

FEBRUARY 2021

CONNECTIONS



JOURNEYING THROUGH
LENT



In Lent, we're reminded that, again and again, suffering and brokenness find us. We doubt again, we lament again, we mess up again. Again and again, the story of Jesus on the cross repeats—every time lives are taken unjustly, every time the powerful choose corruption and violence, every time individuals forget how to love. With exacerbation we exclaim, "Again?! How long, O God?" And yet, in the midst of the chaos of our lives, God offers a sacred refrain: "I choose you, I love you, I will lead you to repair." Again and again, God breaks the cycle and offers us a new way forward.

In this season we will embrace ritual to help us remember and be transformed. Again and again we will come to God with our prayers, our dreams, our hopes, and our doubts. This embodied practice will help us build muscle memory. The repetition will help to retrain our neural pathways. We need these 46 days of Lent because this season shapes us into more faithful disciples. Join us this Lent as again and again, we bring all of who we are to God and trust that God will meet us, time and again, along the way.

2.21 - THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

GOD MEETS US

Mark 1:9-15 | Genesis 9:8-17

2.28 - THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

WE ARE CALLED TO LISTEN

Mark 8:31-9:84 | Psalm 22:23-31

3.7 - THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

WE ARE SHOWN THE WAY

John 2:13-22 | 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

3.14 - THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

GOD LOVES FIRST

John 3:14-21 | Ephesians 2:1-10

3.21 - THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

WE ARE REFORMED

John 12:20-33 | Jeremiah 31:31-34

3.28 - PALM SUNDAY

WE DRAW ON COURAGE

John 12:1-19

4.4 - EASTER SUNDAY

THE SUN RISES

Mark 16:1-8

FAT TUESDAY

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 6:00PM

As we prepare to kick off the season of Lent you are invited to join with your church family to celebrate Fat Tuesday. Make yourself a plate of pancakes and beignets (or whatever you like for dinner), put on some Jazz music and Mardi Gras beads, and join our Zoom call for a chance to catch up with new and longtime friends. Click [HERE](#) to sign up for the Fat Tuesday FUN!

ASH

WEDNESDAY

FEBRUARY 17

This year for Ash Wednesday First Church will offer two opportunities for a meaningful beginning to the Lenten season. There will be a virtual service livestreamed on Facebook at 6:30pm on Wednesday, February 17. Prior to the service, on Tuesday, February 16, Stephanie will teach the congregation how to make ashes from home so that you all will be able to fully participate in the virtual service.

We will also offer two in-person opportunities for you to come to the church to receive drive-thru ashes. From 12:00pm - 1:00pm and then again from 5:00pm - 6:00pm, ashes will be implemented in the alley off of 18th Street North and our parking lot. Folks will receive ashes at the end of the alley where there are three parking spaces. You will be encouraged to park, receive ashes, and receive the words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust, you shall return." Please pay attention to our announcements and social media posts as we approach February 17 for updated information.

LENTEN SMALL GROUPS

This Lenten season we are offering a variety of groups to help you deepen your journey. Three of our small groups will be practice oriented and the remaining groups will be more study based. No matter which path you choose, we hope you will find at least one small group that invites you into something new. To register for Lenten small groups click [HERE](#).

A Book Study for Women *Einstein and the Rabbi* by Naomi Levy

Sundays for 4 weeks beginning February 28, 4:30pm – 6:00pm via Zoom

FACILITATED BY JENNIFER WATERS

Hosted by the Women's Book Study Group, we will use *Einstein and the Rabbi: Searching for the Soul* by Naomi Levy as a jumping off point for discussion. The book centers on the exploration of the meaning and purpose of the soul as inspired by the famous correspondence between Albert Einstein and a grieving rabbi. Participants will want to purchase or borrow a copy of the book.

Queer Theology

Tuesdays for 5 weeks beginning February 23, 6:00pm – 7:00pm via Zoom

LED BY REV. HENRY GIBSON

You are invited to participate in a 5-week study of Queer Theology based on the book *Radical Love* by Patrick S. Cheng (the book is recommended but not required to join in the discussion). In this study, we will explore the depth of lessons to be learned from the contextual theology of the LGBTQIAP+ Christian perspective. The importance of love plays a significant role in Christian theology generally. However, LGBTQIAP+ Christians offer a unique perspective on love that may help us more fully understand the nature of God more broadly. This small group will be led by Rev. Henry Gibson who serves on staff at our sister church Highlands UMC and will be open to both First Church and Highlands members and friends.

