

Lord, I believe

JOHN 9:38



Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 15, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.

Welcome to people new to this church or faith, long time Lutherans, and Christians from every tradition. Welcome to all who have no church home, want to follow Christ, have doubts, or do not believe. Welcome to new visitors and old friends. Welcome to people of every age and size, color and culture, sexual orientation and marital status, ability and challenge. Welcome to believers and questioners and questioning believers. This is a place where you are welcome to celebrate and sorrow, rejoice and recover. This is a place where lives are made new. Welcome on this day.

Music “A Prayer for Peace” Richard Purvis



The Gathering

Matthew 19:13-15; Deuteronomy 24:31-32

protection & care for the vulnerable

Call to worship

God loves the field mouse.

God loves the crows that take flight when church bells ring.

God loves the baby, cooing in the back pew.

God loves the child who rocks and claps.

God loves the one with wrinkled hands and soft eyes.

God loves the bumblebees and the tabby cats.

God loves those who walk, crawl, and roll.

**God loves the giant oaks and the evergreens,
standing strong over all of us.**

God loves the young, the impressionable, and the earnest.

There is no bit of creation that God does not love.

So let us worship this good-news God!

Amen.

Call to confession

Family of Faith,
every week we pray the Prayer of Confession,
because every week we need to be reminded of God's abundant grace.
Every week we need to be reminded of God's love.
Every week we need to be reminded that we too can grow and change.
So join me in this moment of honesty as we seek transformation.
Friends, let us pray:

Prayer of confession & Words of forgiveness

Includes scripture verses from Leviticus 19:33, Matthew 5:9, Deuteronomy 24:21, Matthew 19:14, and Isaiah 43:1.

God said, "When a foreigner resides among you in your land,
do not mistreat them."

**Holy God, we confess,
we have mistreated the immigrants in our land.**

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God."

**We confess, we have clung to guns and war
more than we have pursued peace.**

God said, "When you gather the grapes of your vineyard,
do not glean what is left;
it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow."

**We confess, we have hoarded our resources
and failed to care for our neighbors.**

Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them."

We confess, we have gatekept the good news in unfair ways.

Fortunately for all of us, God also said,
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are mine."

**By God's grace, despite our sin and shortcomings,
we are redeemed, claimed, forgiven, and loved.**

May this good news change our lives!

Amen.

*Opening Hymn

“O God of Mercy, God of Light” Red 714 vs. 1, 4-6

1 O God of mercy, God of light,
in love and mercy infinite,
teach us, as ever in your sight,
to live our lives in you.

4 For all are kindred, both far and wide,
since Jesus Christ for all has died;
grant us the will, and grace provide,
to love them all in you.

5 In sickness, sorrow, want, or care,
may we each other's burdens share;
may we, where help is needed, there
give help as though to you.

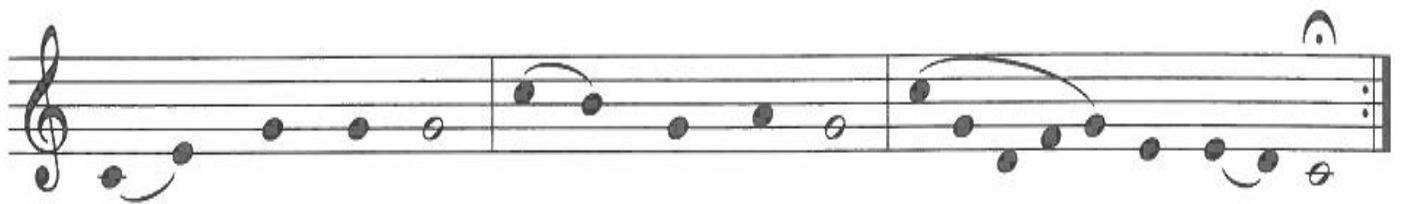
6 And may your Holy Spirit move
all those who live to live in love,
till you receive in heav'n above
all those who live in you.

* Greeting

*P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: And also with you.

Kyrie– We bring our burdens, cares and hopes for God’s mercy



1. Lord, have mer-cy. Lord, have mer-cy. Lord, have mer-cy.
2. Christ, have mer-cy. Christ, have mer-cy. Christ, have mer-cy.
3. Lord, have mer-cy. Lord, have mer-cy. Lord, have mer-cy.

* Prayer of the Day

Celebrate insert pg. 1

P: May God be with you.

