



Portal

February 2024

Rev. Dr. Shawnthea Monroe,
Senior Pastor
Rev. Haley Hansen,
Associate Pastor

ON MY MIND

Finding My Way Back

Ready or not, the season of Lent is upon us. We will mark the start of this season of penitence with an Ash Wednesday service on February 14 at 6:30 p.m. I know it falls on Valentine's Day and there isn't much about Ash Wednesday that feels romantic, but it makes a strange sort of sense: Ash Wednesday is part of the greatest love story of all time.

Early in John's Gospel, Jesus encounters the Pharisee Nicodemus. This teacher of the law recognizes that Jesus is something special, someone sent by God. So Nicodemus sneaks out at night to visit Jesus and figure out who he is. Jesus tries to explain it all to him, but Nicodemus doesn't understand. He's a smart guy, but what Jesus is saying makes no sense to him intellectually.

So Jesus puts it in a different way: *Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.* (John 3:14-16)

The Good News begins with God's love – God's immeasurable, unquenchable love. God loves us so totally and completely that God sends Godself to earth so that we might believe and trust in this love. We are meant to be changed, even transformed by this love, but it doesn't always work, does it?

Don't get me wrong. I love Jesus. Jesus is my savior, and I really want to walk in all his ways, but it's hard for me to wrap my head around God's love. How can God love me so completely? What have I done to deserve this? In my heart, I am a mixed bag at best. Yes, there is compassion, love and patience, but those virtues sit next to jealousy, judgment and selfishness, to name just a few of my sins. There are days I can hardly stand myself, let alone love myself. And Jesus wants me to believe I am loved by God? In the words of Nicodemus, 'How can this be??'

We come to Ash Wednesday dragging all these feelings and failures with us, believing we are unfit and unworthy to be the objects of the Almighty's unconditional love. Together, we read the litany of confession, naming all our shameful words and actions. And then we hear the impossible words of the assurance of pardon: *As a father has compassion on his children, God has compassion on us. As a mother treasures her children, God also treasures us. Let us praise the Lord with all we have, for God is good! God's mercy and love endures forever! Amen!*

This is a love story – our love story. We may not understand it intellectually, but if we pay attention, we can feel it emotionally. The season of Lent offers us the chance to focus not on our unworthiness, but on God's all surpassing love for us. So join me on Valentine's Day and begin this holy season in a spirit of true love.



Yours in faith,
-Rev. Dr. Shawnthea Monroe

FROM OUR ASSOCIATE PASTOR

Throughout scripture, certain motifs and plot points pop up over and over again. Think of all the Bible stories that tell of sibling rivalries, unlikely heroes, and miraculous births. These motifs show up like the chorus of your favorite song: familiar, repetitious, and expected.

One of the motifs that occurs throughout scripture is that of the wilderness. Words translated as “wilderness” occur nearly 300 times throughout the entire Bible. When Moses encounters God, he does so in the wilderness. The Israelites wander in the wilderness for 40 years before entering the promised land. The wilderness is not an idyllic, peaceful place. Rather, wilderness is the setting for intense experiences—hunger, isolation, danger and deliverance. The wilderness is uncharted territory—unfamiliar and unpleasant. Nevertheless, the wilderness is also a place where we encounter God.

On February 14, we here at the Peoples Church will join Christians all over the world in celebrating Ash Wednesday, the official start of Lent. In many ways, Lent is liturgical wilderness. It is an in-between time that links the repentance of Ash Wednesday with the joy and hope of Easter morning. In fact, Lent always begins with wilderness. On the first Sunday of Lent, we usually hear the story of the Spirit taking Jesus from the baptismal waters of the Jordan River into the wilderness for 40 days. After rejecting Satan’s repeated temptations in the desert, Jesus leaves the wilderness to begin his ministry of proclaiming the Good News.

This motif of wilderness is resonant in our own spiritual journeys, our own lives. We don’t have to be desert monks or biblical prophets to understand what wilderness feels like, what it’s like to be in a lonely, isolating in-between space. We know how it feels to be tempted, to be lost and in need of a way out. We know what it’s like to be uncomfortable and uncertain.

