

# COVENANT CHURCH

## H O U S T O N

A Service of Worship for the  
Third Sunday of Lent  
8 March 2026

I remember hearing, from some priest or nun, back when I was a kid, that the unique ability that Jesus had was to know and empathize instantly with whomever he met. Whoever introduced me to this notion related it to love—to Jesus' ability to be vastly, unlimitedly loving. I was really taken by this; it seemed like the greatest superpower of all. And it would be a very novelistic gift—to be able to suspend judgment so completely that you could almost become the other person. All disapproval or distance would vanish. In a sense, all violence would disappear. If you are coming from a place of total understanding, what can you oppose?

—George Saunders, from "George Saunders and the Meaning of Mind,"  
printed in *The New Yorker*, June 5, 2023



Preparing for worship with silence

Gathering in peace

Peace be with you!  
**And also with you!**

Ring in the hour

Silence is kept

\*Prelude

“My Shepherd Will Supply My Need”

arr. Kenneth Dake  
(b. 1961)

Call to Worship

+Opening Hymn #303

“Jesus, Lover of My Soul”

Aberystwyth

**Jesus, lover of my soul,  
Let me to Thy bosom fly,  
While the nearer waters roll,  
While the tempest still is high:  
Hide me, O my Savior, hide,  
Till the storm of life is past;  
Safe into the haven guide;  
O receive my soul at last!**

**Other refuge have I none;  
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;  
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,  
Still support and comfort me.  
All my trust on Thee is stayed,  
All my help from Thee I bring;  
Cover my defenseless head  
With the shadow of Thy wing.**

*\*Please hold silence and remain seated during the prelude*

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

**Thou, O Christ, art all I want;  
More than all in Thee I find:  
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,  
Heal the sick, and lead the blind.  
Just and holy is Thy name;  
I am all unrighteousness;  
False and full of sin I am,  
Thou art full of truth and grace.**

**Plenteous grace with Thee is found,  
Grace to cover all my sin;  
Let the healing streams abound;  
Make and keep me pure within.  
Thou of life the fountain art,  
Freely let me take of Thee;  
Spring Thou up within my heart,  
Rise to all eternity.**

<sup>+</sup>Opening Sentences

**To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial.  
To be known and not loved is our greatest fear.  
But to be fully known and truly loved is, well,  
a lot like being loved by God.  
It is what we need more than anything.  
It liberates us from pretense,  
humbles us out of our self-righteousness,  
and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.**

Invitation

Scripture Lesson

John 4:5-42

These are our sacred stories.

**Thanks be to God.**

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

Time for Children

+ Response:

Dickinson College

**May God support you all your days,  
in times of gladness and in need.  
May God remember you with grace  
and bless your every word and deed.**

Call to Confession

Silent Confession

Unison Confession

**God of Blessing,  
You designed us in your image  
and declared us “very good.”  
But we deny our created identity,  
and defy your vision for creation.**

**We fixate on others’ flaws,  
and focus on their failings,  
while refusing to acknowledge  
brokenness we ourselves carry.**

**We discount others’ pain  
and dismiss their suffering,  
rather than responding with  
the compassion love demands.**

**We reject others’ expressions of care  
and are hostile to their concern,  
for we convince ourselves we are self-reliant,  
and minimize our own need for healing.**

**We diminish others’ worth  
and deny them their dignity,  
forgetting they, too, reflect your image  
and bear the imprint of your love.**

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

**Heal us, Ever-Creating God.**

**Fashion us anew and bless us with your grace  
that we might live into the goodness you intend.**

Words of Assurance

Music

Johann Sebastian Bach

“O Come, Ye Who Are Thirsty”

(1685-1750)

*O come, ye who are thirsty, O come to the waters.  
Come drink; your soul shall live. I will be with you.  
O come ye with no money, my food is freely offered.  
Come to the waters; I will be with you.*

Silent Reflection

Proclamation

+Hymn

Kingsfold

“I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say”

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

1 I heard the voice of Je - sus say, "Come un - to me and rest;  
 2 I heard the voice of Je - sus say, "Be - hold, I free - ly give  
 3 I heard the voice of Je - sus say, "I am this dark world's light;

lay down, O wea - ry one, lay down your head up - on my breast."  
 the liv - ing wa - ter, thirst - y one; stoop down and drink and live."  
 look un - to me, your morn shall rise, and all your day be bright."

