

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

February 22, 2026

Matthew 4:1-11

Abundant Grace

The season of Lent begins with a 40-day trip into the harsh and desolate wilderness. While it might not be as enticing as a trip to Tahiti, it is an important one, nevertheless. It is our time to learn from Jesus how to deal with our own wild beasts, our own hungers and thirsts, and our own run-ins with the Tempter, by leaning on God's Word.

This year, though, I don't need to say "yes" to this invitation to follow Jesus into the desert. That's because I have never emerged. I have been in a state of wilderness lostness for quite some time. Wild beasts remain nipping at my ankles. False promises of stones turning into bread have not satiated the hollow pit in my soul. And tempters seem to be trying to get my attention everywhere I turn.

It is easy to "do" Lent when everything is right in the world. When we feel safe and hopeful, Lent becomes a season of eagerly listening to God, slowing down, praying more, and helping others. But when worries of rising grocery bills and whether it is safe to go out in a public place overtake your thoughts, you wonder: Is this harsh world the norm?

I know I am not alone asking this, as studies show how hurtful and hateful society has become. There was a recent poll that revealed a whopping 47% of Americans agreed that people have become ruder to one another since Covid. The other day, a colleague shared an insight that I found profound. She observed how there was a growing sense of entitlement, yet no one had any shame over the things they said and did.

Perhaps this Lenten season is not so much about entering the wilderness as it is about helping one another exit it — to find our way back to hope by holding even tighter to God's Word, by kicking the wild beasts away, and by claiming the name of Christ when tempters tout false promises.

For here is the good news for all my perpetual wilderness wanderers. There are always — always — angels among us eagerly waiting to administer the help that we need. Perhaps there is one sitting in the pew next to you.

Redeeming God, there are many of us who seem to be trapped in a never-ending wilderness. The weight of the world's worries and fears are robbing us of joy and hope. Strengthen us. Grant us courage. Increase our faith. May this Lent we reach out to one another so that we emerge from our desert desolation together, united in a love that no evil can destroy. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

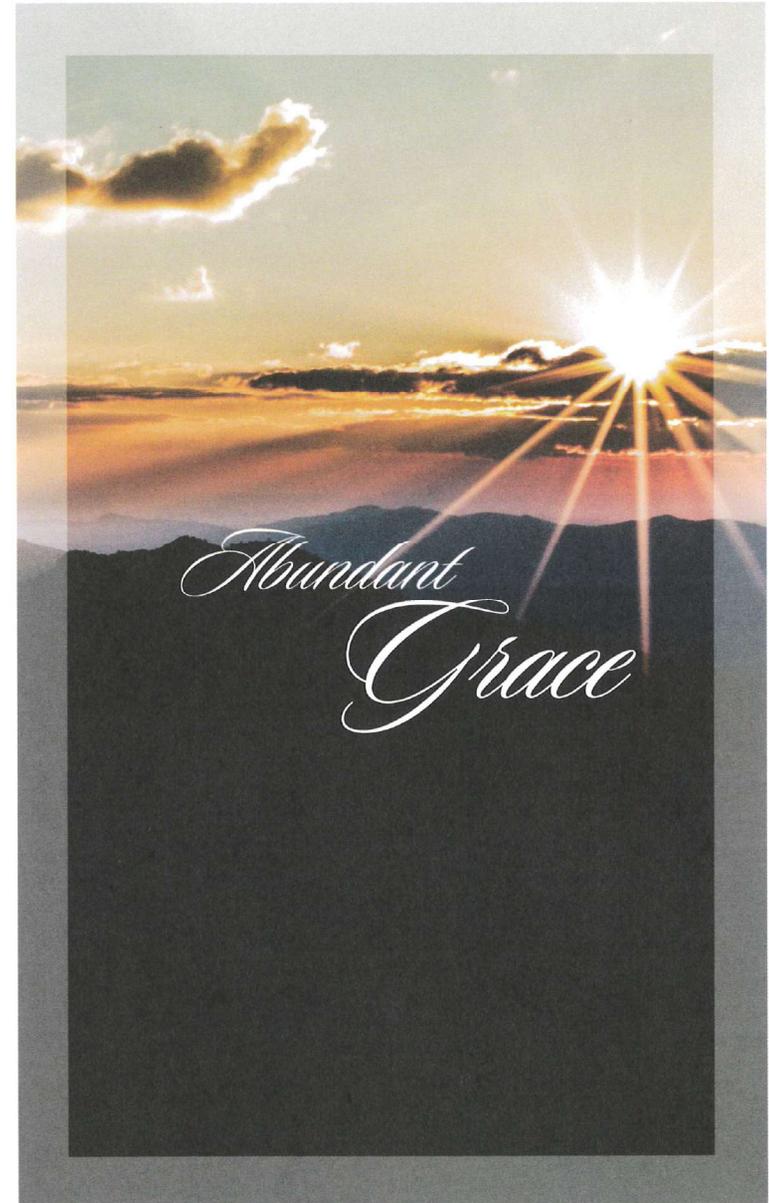
(Rev. Donna Frischknecht Jackson is a communications specialist for the United Church of Christ and author of today's Sunday Bulletin.)