C: and also with you.

P: Let us pray...

C: (following the prayer) Amen.

The Word of God

First Reading

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Celebrate pg. 1

L: Word of God. Word of Life

C: Thanks be to God.

Psalm

Psalm 23

Choir & Cong.

Celebrate pg. 2

Second Reading

Ephesians 5:8-14

Celebrate pg. 2

L: Word of God. Word of Life

C: Thanks be to God.

*Gospel Acclamation

P: (Sung by Pastor) One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

C: (Sing: "Glory to you.." twice)

GOSPEL

Cantor, then All

Glo-ry to you, Word of God, Lord Je - sus Christ.

Glo-ry to you, Word of God, Lord Je - sus Christ.

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. John the 9th Chapter

C: **Glory to you O God.**

*Gospel Reading

John 9:1-41

Celebrate pg. 3

P: The Gospel of the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God**

Sermon

Rev. James P. Lapp

*Hymn of the Day

"Be Thou My Vision"

Red #793

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art:
Thou my best thought both by day and by night,
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord,
Thou my soul's shelter, and thou my high tow'r,
Raise thou me heav'nward, O Pow'r of my pow'r.

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise,
Thou mine inheritance, now and always:
Thou and thou only, the first in my heart,
Great God of heaven, my treasure thou art.

Light of my soul, after victory won,
May I reach heaven's joys, O heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

An Affirmation of Faith

I believe in the good news of Jesus Christ.

**It sounds like welcome
and feels like home.**

**It sounds like laughter
and feels like mercy.**

**It sounds like love
and feels like a seat at the table,
so I believe in the good news of Jesus Christ.**

**I have seen it alive in the world.
And even when my heart aches,
even when wars rage,
even when mercy feels out of reach,**

**I remember the one who
welcomed the children
and led with nonviolence.**

**I remember the one who
cared for the vulnerable
and inspired those around him.**

**I remember that the good news really is good news,
for I have seen it alive in the world.
Thanks be to God! Amen.**

(Please offer a petition out loud from where you are.)

*Passing of the Peace

P: May the peace of God be with you always.

C: And also with you.

The Communion Meal

Offering — We honor and worship God by returning some of the gifts with which we have been blessed.

Music “I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light”

*Offering Prayer

P: Let us pray.

**C: Gracious Provider,
You have set your immense treasures among us,
Opening your heart to the world.
As we prepare to feast on your bountiful love,
Deepen our commitment
To sharing those treasures with others.
Through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

*Great Thanksgiving

P: May God be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Lift up your hearts.

C: We lift them up to God.

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Eucharistic Prayer

P: It is indeed right, our duty and our joy.....

*Words of Institution

*Lord's Prayer

**C: Our Father, in heaven,
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come, your will be done,
 on earth as in heaven.
Give us today, our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
 as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
 and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
 and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen**

Invitation to Communion

P: All who are hungry, come! The feast of grace is spread.

Holy Communion

ALL, Yes — EVERYONE IS WELCOME!

Communion is by intinction, we dip the bread into either the wine (red) or grape juice (white).

AGNUS DEI

Lamb of God, you take a - way the sins of the world,
Repeat as needed
Last time
have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God,
you take a - way the sins of the world, grant us peace.

Hymn “There is a Balm in Gilead” Red #614

REFRAIN

There is a balm in Gilead
to make the wounded whole;
there is a balm in Gilead
to heal the sinsick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged
and think my work's in vain,
But then the Holy Spirit
revives my soul again. REFRAIN

If you cannot preach like Peter,
If you cannot pray like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus
And say, “He died for all.” REFRAIN

Don't ever be discouraged,
For Jesus is your friend;
And if you lack for knowledge,
He'll ne'er refuse to lend. REFRAIN

*Communion Blessing

P: May this Holy Communion of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen us and keep us in God's grace now and forever.

C: Amen.

*Prayer after Communion

P: Generous Host, You have shared your feast with us and made us new. Send us now to set tables of love and grace in our communities, that your liberating love might nourish the world into freedom, in the name of the crucified one, Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen

The Sending

*Blessing

P: As you leave this place, when you meet anger, speak with love.

When you meet fear, speak with hope.

When you meet pain, speak with gentleness.

But no matter what, speak this good news.

For the good news of the gospel is love and justice for all.

So go forth speaking. For if you won't, then who will?