I came to Je - sus as I was, so wea - ry, worn, and sad; I  
 I came to Je - sus, and I drank of that life - giv - ing stream; my  
 I looked to Je - sus, and I found in him my star, my sun; and

found in him a rest - ing place, and he has made me glad.  
 thirst was quenched, my soul re - vived, and now I live in him.  
 in that light of life I'll walk till trav - eling days are done.

Prayer

Offering

Offertory

“Drop Down, O Heavens”

Jeanne Demessieux

(1921-1968)

+Prayer of Dedication

**By calling ourselves progressive, we mean that we are Christians who...  
Have found an approach to God through the life and teachings of Jesus;  
Find more grace in the search for understanding  
than we do in dogmatic certainty—  
more value in questioning than in absolutes;  
Form ourselves into communities  
dedicated to equipping one another for the work we feel called to do:  
striving for peace and justice among all people,  
protecting and restoring the integrity of all God’s creation,  
and bringing hope to those Jesus called  
the least of his sisters and brothers; and  
Recognize that being followers of Jesus is costly,  
and entails selfless love, conscientious resistance to evil,  
and renunciation of privilege.**

+Doxology

Old Hundredth

**Praise God the Source of life and birth.  
Praise God the Word, who came to earth.  
Praise God the Spirit, holy flame,  
All glory, honor to God’s name! Amen.**

+Affirmation of Faith

**Jesus says, “You are the light of the world.”  
I like even more what Jesus doesn’t say.  
He does not say, “One day, if you are more perfect and try really hard,  
you’ll be light.”  
He doesn’t say, “If you play by the rules, cross your T’s and dot your I’s,  
then maybe you’ll become light.”**

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

**No. He says, straight out, "You are light."**

**It is the truth of who you are, waiting only for you to discover it.**

**So, for God's sake, don't move.**

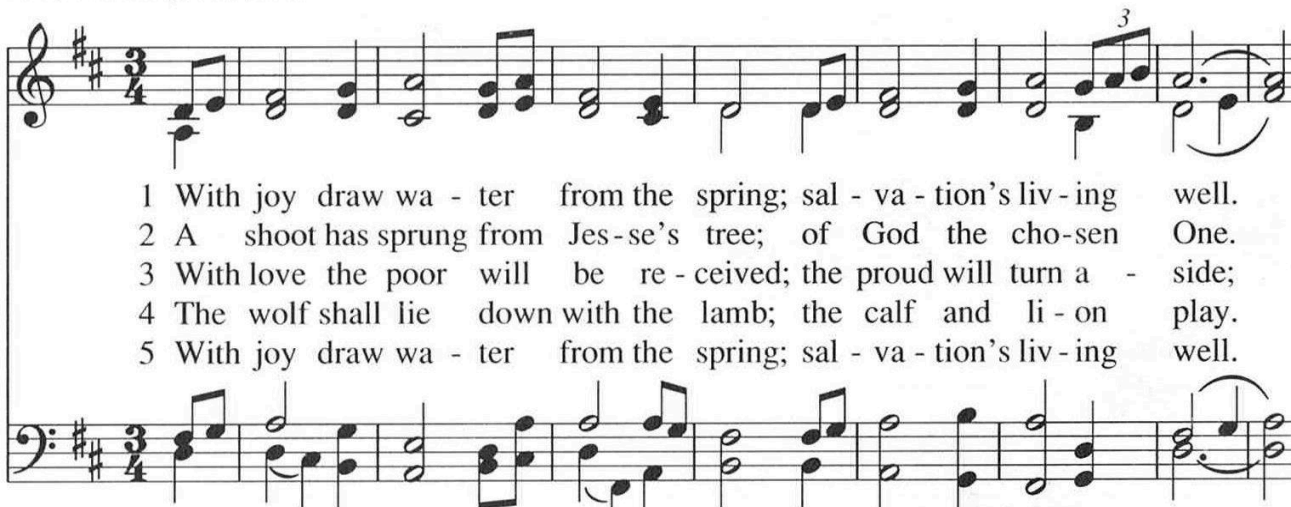
**No need to contort yourself to be anything other than who you are.**

