

Plymouth Congregational Church

*A Congregation of the United Church of Christ
downtown Syracuse, NY*



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Service of the Word
February 22, 2026
10:00 am – Worship

☞ Order of Worship ☞

RINGING OF THE CHURCH BELL

*Be still ... and aware of God's presence
within you and all around you.*

BRINGING IN THE LIGHT

PRELUDE

“Prelude on the Passion Choral”

Dietrich Buxtehude

WORDS OF WELCOME

Rev. Craig French

CALL TO WORSHIP *(by Chris Heckert, adapted)*

Cara Steiner

One: After he was baptized by John,
Jesus went by himself to the wilderness, where he was tempted.

**All: In the desert for forty days, Jesus was tempted
to become relevant, spectacular, and powerful.**

One: Today we begin to journey with Jesus through the season of Lent,
invited to face our own weaknesses and temptations.

**All: Let us worship God and make the journey together,
seeking the Spirit as our guide and companion.**

*HYMN

“Lord Jesus, Who Through Forty Days”

#211

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

One: Peace be with you.

All: And, also with you.

Share a sign of peace with those around you.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION *(by Moira Laidlaw)*

One: Gracious and merciful God,
we confess to you our reluctance to enter the wilderness places,
where we are confronted with our true selves ...
the places where we are tempted to put worldly values

**Please stand if able.*

before our desire for you,
and when our hunger for power and wealth
is greater than our hunger for seeking and doing your will:

All: Forgive us, O God, and increase our trust in you.

One: When we are tempted to use the gifts you give us
to benefit ourselves at the expense of serving others:

All: Forgive us, O God, and increase our trust in you.

One: When we are tempted to use sensational means to increase people's faith,
rather than being guided by the humility of Christ:

All: Forgive us, O God, and increase our trust in you.

One: When we are tempted to use bribery to influence and control people:

All: Forgive us, O God, and increase our trust in you.

One: When we are tempted to manipulate you, God, to satisfy our own needs:

All: Forgive us, O God, and increase our trust in you.

A TIME OF SILENCE

One: Merciful God, save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

**All: Forgive us our sins and fill us with the joy and peace of your
salvation.**

**So strengthen us with your Spirit during this Lenten season
that we put our whole trust in you as confidently as Jesus did. Amen.**

ANTHEM "Lord Who Throughout These 40 Days" Richard Shephard

SCRIPTURE Matthew 4:1-11 (*Common English Bible*)

One: This is the word of God for the people of God.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

STORY FOR ALL AGES Emily Evans

*Following the story, children preschool through
grade 5 will depart for Learning Community.*

2233

Where Children Belong

This, this is where chil-dren be-long, wel-comed as part of the
 wor - ship - ing throug. Wa - ter, God's Word, bread and
 cup, prayer, and song: This is where chil-dren be - long.

WORDS: James Ritchie
MUSIC: James Ritchie

RITCHIE
Irregular

MESSAGE “Spiritual Practices for Distressed People:
Slow Down, Step Away”

HYMN “I Want Jesus to Go with Me” #490

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

THE LORD’S PRAYER

On the last Sunday of the month, we pray this Māori version of the Lord’s Prayer, using contemporary, inclusive language. It is adapted from the New Zealand Prayer Book.

Eternal Spirit,
 Earth-Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver
 Source of all that is and all that shall be,
 Father and Mother of us all,
 Loving God, in whom is heaven:



Something to Try This Week

Stillness isn't about perfect silence or sitting motionless. It's an inner slowing—a deliberate pause that recenters body, mind, and spirit. Stillness helps us step out of constant productivity and return to presence, calm, and groundedness. Stillness says: "I don't have to be 'on' every moment." ... "I am allowed to pause." ... "My worth is not measured by busyness." Stillness settles the nervous system, making space for clarity and connection with God's presence. Stillness is not laziness—it's courage to seek restoration.