Thanks be to God for this good, *good* news.

C: Amen

*Closing Hymn “Amazing Grace” Red #779

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come
Tis grace has brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home

The Lord has promised good to me;
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we'd first begun.

*Dismissal

P: Go in peace. Care for others as God cares for you.

C: Thanks be to God.

Music “Christ, the Life of All the Living”

Serving Today

Reader: Mark Linder
Altar Guild: Judi Alvarado
Coffee Host : Shelly B. & Margaret S.
Office Help: Candace, Sheila & Sherilyn

Sign up to Read, Host Coffee
& Dedicate Altar Flowers *

*Missing a pew buddy?
A phone call goes a long way.*



Unwritten Agreement

We have this unwritten agreement,
us members of humanity.

When the toddler at the coffee shop
runs round the corner,
when her mom, at the register, looks up in panic,
we, the adults in the room, will pledge,
with quick smiles and silent head nods, to keep watch.
We will lean out of our seats.
We will put down our phones.
We will stand at the ready
to scoop up,
to offer words of comfort,
to make silly faces,
to keep an eye on the door.
And we will do this,
because we cannot ignore the instinct to care.
We will do this,
because we cannot ignore the child right in front of us.
We will do this,
because love always includes the least of these.

By Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed



SHORT TERM Penny, Family of Pr. Herb Schmidt, Family of Marc Northcott, Camryn, Corbin, Marilyn, Nathan, Dorothy Ronning, Bob Holzwarth, Amanda, Mary Robe & Family, Renee, Family of Laura Gates, Sina & Bella, Chad Fields, Laura, Ayla, Beth Stiles, Margaret Schraft, Laura & twin babies, James, Don & Taiyo, Pr. Gary & Corinne Stevenson, Family of Bobbie Erickson, Kevin, Beth, Liz, Sam, Florence, Tom Williams, Tim Oldfield, Kathy M., Nancy, Corrine & Daniel, Connie Garcia & Family, Family & friends of Rev. Jim Carr, Grey, Levi, James, Galahad, Debbie, Sam, Nate Barker, Robbin, Keith, Noelle, Ensley, Middle East Peace, Tom Dawson, Dustin, Father Jack Davis, Adolfo, Elida, Jeannie, Anetta, Jane, Barbara Allen, Gary & Marjie Toops, Rachel B., Anne & Chloe Johnston, Isaac & Marissa, Mateo & Lina, Atlas, Sal, Katarina.

LONG TERM Those suffering with Mental Illness, James Sheehan, Biergiel—Colclough family, Eric Utto-Galarneau, Beth UG, Brian Utto, Kathy Brooks, Joel Hurtgamm, Dawit & family (Ethiopia), Miller, April, Aaron Johnson, Shelby, Ashley, Frank, Joe, Lisa & Beau, Linda Johnson, Jan Shadle, Vi Olly, Mike, Susan Anderson, Brouse Family, Janet Baker, Sandy Godvine, Janelle Yung, Karin, Will, Chris & John B., Immigrant families, The Homeless, People of Ukraine, People of Palestine/Israel, Our Nation's leaders, Mt. Cross, St. Stephen's Child Development Ctr, S.S. Senior Housing, Pastor Jim & Our Church Family, men & women of Armed Forces, and the Youth of today.

** Please notify when to remove **



Hello, My Name is Crystal. I Am writing This Letter To say Thank YOU for adopting My Family for Christmas. As I am A SINGLE MOTHER, IT GETS HARD SPECIALLY During The Holidays. This has been a big help for me because the kids ask for everything and I'm not able to get them much. thankfully this year will be better, i am excited for The kids. i know they will be happy and appreciate Anything that is given to them. thanks for helping out my famin in need.

With so much love and appreciation,

Aaligan

Uziel

& Crystal ♡

MERRY XMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR!

HEARTFELT GRATITUDE TO YOU!

Dear “Angel Tree” Adopt-a-Family Friends,
The results are in! This past holiday season, nearly **4,000 people** in our community experienced holiday magic *because of you*. From children receiving their first bikes to seniors finding a lifeline of connection, you created a wave of kindness that reached every corner of Santa Cruz County.

"The brightest part of our holiday was you...thank you!"

With love, Zoe, Marisol, and Juan

But wait! There's more to your impact:

Because of your outpouring of support, we partnered with the **Center for Farmworker Families** and **Barrios Unidos** to provide specialized, trust-based distributions for families who did not feel safe participating in more public campaigns. You ensured that safety was never a barrier to holiday joy, and that even more neighbors in our community felt seen and cared for.