And yet, the liminality and struggle of the wilderness is an essential part of our faith. We can’t get to the joy of Easter morning without the uncomfortable and soul-searching wilderness of Lent. The preacher Barbara Brown Taylor wrote that “anyone who wants to follow Jesus all the way to the cross needs the kind of clarity and grit that is found only in the wilderness.” Lent, therefore, is an invitation to intentionally journey in the wilderness and let the landscape change you.

The wilderness is inevitable. We all wander. We all feel lost at times. However, when we find ourselves in the wilderness, like Jesus we can trust that God is with us, that we are not alone. When we deliberately enter into the wilderness, step out of our ordinary routines and tend to our relationship with God, we find ourselves changed. My prayer this Lenten season is that you’re brave enough to sit in the wilderness for a while and recognize God’s love and call on your life while you’re there.

Yours in Christ,
-Rev. Haley Hansen

SPRING BREAK TRIP

For the first time since 2019, the Peoples Church Campus Ministry will embark on a spring break mission trip! We’ll join a group of students from the University of Michigan Wesley Foundation and travel to Memphis, Tennessee for a week of service and learning. We’re partnering with an amazing organization called Serve901, which connects college students with service and social justice-oriented learning opportunities in Memphis.

After taking a pause on spring break trips for several years due to Covid, I’m really excited that we’ll once again offer this exciting opportunity to our students. Service trips are an amazing way to grow, learn and put your faith into practice. Please keep our students in your prayers as we prepare for this big adventure. My hope is that this will be a week of growth, connection, and, above all, hope.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

It is with much joy and thanks that the Capital Campaign steering committee reports that on Sunday, January 21 a congregational meeting following the 10:30 a.m. service was held to vote on the Resolutions for approving the Capital Campaign. This vote determined whether the Capital Campaign was to be approved and work toward completion of all phases of the proposed campaign would begin.

John Lindley was the chair of the special meeting and asked for a motion to bring the Resolution to a vote. Jon Lundy motioned and Emily Anderson seconded to bring the resolution to a vote, and the motion passed. Some church members asked the following questions during the discussion, and their answers are important for those who may not have attended the meeting to know.



Q: Are the phases laid out as they are so we can meet in the Social Hall while the Sanctuary is being remodeled? A: Yes, and the Capital Campaign Steering Committee along with architects and estimator worked diligently on the order of the phases.

Q: Is the total amount in the resolution broad enough to incorporate any surprises? A: Yes. The resolution describes the path to completion.

Q: What is the timeline for each phase? A: Capital Campaign Donor brochures outline the answer to this question, but there are many variables as to when we can start construction, get financing, etc. If all goes well, we hope to start construction in April or May of 2025. The money has to be there to do each phase.

Q: Are we taking multi-year pledges and what is the percent of money needed to start the project? A: Donors can finance their pledge for up to 5 years. We know it's a number less than 100%. It will depend on the speed and amount of gifts collected along with the cost of financing.

Q: Are we starting this year or next year? A: We hope to begin construction by next summer as we need to do the work in the warmer months. Fundraising, financing and the outreach project will kick off immediately.

Rich Patterson, Clerk of the Church, gave the following report after the votes were counted: Number of votes cast: 162. Number of absentee votes cast: 15. Number of votes necessary for passage: 107. Votes in the affirmative: 133. Votes in the negative: 29.

After the report, John Lindley thanked the congregation on behalf of the steering committee. He shared with the congregation that next steps include the Council of Elders authorizing a fundraising committee for the campaign, as well as each of the Capital Campaign subcommittees beginning the necessary work of developing timelines for successful completion of each phase of the campaign. John went on to assure the congregation that they will be notified regularly of the progress of the Capital Campaign and its projects.

Members of the congregation can be part of the first step of this endeavor by completing a donor form and sharing how they would like to be involved in the success of the Capital Campaign. Completed donor forms can be mailed to the church office, filled out on the church's website, or dropped into the locked mailbox outside the church office door.