Converge Young Adult Small Group

Tuesdays for 6 weeks beginning February 23, 7:00pm - 8:00pm via Zoom

LED BY REV. JONATHAN GOSS

This small group is geared toward young adults at First Church who are seeking community and fellowship. We will spend the 6 weeks of Lent studying the lectionary texts and themes from each Sunday's worship.



A Lenten Storytelling Circle

Wednesdays for 4 weeks beginning February 24, 2:00pm – 3:30pm via Zoom

LED BY ANNE WHEELER

Stories define the lines and color in the patterns of our lives. For four weeks we will gather to share some of those stories. With prompts from the week's Lectionary readings, we will retrieve stories we have heard, stories we have lived, stories we have created. No agenda except to be open, to share as we feel ready, and to listen with respect and grace as we discover the stories that have led us to be who we are in this extraordinary day.

Exploring Spiritual Practices

Wednesdays for 5 weeks beginning February 24, 6:00pm - 7:00pm via Zoom

FACILITATED BY REV. KATIE GILBERT

You are invited to join us on a five week journey as we explore a variety of different practices. Each week will be facilitated by a different person(s) with experience in the practice. We will explore the following practices: gentle yoga with meditation and breath work (led by Marie Blair), watercolor painting (led by Robin Jackson), visio divina (led by Katie Gilbert), creative writing (led by Trudi Mullins), and prayer beads (led by Fran Early and Anne Cain).

A Lens of Love: Reading the Bible in Its World for Our World **by Jonathan L. Walton**

Wednesdays for 4 weeks beginning February 24, 6:00pm – 7:00pm via Zoom

LED BY REV. STEPHANIE YORK ARNOLD

The Bible is meant to be a living testament to help us better understand God's expansive love for all creation. Yet time and time again it is used as a dogmatic list of rules, rigid beliefs, and regulations that constrict life instead of give life. A Lens of Love, much like the Manna and Mercy Retreats we have taken as a church family, invites us to explore the context of the Bible before applying its message to the context of our daily lives. This is a great study for those seeking to better understand the heart of the Bible and possibly make peace with the harm it has caused for so many.

Hiking Small Group

Saturdays for 6 weeks beginning February 20, 9:00am

LED BY LYNN ELGIN & DAVID COMMER

Weather permitting, this group will hike trails at Red Mountain Park, Ruffner Mountain, and at least one loop at Oak Mountain in order to experience a diversity of trails in our area. We will meet at 9:00am at each designated trailhead or parking lot; details and schedule to follow. Hikes will be no longer than five miles and no shorter than 2 1/2 miles, with elevation gain and loss (hills) limited to 300 feet. We are open to speedsters and slow pokes alike. This won't be racing or trail running. Reading the hikes and literature of Henry David Thoreau—or Bill Bryson—beforehand might enhance the adventure.

WAYS TO ENGAGE

DURING THE LENTEN SEASON

In addition to our small groups, we are encouraging you to engage with us during this Lenten season through a variety of other opportunities. From the delivery of a Lenten bag, to Lunchtime Lives to the celebration of "Little Easters" on the weekends to the Stations of the Cross, we hope these practices offer something for everyone to try.

.....

LENTEN BAG DELIVERY

With the Lenten season just around the corner we are excited to share that once again the staff and lay volunteers will be making home deliveries in an effort to share love and connection. Each bag will contain elements to help you practice the important holy days of Lent in your home as well as devotional cards and materials for your daily practice if you choose. If you would like to help package Lent goodie bags or make deliveries to neighbors at your convenience during the weekend of February 11-14, please contact Katie Gilbert at Katie@firstchurchbhm.com to sign-up to help. We look forward to offering you a small gift to help you journey through Lent.

LENTEN LUNCHTIME LIVES

Each Tuesday at 12:00pm during Lent you are invited to join us on Facebook for an interactive time of connection and creativity. During each segment you will be offered instruction on how to make a creative expression of your faith during your Lenten journey. If you can't tune in at 12:00pm feel free to watch these Lunchtime Live segments later at your convenience. See the schedule below:

FEBRUARY 16 - HOW TO MAKE ASHES FOR ASH WEDNESDAY

FEBRUARY 23 - THE STORY OF ESTHER AND HOW TO MAKE PURIM COOKIES

MARCH 2 - HOW TO MAKE PALM CROSSES

MARCH 9 - HOW TO MAKE EASTER PRETZELS

MARCH 16 - HOW TO MAKE HOT CROSS BUNS

MARCH 23 - HOW TO MAKE CASCARONES OR CONFETTI EGGS

MARCH 30 - HOW TO MAKE A FLOWER CROSS AT HOME

CELEBRATING “LITTLE EASTER”