"You have no idea how much you helped our family..."

~Toni and the kids

LENT is about BECOMING,
DOING,
and CHANGING,

WHATEVER IT IS
THAT IS BLOCKING THE FULLNESS OF LIFE
IN US RIGHT NOW.

Sister Joan Chittister, OSB

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*“Lent offers us the practical and effective
weapons of fasting and almsgiving
as a means of combating
an excessive attachment to money.
Giving not only from our abundance,
but sacrificing something more
in order to give to the needy,
fosters that self-denial which is essential
to authentic Christian living.”*

Pope John Paul II



Lenten Wednesdays
6:00 pm
(Worship 7:00pm)



March 18 & 25

Lent invites us into a unique season of slowing down, listening deeply, and opening our hearts to spiritual renewal. Instead of focusing only on what we give up, Lent encourages us to let go of what weighs us down and make space for grace, strength, and hope. As a church family, we walk through these 40 days together—praying, supporting one another, and trusting God’s guidance. With this spirit of reflection and renewal, we invite you to join us for the services that will shape our Lenten journey.

Other Giving Options

We are now able to receive donations made by:
credit card, debit card, PayPal, Venmo & Zelle.

There are three choices:

- 1) **Vanco**, our regular electronic giving provider;
- 2) **PayPal / Venmo / Zelle** for single one-time gifts;
- 3) **PayPal** with the possibility of recurring donations and an option to cover the fees. All are available at <https://ststephenslutheran.org>





PANCAKE BREAKFAST & EASTER CELEBRATION

Sunday, April 5

- Set up, servers & clean up. See sign up sheet.
 - Help with Children's activities during worship.
 - Sign up to order a Lily to help decorate the sanctuary.
 - Plan ahead and invite folks.
Let them see "our light shine".
 - Thank you Sandi Crouser - Thrivent Action Team Grant
-



“COPA After Church”
Sunday, March 29th
11:20a – 12:30p

Plan to stay after worship to meet with Pastor Jim and COPA Associate Organizer Eli Holliday. We will discuss our current efforts for justice in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, as well as our hopes for future relationships and actions with other churches and organizations.

Upcoming Events:

March Benevolence Offering =
St. Stephen's Scholarship Fund

- March 17 Scouts 6:00 pm
- March 18 Preschool Chapel 10:15 am
- March 18 Lenten Wednesday
Souper 6:00 pm (Hosts: Rebecca W. & Don S.)
Worship 7 pm
- March 19 Men's A.A. Group 7:00 pm
- March 20 A. A. Group 7:00 pm
- March 13-15 Mt. Cross Women's Retreat
- March 29 Palm Sunday Dramatic Worship
Readers needed
- April 2 Maundy Thursday worship 11 & lunch 12:00
Worship 7 pm
- April 3 Good Friday worship 7pm
- April 4 Easter Set up 10 am
- April 5 Easter Celebration
Pancake Breakfast 9:00 and 11:30.
Worship 10 am
- April 7 Trinity Tuesday 6:30 pm Discretion Brewery
come for honest conversation and genuine community
- April 18 Pr. Herb Schmidt Memorial 1:00 Messiah, High St.
- May 22-25 Mt. Cross Memorial Day work weekend

Pastor's Office Hours Wednesdays 10 to 1:00

Our Mission Statement

St. Stephen's is a welcoming, healing community who worship God in Christ, nurture people growing in faith, serve others with acceptance and love, invite people to share the joy of the spirit.

Reconciling in Christ

“We welcome all who are seeking God's love and grace. We welcome all because God welcomes all, regardless of race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or relationship status.

We welcome all without regard to addictions, physical or mental health, imprisonment, socio-economic circumstances, or anything that too often divides us. Our unity is in Christ.”

St. Stephen's Lutheran Church E.L.C.A.
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Office Hours: Mon.—Friday. 12:00 —5:00 pm

Ministers: The People of St. Stephen's
Pastor: Rev. James P. Lapp
Church Administrator: Leslie Lapp
Church Musician: Gary Roberts
Sunday School: Leslie Lapp
Pre-School Director: Kathy Berens
Custodian: John Hopping
Videographers: Jay Johnston, Kent Madsen & Barb Rice

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