8 1/2" x 14" UCC SUNDAY BULLETIN SERVICE

Bulletin artwork and backpage stories copyright © 2026 United Church of Christ

BUL0212





St. John's United Church of Christ
First Sunday of Lent
 February 22, 2026



WELCOME, ANNOUNCEMENTS, GREET ONE ANOTHER (be seated)

PRELUDE

CHURCH BELL (the bell invites us to worship)

GOD CALLS US TO WORSHIP (responsively)

Jesus began his ministry to the world, led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

As we begin our Lenten journey, let us be led by the Spirit, even into the uncomfortable places.

In those forty days, and in that place, Jesus was faced with hunger, doubt and temptation.

As we seek to follow Jesus, we would be led, even into the uncomfortable choices.

Jesus left the wilderness, faithful and obedient to God, rejoicing in the One in whom he trusted.

As we continue on our path to faithfulness, we will be led by our Christ, rejoicing in the Lord our God. Come Let Us Worship our God!

***OPENING HYMN** *In the Cross of Christ I Glory* (v.1 & 2) #207

***WE INVITE GOD TO WORSHIP** (unison)

Catch us, O God, in our aimless scurrying from you and others and hold us in this Lenten season. Hold our hearts to the beat of your grace and create in us a resting place, a kneeling place, a tiptoe place where we can listen for your whispered summons and be attentive to your healing love. Come, be with us as we worship. Amen.

***RESPONSE** *How Great Thou Art* (chorus only) #33

ANTHEM *Just a Closer Walk With Thee*

CH CHILDREN'S MOMENT Locking up the "A" Word *Jesus Loves Me*

OFFERING INVITATION

Let us give back to God with gratitude for all blessings received.

***RESPONSE** *Lord, Jesus, Who through Forty Days* (v. 3) #180

***PRAYER OF DEDICATION** (unison)

Generous God, Take these gifts and multiply them. Send these gifts to places and people where they are needed so that others may see Jesus. Amen.

WE GATHER IN PRAYER

Silent Prayers – Pastoral Prayer-The Lord's Prayer (debts/debtors)
 Congregational Response tune: *Go to Dark Gethsemane* #196

SCRIPTURE: Old Testament: Psalm 32

New Testament: Matthew 4:1-11

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

MESSAGE: *Clickbait Headlines*

***CLOSING HYMN** *Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days* (vs. 1 & 2) #180

***BLESSING** (unison)

Let us journey together into this desert time. Let us have the courage of the Israelites who remembered God's deliverance. Let us have the wisdom of Paul, in confidence of a knowing heart. Let us carry the son of the psalmist with us and celebrate God's protective grace. And let us be with Jesus in our longing for the wholeness of creation and community alike.

***CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE** *God, Dismiss Us* (v.1) #439

* **POSTLUDE**

**You may place your offering in the plate at the back of the sanctuary or online at myucc.org and clicking on the *contribute* button. Please prayerfully consider setting up regular online donations to continue our outreach into the community

Announcements

** You may place your offerings in the designated basket or online at myucc.org and click on the *contribution* button. Please prayerfully consider setting up regular online donations to continue our outreach into the community.

LENTEN BIBLE STUDY on Tuesdays beginning February 24th at 11:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. each week. *The Room Where It Happens* is an exciting Lenten course written by Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin, inspired by the filmed version of the award-winning stage musical *Hamilton*. The course has been written in the hope that all ages can be involved in the room where it happens for discussions about what the Bible and the experience of Christian faith teach us about some of the big issues faced in the musical by Alexander Hamilton: his responses to injustice, adversity, and temptation, his search for identity, and his realization that he (and all of us) can make a difference in the world. The course has five weekly sessions

- Identity and Belonging - Ambition and Temptation - Love and Sacrifice
- Hope and Courage through Adversity - Forgiveness and Redemption

Each session includes suggestions for inspiring songs from the musical to watch, with relevant Bible passages and discussion questions. Invite your friends and join us.

LENTEN SELF-DENIAL OFFERING Set aside a dish, box, jar, can, basket, whatever and each day toss in the amount listed on the self-denial list as a daily reminder of all the blessings you have received at God's hands. A sheet was included in the February newsletter and copies are available in the back of the sanctuary. Bring your offerings on Easter Sunday as a special Lenten sacrifice.