Stillness doesn't require hours. Stillness can live in ordinary moments: Waiting for water to boil ... Standing in line at the grocery store ... Sipping a cup of coffee ... Sitting in the car. Instead of reaching for your phone, notice your breath and your body. How might stillness turn waiting into space, rather than anxiety? What am I waiting for in this season?

Kiran Young Wimberly in Resilient Spirit

*If you would like to walk the labyrinth,
please proceed downstairs, quietly.*



☞ Plymouth Runs on YOU ☞

USHER: Frank Leonard

FLOWERS: Gert Danzy reminds us that Spring is on its way.

DEACONS ON DUTY: Cindy Perrine and Kailyn Wright

LITURGIST: Cara Steiner

ONLINE WORSHIP COORDINATOR: Tom Zorn

COMMUNITY TIME: Gert Danzy, celebrating the end of Winter

COUNTER: Kathleen Deters-Hayes and Susan Hawks

THIS WEEK AT PLYMOUTH

- Today Worship, 10am, Sanctuary
 Community Time, 11:15am, Memorial Hall*
 Book study, 11:15am, Parlor
- Tue Feb 24 Church Council, 5:30pm, Parlor**
 Narcotics Anonymous (NA), 6:30pm, Memorial Hall
 Christian Formation, 7pm, Parlor**
- Wed Feb 25 Food Pantry, 2pm, Basement
- Thu Feb 26 **NO** Vocal Choir Practice until March
- Fri Feb 27 NA, 6:30pm, Memorial Hall
- Sat Feb 28 NA, 12noon, Memorial Hall
- Sun Mar 1 Worship, 10am, Sanctuary
 Community Time, 11:15am, Memorial Hall*
 Book study, 11:15am, Parlor

**You are invited to join us for Community Time for coffee, tea, and refreshments in Memorial Hall after worship.*

*** Board meetings are open to all; please contact the Church Office to be put in contact with the Chair who can receive your request and share meeting information with you.*

Let's Continue this Tradition — Make a Donation whenever we sing a Spiritual. Here's how: You are invited to contribute \$1 every Sunday we sing a spiritual, especially in February. Place your \$1 in the small cream-colored envelopes in the pews. Our gifts will be used to support the Creative Arts Academy (part of the Community Folk Art Center). CAA is a free visual and performing arts immersion program for young creatives ages 8-16. Courses include visual arts, piano, ballet, West African drum, personal development, and poetry. Participants also learn about freedom, activism, and community.

☞ Joys and Concerns *☞

In the week ahead, you are invited to pray for:

- Our shut-in congregants; Leslie A., Myrtle B., Fung-Chan C., Joanne C., Geri H., Pat H., Marilou O. and Mable W.
- Jeff C. recovering from a bad auto accident.
- Marva Hudson, a Plymouth Food Pantry volunteer, is in the hospital.
- Elizabeth M's sister in recovery.
- Keith J's mother-in-law who is dealing with heart issues.
- Leslie A. recovering at home after surgery.
- Sandra B. dealing with multiple myeloma and Alzheimer's.
- Doris D. rehabbing at Menorah Park, following surgery after a fall.
- Stephen C. dealing with lung cancer and other health issues.
- Folks dealing with mental illness, incarceration, and homelessness.

**The listings for Joys and Concerns will be kept for one month; after that you can request they be re-upped by contacting the Church Office.*

Covenant Community Groups 2026

Plymouth Congregational Church currently has four active Covenant Community groups with a total of 34 members. Some of the groups are able to accept new members. We would also love to have additional groups added if you have a group of people interested. All groups meet once a month at someone's home, usually rotating. One group meets on Monday evening, two groups meet on Wednesday evening, and one group meets on Friday evening. Currently, we are also exploring congregational interest in an *afternoon* group.

Plymouth Covenant Communities

What? Small groups of 10-12 who meet monthly for fellowship, conversation, support and sometimes food!

Why? To develop strong relationships in safe spaces, to share our personal joys and concerns, to support and care for each other, and to deepen our faith.

