a loving congregation that models to our younger Christians how important it is to serve others.

Mission Possible Kids (MPK)

MPK is a group of St. Stephen's loud and crazy 3rd-6th graders who meet one Friday a month to serve the community. Monthly they pack meals for school children with food insecurity to take home over the weekend. This group also wrapped the gifts handed out during the Christmas season by Grace Ministries. They have also bagged bread to be handed-out during the monthly food distribution at SSUMC. Last month MPK wrapped goodie bag toys for an organization that throws birthday parties for homeless children. At MPK we are reminded that serving others can be both meaningful and fun.

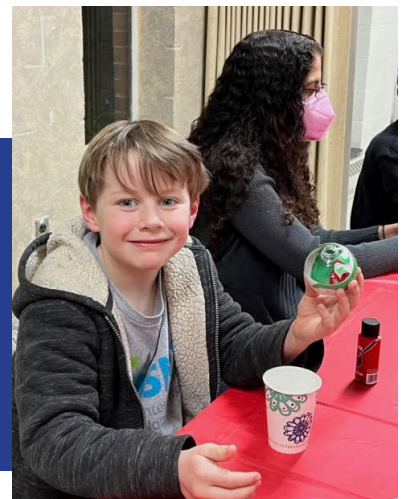


Important Dates:

Easter Eggstravaganza is on April 8 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

J3 Mini VBS- designed for children aged 4-years through Rising 1st Graders, June 19-21, 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Hero Hotline VBS- Rising 1st Graders through 6th Grade, July 17-21, 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.



Eight Reasons to Attend Sunday School at St. Stephen's

1. SSUMC has the best Sunday School teachers (just ask Melissa, Leighanne, Shannan, Betsy, Jeff, Julie, Ken, Larry, Lori, Lorac and Johnnie).
2. The Bible is more fun when read with friends.
3. We have crafts to match every Bible story (Thank you, Leighanne).
4. We have more fun in Children's Church.
5. There is a place for everyone.
6. Your friends are here.
7. We have live music (Thank you, Tim and Teryl).
8. The Bible says, "Let the little children come to me." (Matthew 19:14)



We're having lots of fun at youth group this year! Getting back from vacation isn't always easy, but you wouldn't know that looking at our crew.

Between Friendsgiving, Christmas, and the Lock-In, our youth met every Sunday night and Monday/Tuesday afternoon to play games, hang out, and learn more about what it means to be a team.

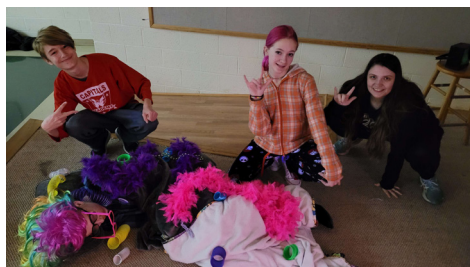
Youth

Friendsgiving and Christmas Party

The end of the year is always busy with holidays, so we took some time to relax and have fun with each other. Our two big parties for Thanksgiving and Christmas were awesome! We had 24 feet of table space full of food for dinner and just as much space needed for presents that our youth brought to donate to Grace Ministries.



Lock-In



Lock-ins seem to be a dying pastime, but our youth don't seem to think so! We had SO much fun playing video games, watching movies, bowling, and fighting to not be the first person asleep. This is one of our retreat-style experiences where kids just get to be kids and it's always so enjoyable.

To Love and To Serve

Our summer mission trip this year is Jeremiah Project, and we have a LOT of people going! Ten youth and four adult chaperones are taking this week-long expedition to Romney, West Virginia. Before donations and admission, that's nearly \$8500 going towards helping make homes warmer, safer, and drier. And it's OUR youth doing this good work. To prepare that much money we have a lot of work to do, and our pancake supper, bake sale, carwash, and letter-writing are just a couple ways we do that.



Weekly Meetups

Youth Group is all about inclusion. A lot of youth are uncomfortable around church for a lot of reasons. Our mission is to show them love and care regardless of their circumstances.



We meet them where they are so they can feel safe about being in youth group. We've been meeting at McDonald's and Peet's for a long time now, and continue to do so! McDonald's is still an anything goes kind of atmosphere where we get some announcements out and let the kids relax with each other, food on us. "Peet's" is now "Coffee+" and meets near the four main high schools in the area on a rotating basis. We get to have deeper conversations there about things like current events, mental health, and personal joys/concerns the youth have that they might be uncomfortable bringing up in a more active environment.

Moving into Lent

Youth group is all about Lent right now. We just had our pancake supper and are celebrating the season with a 7-Sunday spirit week! Dress-up competitions and different activities like pillow dodge-ball, construction training, learning improv, and recording a new youth-group video montage are keeping things fun and interesting.



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We are hosting a baby shower for Grace Kim, who is expecting a baby girl! The shower will be held on March 26 from 3:00pm to 5:00pm in the Welcome Center.

Grace and Pastor Minoo are beloved members of our church family, and we want to celebrate this special time with her. We hope you can join us to shower her with love and blessings as she prepares for the arrival of her little one.

(Minoo and Sena won't be attending; let's make this a special time just for Grace!)

Use the QR code to access their registry on Amazon; diapers will always be greatly appreciated. Questions or want to help? Contact Lori Broce at loribroce@gmail.com. This shower is sponsored by United Women of Faith.



Plan to be present for our Holy Week and Easter Services:

Palm Sunday Service: Sunday, April 2 at 9:00AM and 11:00AM including our Palm Sunday cantata by members of our Music Ministry.

Maundy Thursday Service: Thursday, April 6 at 7:30PM. A service of Holy Communion where we remember and participate in Jesus' last supper with the disciples. Service will be held in the Welcome Center.

Good Friday Service: Friday, April 7 at 7:30PM. A Tenebrae Service where we reflect on the coming darkness of Jesus' death. Service will be held at the sanctuary.

Easter Eggstravaganza: Saturday, April 8 from 2:00-4:00PM. Creative events for children and their families along with an egg hunt at the end of the day.

Easter Sunrise Service: Sunday, April 9 we will gather in the Chapel in the Glenn at 6:30AM. This is located outside the building near the back of our property. If the weather is not suitable, we will gather in the Fellowship Hall.

Easter Sunday Services: Sunday, April 9 join us for our 9:00AM service (contemporary music) or 11:00AM service (traditional music) to celebrate the resurrection! Sunday School for all ages at 10:00AM and nursery for ages 0-2 available from 9:00AM-Noon.