Lent is the 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter. If you count the days on your calendar, you will find more than 40 because Lent excludes Sundays. Christians consider every Sunday a celebration of the Resurrection. As a part of our journey this year, we are encouraging you to practice “little Easters” on one day of each weekend during Lent. On these days we pause our fasting and celebrate Christ’s gift of love for us. Using practices from around the world, we have collected a list to inspire you to a bit of fun and celebration. All of our ideas are shared below so that you can plan ahead. In addition, we will post these practices to Facebook and Instagram each Saturday during the Lenten season. We hope you will share pictures and stories of the ways that you find “little Easters” in your midst.

FEBRUARY 20-21 | CULTIVATE NEW LIFE

Plant seeds, bulbs, or flowers and watch them grow over the next several weeks.

FEBRUARY 27-28 | BAKE SOMETHING TO SHARE

Make cookies or bread and bake enough to share with friends or neighbors.

MARCH 6-7 | HAVE AN OMELET FEAST

Celebrate like they do in the French village of Bessières with an omelet feast of your own.

MARCH 13-14 | FLY A KITE

Make your own kite or buy one in a store but get outside and release your inner child.

MARCH 20-21 | DYE EASTER EGGS

Buy a kit and dye your own Easter eggs or get creative and make homemade egg dyes.

MARCH 27-28 | HAVE A PICNIC

Pack up your blanket and favorite foods and take them outside to enjoy.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

During the 3 week span from Monday, March 15 through Friday, April 2 you will have the opportunity to come to First Church and move through the Stations of the Cross. These stations have been created to move alongside our Lenten theme of *Again & Again: A Lenten Refrain* and will invite you to reflect on both the historical and modern contexts. The stations will be placed throughout our courtyard and can be experienced at your convenience during those weeks. We hope this practice will enhance your experience this Lenten season.



Valentines

SONGS OF LOVE

Join Bert Pitts and other First Church singers for an afternoon of love songs from multiple musical genres on **Sunday, February 14**. Bert is gathering a few friends together to pre-record some Broadway and classical favorites to share. We will send a link Sunday afternoon so that you can enjoy some beautiful singing on Valentine's Day with some of your familiar First Church musicians.

COFFEE & CONVERSATION

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 9:00AM



Grab a cup of coffee and join us as we get to know one another. If you have been visiting with us at First Church or joined in recent months, you are invited to join us for Coffee and Conversation on Sunday, February 21 at 9:00am. This is an opportunity for us to get to learn more about you and what brought you to First Church as well as an opportunity for you to connect with one another. Our gathering will take place via Zoom and last for approximately one hour. Each participant will receive a Starbucks gift card so that you can treat yourself to a cup of coffee on us! If you are interested in joining us click [HERE](#).



You are invited to join us for First Church 101 on Sunday, February 28 at 9:00am on Zoom. This opportunity is open to anyone who is interested whether you are new here or have been around for years. Together we will discuss United Methodist teachings on theology, polity, and the Social Principles as well as introduce you to the membership commitments of First Church. Please let us know if you plan to attend by registering [HERE](#).

CITY KIDS HAPPENINGS

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY 2021

Children's Council is gearing up for an exciting new year of expanding our current virtual outreach as well as planning for our potential future return to in-person activities. City Kids virtual Preschool Bitmoji Classroom, Elementary Zoom Sunday School meetings, monthly mail outs/deliveries, and socially distanced in-person family hangouts will all continue in the new year. Additionally, our City Kids Facebook page will continue to be a place for our families to share experiences and access Children's Ministry information. To learn more about how you can participate or for more information about Children's Ministry happenings contact Linda Thorne at Linda@firstchurchbhm.com. Here is a sampling of our upcoming events.

Children's Lenten Box & Valentine Bag Delivery | FEBRUARY 11-14

Children's Council will deliver Lenten items to your home to help parents imaginatively navigate the Lenten season with their children. Of course, we will also deliver a Valentine to tell them their Church family LOVES them! To practice one of the main pillars of Lent (giving), children will be encouraged to collect nonperishable food items for Glen Iris Grace.