We look forward to many more celebrations to come. This project will create capacity for this church to follow the path discerned by the Elders, our pastors, and our Congregation to fulfill our call for serving our community through our faith and resources. If anyone has questions, suggestions or wishes to volunteer for the Capital Campaign work, please call either Nancy Danhof (517-285-1666) or Sandy Draggoo (517-719-2919), co-chairs of the Capital Campaign.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Here is the latest from Children's Christian Education at The Peoples Church!

SUNDAY SCHOOL: In January, students learned lessons about Jesus' birth and Jesus calling the disciples. They made paper crowns after learning about the Magi, decorated cupcakes to look like the baptism of Jesus, and worked on Valentines cards for our outreach project. They continue to practice the Lord's Prayer at the start of each Sunday School session.

CAROL CHOIR: Students spent January rehearsing for their performance on Sunday, February 4. Mrs. Reed has not only been teaching them the music, but also how to take deep breaths.

VALENTINES CARDS & CARE PACKAGES: Last year Ms. Kathi started a Valentine's Day care package outreach project, which we are continuing this year. We need volunteers to make baked goods and to deliver Valentine's treat boxes the week of February 12. These packages go to our elderly and homebound members of the congregation. If you are interested in helping with this, please contact me via email (ahayes-murray@hpsk12.net), or phone (616) 755-8874.

LOOKING AHEAD: We are very excited about the programs we have planned for the year! Please mark your calendars for the Kids' Business Fair on Sunday, March 17 following the 10:30 a.m. service! Our church's youngest entrepreneurs will be selling their handmade creations. We anticipate baked goods, crafts, and more for sale! Registration will be required for kids wishing to sell at the event.

DONATIONS: I am currently working on organizing and restocking the Sunday School arts/crafts supply room and our pageant costume closet. Additionally, I'd like to update some of the toys available in our pre-school/ kindergarten classrooms. That being said, if you have any arts/crafts supplies, storage bins (any sizes), or games/toy sets that you are looking to give to a good cause, our Sunday School program might like to take them off your hands!

Peace and Blessings,

-Alexa Hayes-Murray, Children's Ed. Director

PEOPLES CHURCH YOUTH GROUP

Hello Peoples Church family!

PCYG cooked, painted, and danced our way into the new year with our 'New Year:



New Skills' class series. I absolutely love learning with the kids and appreciate the way they've stepped out of their comfort zones to try new skills!

We are stepping back into our Monsters of the Bible series this month, and I'm looking forward to seeing what interesting creatures we find in the pages. We will also be sharing the love with a special Valentine's Day activity!

If you are a PCYG student or parent, don't forget to check the PCYG calendar for the Coppertones and youth choir rehearsals schedules, and note that we will not be meeting the evening of February 25.



If you know any middle or high school students interested in joining PCYG, please, contact me so we can get them connected. Stay warm and safe, and I'll see you soon!

-Elisha Smith, Youth Director

PEOPLES CHURCH PRESCHOOL

Many years ago, early childhood scholars realized that play-based, rather than academic-based, curriculum was best for young children. Play based means Play is seen as a basic activity. This curriculum emphasizes free play; that adult-directed activities must be playful; and that children's interests, as they are expressed in their play, must be the guiding principle for the choice of content.



Educators at Peoples Church Preschool embrace that play is the focus in the curriculum, but their training involves an emphasis on Play-Responsive teaching. This approach ensures that a play-based curriculum does not become watered down into adults just watching children play.

Play-Responsive Teaching is about teaching being seen as a joint activity where educators and children are mutually engaged in some content and the educator is qualitatively responsive with the learners. Educators must encourage dialogue with listening, imagination, and interaction. Children must be guided to both dig deeper and reflect on their work/play. Educators work to slow down, look closely and listen deeply. It is the educator's job to observe and then motivate children toward wonder, curiosity, and joy.