+Closing Hymn

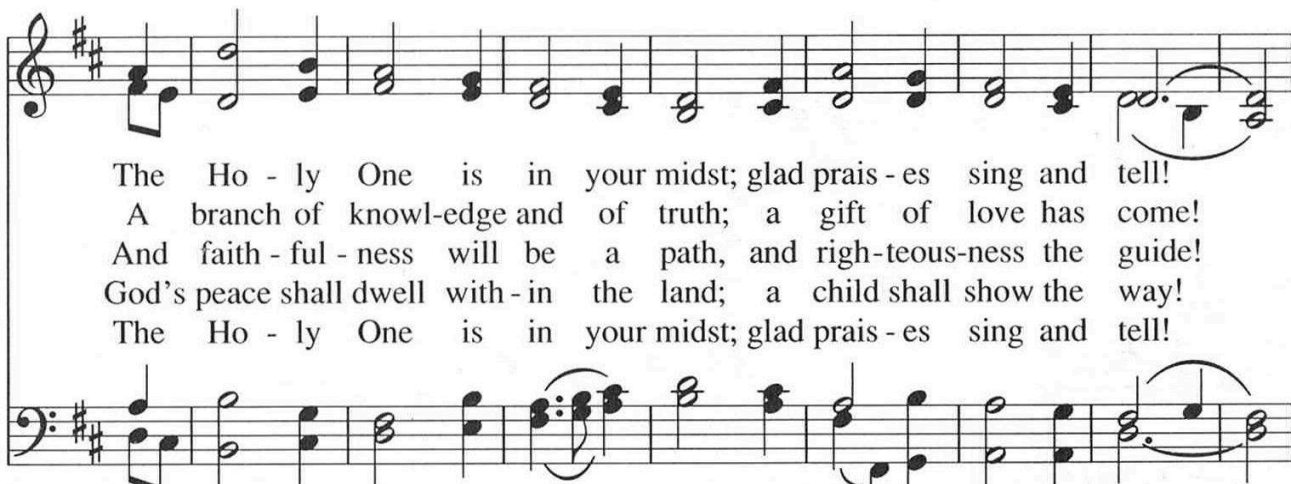
St. Columba

"With Joy Draw Water"

Anne McKinstry, 1986, 1993



1 With joy draw wa - ter from the spring; sal - va - tion's liv - ing well.  
2 A shoot has sprung from Jes - se's tree; of God the cho - sen One.  
3 With love the poor will be re - ceived; the proud will turn a - side;  
4 The wolf shall lie down with the lamb; the calf and li - on play.  
5 With joy draw wa - ter from the spring; sal - va - tion's liv - ing well.



The Ho - ly One is in your midst; glad prais - es sing and tell!  
A branch of knowl - edge and of truth; a gift of love has come!  
And faith - ful - ness will be a path, and righ - teous - ness the guide!  
God's peace shall dwell with - in the land; a child shall show the way!  
The Ho - ly One is in your midst; glad prais - es sing and tell!

Benediction

\*Postlude

Elizabeth Stirling

"Fugue on the Old Hundredth"

(1819-1895)

+Please stand in body or spirit

\*Please hold silence and remain seated during the postlude

## Worship Notes

The worship leader is **Jacy Grannis**.

The Call to Worship is “Grace” by Orlando Ricardo Menes.

The Opening Sentences are by Tim Keller.

**Jeff Turner** gives the Invitation.

The Unison Confession is by Rev. Sudie Niesen Thompson.

The text of “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say” is by Horatius Bonar.

**Deacon Nita Lindley** gives the prayer.

The Prayer of Dedication is excerpted from “The 8 Points (2003)” by The Center for Progressive Christianity.

The Affirmation of Faith is by Father Greg Boyle.

The hymn texts are reprinted with permission under ONE LICENSE, License #741361-A. All rights reserved.

## About Today’s Service

You’ve heard me use the word synoptic to refer to the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

These three share a similar structure and chronology: Jesus is baptized, ministers primarily in Galilee, enters Jerusalem triumphantly on Palm Sunday, begins the last week of his life, and celebrates Passover with his disciples.

John diverges significantly from this structure and chronology. It’s not explicitly stated that John baptizes Jesus, and this event does not mark the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. More significantly, in my mind, Jesus travels repeatedly to Jerusalem; the events described in chapter 3, for example, occur in Jerusalem. And John mentions at least three Passover celebrations. John is the reason for the traditional understanding that Jesus’ public ministry lasted three years.