How? You can express your interest in joining a group for **2026**, or just ask questions by calling or texting **Leela George** at (315) 254-7807 or by email at ljgeorge62@gmail.com

Music Notes for Sunday, February 22nd, 2026

Sometime in the first half of the thirteenth century, the Abbott Arnulf of Leuven in present day Belgium wrote a series of seven poems, each addressed to one of the body parts of the Christ on the cross. In the seventeenth century, the German hymnist Paul Gerhardt translated the poems into German from the original Latin, and the last one became the best known as (in English) O Sacred Head, Now Wounded. The tune to which the text was sung was by Hans Leo Hassler in 1601, although he originally used it for a secular love song. In 1656 Johann Crüger married the poem and the tune together, and the combination proved to be one of the most enduring hymns of Christendom. Dozens of composers wrote longer works based on this text/tune combination, including many chorale preludes for organ. Bach used the tune four times in his St. Matthew Passion, and it is because of this that the tune became widely known as the Passion Chorale – although many composers used the first lines of various translations of the original poem as the name of the tune. This year during Lent, we will explore some of these chorale preludes. Our **prelude** is a setting by Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707) who lived in a territory that was then Danish but is now German. He was the most widely respected church musician of his day, and the young Johann Sebastian Bach walked over 200 miles to study with – overstaying his two weeks leave by months! Buxtehude hints at each phrase of the chorale in the lower voices before bringing in a solo voice that ornaments the original tune (in the same way that a gospel singer today might ornament a familiar tune.)

Richard Shephard (1949-2021) was a British academician and composer. Our **anthem** is based on the English folk tune, *The Turtle Dove*.

*Lord, who throughout these forty days for us did fast and pray,
Teach us with thee to mourn our sins, and close by thee to stay.*

*As thou didst hunger bear and thirst, so teach us, gracious Lord,
To die to self and chiefly live by thy most holy word.*

*And through these days of penitence, and through your Passiontide,
Yes, evermore, in life and death, Jesus, with us abide.*

We continue our celebration of African American History Month with Moses Hogan's arrangement for our **offertory**.

Only within the past year has it been confirmed that two works previously attributed to another composer are indeed works of the young Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). Our **postlude** is most likely the Syracuse area premiere of this piece.

Visio Divina: A Practice of Sacred Seeing

In the way that lectio divina invites us to “chew” on a sacred text, allowing us to receive its flavor and wisdom, visio divina is a contemplative practice of receiving God’s presence through what we see. Spiritual teacher Christine Valters Painter writes:

In visio divina, we move our awareness into our hearts and let our vision arise from this place of integration rather than analysis, and receptivity rather than grasping after the things we desire. Our intention is to see things from a new perspective, but the paradox is that this longing requires us to relinquish our usual ways of relating to the world.

Painter suggests taking a few moments of silence to center in our bodies, becoming present to the Spirit.

Visio divina means sacred seeing and is essentially an application of the rhythm of lectio to a prayer of “gazing.” Gazing is looking upon something with the eyes of the heart. It is not a hard or penetrating stare but a soft receptive way of being with an image...

From this heart-centered place, slowly open your eyes and cast a gentle gaze upon your photo [or image] with the eyes of your heart. Take a few moments to allow your eyes to wander over the whole landscape of the image, exploring all of its shapes, colors, contours, details, and symbols. Allow yourself to simply be present to the details of this image.

Gradually notice if there is a place on the photo where your eye is being invited to rest... What is the place on the image calling to you – is it a symbol, color, or expression? Take a few moments to simply be present to this in a gentle way...

Slowly begin to notice if an invitation begins to emerge from these memories, feelings, and images moving in you. In the concrete circumstances of your life right now, what awareness or action is God calling you to? What is my invitation in this moment of my life? How am I being called to respond?...

As you become more comfortable with praying in this way and allowing visual elements to be a “text” for prayer, you can begin to bring this spirit of visio divina with you even as you are out walking... As you receive your images, pay attention to moments that seem to shimmer and make space within your heart to be with whatever feelings or memories these stir, trusting that God is at work in the process. Over time, you might discover that there is an invitation being offered to you in this time of slowing down and deepening your way of seeing in the world...