-Dana Johnson, Preschool Director



WELCOME MINISTRY

Interested in learning about The Peoples Church? All are welcome to join a guided tour with plenty of great information on Sunday, February 4 immediately following the 10:30 a.m. worship service. To participate in the tour, meet at the front of the sanctuary. Tours usually take 45-60 minutes. For more information, contact via email our Welcome Ministry co-chairs, Bob Steinkamp at bsteinkamp@hotmail.com, or Julie Pierce at juliep2315@gmail.com.

If you'd like to learn about becoming a member of The Peoples Church, join Rev. Dr. Monroe and several ministry representatives in the church's Centennial Room for a New Members' Class immediately following the 10:30 a.m. worship service on Sunday, February 11. Classes usually last 60-90 minutes. Our new members' classes are only informational and do not obligate you to become a member. To register for the new members' class, contact the church Membership Coordinator, Beth Lundy, by calling (517) 908-4453, or via email at blundy@thepeopleschurch.com. Childcare is provided during the class only upon request.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Are you looking for a way to serve the homeless and underhoused? On the second Sunday of each month, Cardboard Prophets — a Lansing-based group that provides help to the homeless — hosts 'Fellowship in the Park' at Reutter Park in downtown Lansing, across from the Capitol. At this event, gently used sleeping bags, blankets, clothing, personal items, and other various goods are provided at no charge to people in need. The Community Engagement Committee will collect the items and take them to the event to be distributed. All you need to do is look through your closets and bring your donations to the Church.

TPC has provided storage space for this ministry so we can collect and organize donations. Community Engagement will be collecting a specific item each month. We are not asking for new items, but items that are donated must be laundered and in good repair. If you have gently used and clean items, please place them in the large blue plastic storage bin located near the Church offices on the east of the sanctuary. In February we are collecting pillows.

FROM OUR CHAIR OF ELDERS

Telling Our Story



Did you know that The Peoples Church, due to the generous contributions of members and the diligent work of the Community Engagement Ministry, impacted thousands of lives through contributions of more than \$80,000 to local, state, and global organizations in 2023 alone?

Did you know that The Peoples Church, due to the tireless efforts of members and staff through our Wednesday night meals, personal needs closet, and other means, fed, clothed, and provided basic necessities to hundreds throughout the Capital Region this year?

Did you know that The Peoples Church has played a substantive role in the spiritual health of hundreds through worship services and educational programming held both live and virtually?

Did you know that The Peoples Church has growing and robust ministries serving the campus community, middle and high school youth, and young adults – all providing a welcoming, safe, inclusive atmosphere for all to hear the Good News?

Did you know that The Peoples Church plays host to multiple art exhibits, concerts, recitals, and performances each year, fostering the thriving visual and performing arts of the region and providing a venue for dozens to express creative spirit?

Did you know that The Peoples Church just recently voted to undertake a multi-year, multi-million dollar Capital Campaign, a component of which will be an influx of hundreds of thousands of dollars in capital and volunteer capacity benefiting a growing Lansing charity?

You are reading this text – so the chances are better than average you *are* aware of these ways in which The Peoples Church is doing the work and spreading the word of God. Further, since you are reading this article, you probably play an integral role in one or more of these efforts – truly just six examples of the countless goings on in our faith community.

But now, stop and briefly think about all the people with whom you have daily contact that are simply not aware of the wonderful and impactful gathering of caring Christians in their own backyards. That's our challenge now.

To continue our growth trajectory, to fill the sanctuary and live online broadcasts of our worship services, to fill our committee and volunteer opportunities and programming, and yes – to fill our offering plates, we must now tell our story. The Peoples Church leadership will be working intentionally in coming months to share these stories through traditional and social media, but we need your help. Speak to your neighbors. Speak to your co-workers. Speak to anyone who will listen and tell them about your home at The Peoples Church.

It is refreshing to be a part of something so genuine and so impactful that the action itself *is* the marketing and attraction. We need only tell the story.