Easter Egg Hunt | MARCH 28

Plan to spend a Saturday morning having fun with your church friends in a socially distanced in-person environment. Games, music, interactive Bible time, art, and so much more! Enrollment will be limited to provide for smaller class groups. (available for ages 2 through Kindergarten)

Preschool Summer Mini Camp | JUNE 26

Plan to spend a Saturday morning having fun with your church friends in a socially distanced in-person environment. Games, music, interactive Bible time, art, and so much more! Enrollment will be limited to provide for smaller class groups. (available for ages 2 through Kindergarten)

City Kids Camp | JULY 19-23

Join your First Church friends for a mighty, mini-Arts Camp. The same great fun as our traditional Arts Camp, but with smaller groups of your First Church family. Games, Percussion, Interactive Bible Time, Art and so much more! Enrollment space will be limited to provide for smaller class groups. (1st – 5th grade)





.....
GLEN IRIS
.....

.....
GRACE
.....

U P D A T E

Thanks to everyone who has enabled Glen Iris Grace to keep going during COVID. We deliver a total of 150 bags each week to Glen Iris and Midfield Elementary Schools. Each bag contains 12 - 15 items of nonperishable food and costs about \$6. At Glen Iris the students who pick up lunches also pick up their weekend food bags every Friday. Midfield is able to run buses to deliver lunches four days per week and our weekly food bags every Thursday.

Because of the generosity of so many, we purchased 100 Midfield Piggly Wiggly gift cards worth \$40 each. The counselor distributed these the week before Christmas. Glen Iris had so much illness in December, we decided to do something special for them in the spring. (Normally we help them with their Fall Festival, but it was cancelled this year.)

After COVID, we will be back to packing bags at church and will welcome your help. We appreciate your support and prayers for the many hungry children in the Birmingham metro area. We hope to expand this ministry once the pandemic restrictions ease.

For more information please contact Cathy Ivey (205-903-9311 or cathycivey@gmail.com) or Andrea Whitehead (205-531-6231 or andrea.whitehead1024@gmail.com).

FEBRUARY CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 8

6:00pm - Executive Council

FEBRUARY 13

~ Lenten Bag Deliveries ~

FEBRUARY 21

9:00am - Coffee & Conversation

FEBRUARY 14

~ Lenten Bag Deliveries ~

FEBRUARY 11

~ Lenten Bag Deliveries ~

FEBRUARY 23

12:00pm - Lunchtime Live
6:00pm - Staff Parish

FEBRUARY 16

6:00pm - Fat Tuesday Fun
12:00pm - Lunchtime Live

FEBRUARY 12

~ Lenten Bag Deliveries ~

FEBRUARY 17

12:00pm - Drive Thru Ashes
5:00pm - Drive Thru Ashes
6:30pm - Virtual Worship Service

FEBRUARY 28

9:00am - First Church 101

WEEKLY CALENDAR

SUNDAY

9:00am - Preschool Bitmoji Classroom Email
10:00am - Elementary Sunday School (Zoom)
11:00am - Loft & Sanctary Online Worship
2:00pm - Youth Group

TUESDAY

7:00pm - Converge Young Adults

WEDNESDAY

6:30pm - Chancel Choir

FIRST CHURCH BIRMINGHAM STAFF

Senior Pastor: Stephanie York Arnold	Stephanie@firstchurchbhm.com
Pastor: Jonathan Goss.....	Jonathan@firstchurchbhm.com
Executive Pastor: Katie Gilbert.....	Katie@firstchurchbhm.com
Minister of Youth & Social Justice Engagement: Tiffany Dowdy.....	Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com
Minister of Children & Church Events: Linda Underwood Thorne	Linda@firstchurchbhm.com
Organist: Richard Byrd.....	Richard@firstchurchbhm.com
Design: Blake Hobbs.....	Blake@firstchurchbhm.com
Choir Director: Patrick Evans.....	Patrick@firstchurchbhm.com
Loft Worship Leader: Katherine Mullen	Katherine@firstchurchbhm.com
Office Administrator: Peg Thompson	Peg@firstchurchbhm.com
Business Administrator: Steve Pitts.....	Steve@firstchurchbhm.com
Maintenance Supervisor: Ron Dates.....	Ron@firstchurchbhm.com
Nursery Director: Ginger Gambill	Ginger@firstchurchbhm.com
Wedding Director: Betsy Pate	Betsy@firstchurchbhm.com
Executive Director of Early Learning Center: Cassandra Copeland.....	ELC@firstchurchbhm.com



an OPEN place for ALL to **WORSHIP, GROW,** and **SERVE**

518 North 19th Street • Birmingham AL 35203
205-254-3186 • www.firstchurchbhm.com