But it’s not just chronology and structure that distinguish John from the synoptic gospels. The synoptics agree that Jesus taught using parables. In John, Jesus’ typical means of teaching comes through self-revelatory discourses or experiences. The gospel of John is often said to be the more spiritual or mystical of the gospels and is understood to be the least historically accurate. In other words, we might say, John is focused on the Christ of faith with very little interest in the Jesus of history.

*–Laura Mayo*

## Announcements

Houston Food Bank service day this coming **Saturday, March 14**: please see the newsletter to sign up or talk to Jason Steiner.

Spring Organ Recital Series: Tuesdays at 12:15pm, continuing through March 24.

Spring Equinox Labyrinth Walk after church on March 22.

All Church Workday and Deacon Trivia Night approach on Saturday, March 28.

Subscribe to the Covenant Lent devotional at [CovenantLent2026.substack.com](http://CovenantLent2026.substack.com).

Committees meet on April 26, August 9, and November 8.

## Calendar

Mon. March 9	7pm	Insight Meditation, Huff Fellowship Hall.
Tues. March 10	12:15pm	Spring Organ Recital Series: Joseph Little, Sanctuary.
Thurs. March 12	10am	Community Group, Zoom.
	1:15pm	Lunctime Lectionary Lab, Zoom.
	7:15pm	Covenant Singers Rehearsal, Sanctuary.
Sat. March 14	8am	Houston Food Bank Service Day, off-site.
Sun. March 15	9:30am	Adult Education, 2nd floor of Huff Fellowship Hall building or on Zoom: Bruce Yaeger presents on the three creation accounts in Genesis.
	9:30am	Handbell Rehearsal, Huff Fellowship Hall.
	10:30am	Covenant Singers Rehearsal, Sanctuary.

## Information

**Childcare** is provided in the children's area beginning at 9:30 a.m. Children aged 2 and under are invited to the nursery. Children aged 3 to 9 are invited to the children's area after the Time for Children.

**All-Gender Restrooms** are located in the Huff Fellowship Hall building.

**Covenant Recycles:** If you do not wish to keep your order of worship, please recycle it by placing it on the stand located in the narthex.

**Office Hours:** The Church Office is open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 8am-3pm, and Tuesday from 1pm-5pm.

**Helpful Links:** Scan here for digital Visitor and Celebration & Concern Cards; any sign-up forms mentioned in the Announcements; and other useful information.



*Covenant Church affirms the sanctity, dignity, and equality  
of human beings and the value of all life in the universe.  
We welcome persons of all racial and ethnic heritages, all sexual orientations,  
all gender identities, and all faith perspectives to our Christian community.  
We stand for each individual's right to worship God and to respond  
to God's call to ministry with a personal understanding  
of God's all-encompassing love.  
We value a holistic approach to faith and seek to worship in ways that are  
intellectually credible, emotionally stimulating, spiritually engaging  
and contemporarily relevant.  
We value music and art and ritual to express what we cannot ever fully say.  
We value participation so that we might hear many approaches  
to our shared faith.*

**Covenant Church, an ecumenical, liberal, Baptist congregation**

Members of Covenant, Ministers

Fran Avera, Minister of Music, Emerita

Trena' Jamison, Children and Youth Coordinator

Heather Laureles, Director of Administration & Communications

David Lee, Director of Music

Laura Mayo, Senior Minister

Jason Steiner, Organist and Associate Director of Music

Raymond Stubblefield, Minister of Congregational Life

Brendon Young, Moores School of Music Artist in Residence

4949 Caroline Street  
Houston, Texas 77004  
713-668-8830

[www.covenanthouston.org](http://www.covenanthouston.org)  
[office@covenanthouston.org](mailto:office@covenanthouston.org)

*Covenant Church recognizes the laws of the State of Texas and the rights of its citizens. Consistent with this acknowledgment and with respect for the values of our Church, we also acknowledge that our congregants and visitors seek a safe and comfortable space for worship and celebration. In that spirit, we request that all firearms be left in a secure place outside of the Church. We thank God for providing us with the opportunity to worship together and to continue to respect each other as human beings.*