-John Lindley, Chair of Council of Elders



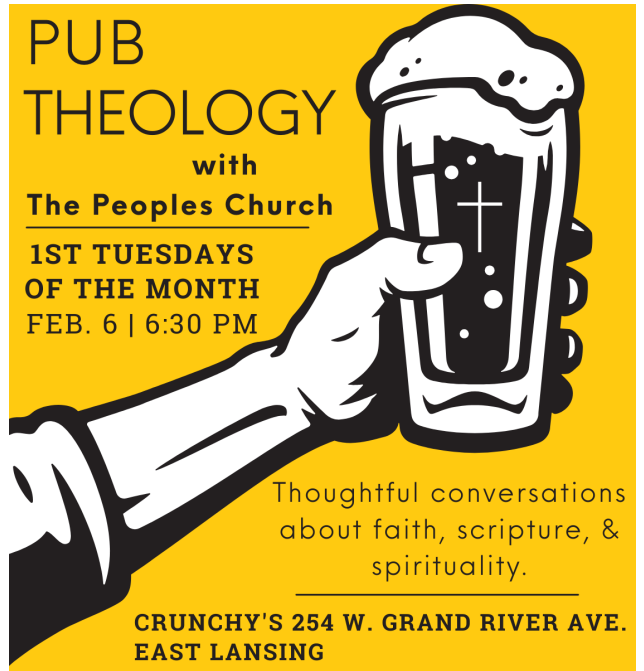
**SERVICE OF
HOPE & HEALING**

In remembrance of
those lost during the
MSU shooting.

**Tuesday, February 13
7 P.M.**

The Peoples Church
of East Lansing
200 W. Grand River Ave.
East Lansing, MI

**PUB
THEOLOGY**
with
The Peoples Church
**1ST TUESDAYS
OF THE MONTH**
FEB. 6 | 6:30 PM



Thoughtful conversations
about faith, scripture, &
spirituality.

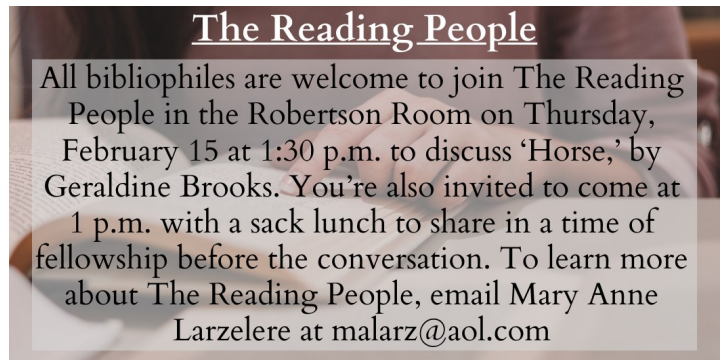
**CRUNCHY'S 254 W. GRAND RIVER AVE.
EAST LANSING**

The Knitting People

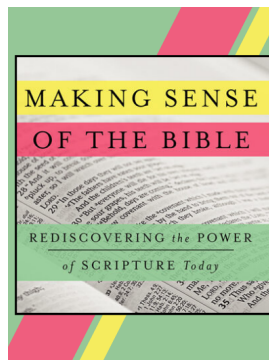


Knitters and crocheters are invited to join us in the Robertson Room on Thursday, February 22, 1-3 p.m. to work on socks, hats, mittens, baby blankets, and prayer shawls for people in our wider community. Please bring completed items for blessing. We have materials and patterns to share! Tea will be served. Email Mary Anne Larzelere at malarz@aol.com for more information.

The Reading People



All bibliophiles are welcome to join The Reading People in the Robertson Room on Thursday, February 15 at 1:30 p.m. to discuss 'Horse,' by Geraldine Brooks. You're also invited to come at 1 p.m. with a sack lunch to share in a time of fellowship before the conversation. To learn more about The Reading People, email Mary Anne Larzelere at malarz@aol.com



Join Rev. Dr. Monroe for a six-week course on Adam Hamilton's book, 'Making Sense of the Bible.' The class will meet on Sunday mornings, 9:20 – 10:20 a.m. during Lent. Hamilton's book can be purchased on Amazon and at Schuler Books.



Ash Wednesday
February 14

12 P.M. | Brief service
& Imposition
of ashes

6:30 P.M. | Full service
Repentance &
Reconciliation,
Imposition of ashes



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Denominational News!**

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