Our commitment to visio divina and seeing the world as a sacred text, and everything as worthy of our attention and presence, rather than divided between what is “ugly” and “beautiful,” or as a mere imitation of our own expectations, means that we might begin to see this as true within our own hearts as well.

Our food pantry is gathering hats, gloves, socks, coats, snow pants, and insulated underwear to help our clients during the cold weather.

We are a Welcoming congregation: Please wear your name tag during the Service and at Community Time, Forums, and Bible Study. Let's get into the habit of letting people know who we are, whether they are new or just visiting.

Welcoming Children in Worship: Children of all ages have a place in worship and in the life of the church. At Plymouth we try to engage all ages in different ways. Worship activity kits are available at our worship activity shelf in the back of the Sanctuary for our young children and youth (and for any adults who feel led to use them!). We hope that these activities will help worshipers connect with the service in ways that are meaningful to them. Please return the activity kits with all of the supplies to the shelf at the end of the service.

Nursery Care: Infants and toddlers have a special place in worship, too, and are always welcome. We also offer Nursery care for infants and toddlers starting at 9:45am. There are changing tables in the restroom just off the sanctuary, in the nursery, and in the men's restroom in the basement. The Service is piped into Memorial Hall, next door to the sanctuary, for those who would welcome a space apart.

Flowers – Make our worship space even more beautiful for the glory of God and in honor of whatever you choose. A sign-up sheet is found in the bell tower entry. The cost is \$35 but plans for larger or multiple arrangements can always be made.

Accessibility: Individual listening headsets are available on the table at the back of the sanctuary. Please contact an usher for help. An elevator and ramp are available. Large print bulletins are at the back of the sanctuary.

Ample free street parking is available on the blocks around our church on Sundays, as well as in the lot behind the Catholic diocese building. For those able to walk a short distance, parking here will allow those with mobility impairments or small children to use the spots directly in front of the church.

Parking Reminder: If you are using the Diocese parking lot, please be respectful of where you park. Do not park in front of the garages; there are vehicles that may be needed at any time. Also, please don't park in unmarked spaces. If it is not a designated parking place, then it is used to get to another area in the parking lot. If you park there, you will be blocking someone in or out of legitimate parking spaces. Thank you.

☞ About Plymouth ☞

Plymouth was founded in 1853 by a group of Syracuseans who wanted to create a Christian abolitionist bulwark in the city. Since then, we have fought against slavery, poverty, and war; for immigrant, native, worker, LGBTQ+ and women's rights; and sought to be agents of mercy in a hurting world. We believe in beauty, laughter, the struggle for peace with justice, taking risks for God, and the Way of Jesus Christ.

Our faith is over 2,000 years old; our thinking is not!

We are Open and Affirming We believe God calls us to welcome all and their gifts regardless of gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, physical ability, socioeconomic status, or religious background.

We are Just Peace We covenant to live actively within the holy longing that weds justice with the quest for peace – within us, between us, in community, and across the globe. We covenant to affirm the sacredness of all life and to honor and preserve creation.

We are Sanctuary We provide a space of physical, emotional, and spiritual safety for immigrants without documents, and specifically pledge to the principles of the national New Sanctuary Movement.

We are Immigrant Welcoming We seek to learn, support, and develop practices and programs that facilitate the respectful welcome and inclusion of all immigrants into our congregation and community.

We are Progressive Christians We try to walk in the way of Jesus Christ, our brother and savior. We believe God speaks new meanings for new days, and that She does so not only in the church and the ancient words of the Bible, but through the insights of science, the arts, the revelations of other religions, and the best strivings of the human spirit. We believe God has granted us a purpose, and that life is too short for long-faced religion. Join us!

Rev. Craig French, Bridge Pastor
Dr. Joseph Downing, Director of Music
Lori A Forrester, Church Administrator
Emily Evans, Youth and Children's Ministries Coordinator
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