DINNER & CONVERSATION: This week's dinner will be at Bobe's in Washington at 6:00 pm on Thursday night. Please sign the list in the back of the sanctuary so we can reserve a large enough table.

MESSY CHURCH Our March 4th Messy Church theme is *Marching in the Light of God* and will feature a Science experiment, suncatcher, sunburst craft, lightbulb craft, treasure hunt with glow sticks and MORE! Dinner will be chicken pot pie, salad and ice cream treat. Everyone is welcome!

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING is one of the four denominational offerings we collect each year. This offering supports relief efforts for hunger, poverty, natural disasters, climate change, immigration/migration and refugees. It serves individuals and communities in need providing people with safety, sustenance and hope. This year's offering will be collected during worship on March 15th.

If you would like to donate a Spring Flower in honor of, or in memory of a loved one, please leave them in Memorial Hall by 12:00 noon on Friday, April 3. Don't forget to complete the donor form including the label to attach to your Spring Flower. A list of donors will be included in the May newsletter.

MARCH MOVIE NIGHT will be *Hamilton* on March 15th at 4:00 p.m. This movie is over 3 hours long so we are starting early. A light dinner will be served during the intermission. *Hamilton* is a revolutionary Broadway musical by Lin-Manuel Miranda that tells the story of American Founding Father Alexander Hamilton, blending hip-hop, R&B, pop, and traditional show tunes with a diverse cast to reimagine U.S. history. It follows Hamilton's rise from an immigrant to the first Secretary of the Treasury, exploring his political and personal life through his relationships with figures like Aaron Burr, George Washington, and Eliza Hamilton. The show won numerous awards, including 11 Tony Awards, a Grammy, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Some adult language and content but recommended for high school students and up. Sign up sheet in back of sanctuary.

Prayers Posts

We ask for continuing prayer requests for: Tom Nowaskie, Marilyn Houchins, Tony Riley and Ellen Riggs. Bobby Bahr. Prayers for Megan Jennings upon the death of her dad. Prayers for Rhonda Webber (Brenda Fillingim Niece)

Shut-in Addresses:

Susie Milligan - Colonial Assisted Living, Room 118, 1622 S Hart Street Road, Vincennes, IN 47591
Leona Conway - Aperion Care, C Wing Room C-35, 3801 Old Bruceville Road, Vincennes, IN 47591
Marge Beamon - The Villages at Oak Ridge, Room 303, 1694 Troy Road, Washington, IN 47501

At Home:

Gary Meyer
Mike Lankford

Prayer requests or updates can now be relayed to the church office during regular office hours and Pastor Debbie during the evening/weekend.
Email: st.johnsuccoffice@gmail.com or call 812-882-2720 M-F, 9 am - 1 pm.

This Week in the Life of St. John's

Sunday, February 22

Adult SS Class 9:30am
Worship 10:30am
Youth 4-5:30pm

Tuesday, February 24

Girl Scouts 4:30-6:30pm
Hamilton Bible Study @ 11 & 6 pm

Thursday, February 26

Dinner & Conversation
Bobe's in Washington @ 6 pm

Monday, February 23

BABE Store 12-5:30pm

Wednesday, February 25

March Newsletter Items Due
Choir @ 7 pm
Laundry Love 6-8 pm

Friday, February 27

Pastor Debbie is Off

Looking Ahead In March 2026

Sunday, March 01

Adult SS Class 9:30am
Worship 10:30am

Tuesday, March 03

Girl Scouts 4:30-6:30pm
Sandy's Pantry 11-12:30pm

Thursday, March 05

Sandy's Pantry 11-12:30pm
Dinner & Conversation
Café Moonlight @ 6pm

Monday, March 02

BABE Store 12-5:30pm

Wednesday, March 04

Messy Church @5:30-7pm
Choir @ 7pm

Friday, March 06

Pastor Debbie is Off



Staff and Volunteers

Pastor:	Rev. Debbie Jo Atkins
Secretary	Kim Butler
Church Board President:	Sandra Lange
Organist:	DeEtta Welte
Music Director, Pianist:	Becky Brockman
Children & Family Ministry Coordinator:	Will Meyer
Nursery Attendant:	Darcie Bahr
Head Usher:	Ren Simmons
Liturgist:	Hope Clausman
Projection:	Jill Doggett
Sound:	Andrew Anson

Did You Know?

St. John's Sunday Morning Worship Services are streamed LIVE on our church's Facebook page, "St. John's United Church of Christ Vincennes."

Or, you can watch the Worship Service at your convenience by going on the church website, "myucc.org" and clicking on "Worship Service" for a particular date.

You can also download a copy of each monthly church newsletter from our church website to keep up with all the activities.