

# This Week at Wilkesboro UMC...

Share the Good News of Jesus Christ, Comfort the Troubled, Embrace God's Love

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## Worship News: Love That Will Not Let Us Go

This Lent, we'll walk through the Gospel stories that remind us of a love that refuses to let go — in wilderness, in confusion, in shame, in grief. Join us as we rediscover the steadfast mercy of a God who never abandons us.

On Sunday we were reminded that while we often assume we know one another's stories, Christ meets us with a deeper grace that sees us fully and still calls us beloved. Surprised by that love, we are sent to gather others with the simple invitation: "Come and see." You can read the attached sermon or watch the entire service on [Facebook](#) or [YouTube](#).

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## Upcoming Events:

### **Lenten Bible Study returns tonight at 5:30 in the Ecclesia Room**

We will explore John 9:1-41 and the topic - When Religion Gets in the Way

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### **Easter Lily**

Honor or remember a loved one by adding an Easter Lily to the sanctuary. Lilies are \$30 each, order deadline is March 23<sup>rd</sup>.

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### **Mission Spotlight: Sewing Bee**

This week we celebrate the men and women whose faithful handiwork can be seen all around the world. Our Sewing Bee, led by Tanya Shire, creates, packages, and ships much needed items like children's dresses, shorts, book bags, backpacks, and school supplies to countries like Haiti and Uganda, just to name a few. LuoPads are in high demand because they provide women who lack access to disposable menstrual products with a safe, reusable solution—helping ensure they can continue their education and work with dignity during their cycles. Just look at what they have accomplished in less than 3 months!

Item	-	Month	-	YTD(over/under)
Dresses		25		82 (+7)
Shorts		36		95 (+20)

Bookbags	150	630 (+180)
Backpacks	199	635 (+185)
LuoPads	1200	4000 (+250)

If you would like to get involved in this beautiful ministry, see Tanya Shire

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### **Staffing Change:**

We are sad to say goodbye to our treasurer, Carol Canter. Carol has been a wonderful asset to our team but we celebrate her retirement which will allow her more time for the arrival of her first grandchild.

Treasurer duties have been transferred to our Administrative Assistant, Hilda Crisman on an interim basis.

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### **Coffee with Karen is back to Anchor Coffee at 10 a.m. every Tuesday**

Even though Pastor Karen is away this week, our regulars will be meeting for a good cup of coffee and a good dose of fun.

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## **Carrying Light Through Lent: Star Word Reflections**

**During Epiphany, members of our congregation chose a "star word" to guide them in their spiritual journey for the year.**

**Each week of Lent we will publish a reflection by one of our members.**

### **Star Word: Confession**

**By Matt Ledford**

Read: Romans 10: 10-11; James 5:15-16

"Confession". To someone prone to making a LOT of mistakes, that is an intimidating word. Sometimes the idea of confessing my transgressions feels like a dragon's hot breath rolling down my chest. But there are many ways to approach this intimate word. For me, my first thought goes to a movie scene of a young man in a Catholic closet whispering to a patient priest. But confession also comes after we stand up from that saving altar and the glow shining from our face and the light of our eyes confesses to anyone near that we are a new creature; born of an incorruptible seed.

That kind of confession is honestly the best kind of proselytizing; Because that glow cannot be feigned. And, wow, is it contagious!

But let's go back to that scary kind of confession: The acknowledgment that we have

sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God. Yes, we have. We all have. We feel shame when we fail our Father. Feeling shame is okay; it's a powerful motivator. But don't linger in that shame. Confession is not about guilt and shame. Confession, as hard as it can be, is our ticket to joy, freedom, and power. The power of the cross is only gained if we admit it should be us hanging there. And confession is that admission. But fear not: Jesus Christ is waiting at the foot of that cross. And it has been my experience that wherever Jesus is, that's where I want to be.

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## Prayer Requests

### Family of Rosie Shepard

**Cindy and Ernie Winslow's Daughter (Amy DeSouza) and Grandson (Hendrix Michael DeSouza) (Grandson was born early and weighs only 3 pounds).**

Phyllis Austin, Wade & Brenda Church, Margaret Cooper, Brenda Dale, Jim Day, Amy DeSouza, Charles Drum, Hal Emery, Jimmy Epley, Kyson Farley, Ronnie Farley, Craig Freas, Charles Gambill, Terry & Anne Garwood, Cade Gibbs, Jennifer Gibby, Sherry Harrold, Kay Hayes, Kimberly Hughes, Francoise Hughes, Shannon Hughes, Mark Johnson, Max Joines, Brenda Kilby, Pam King, Tom Kinlaw, Barbara Kitchen, Aislynn Ladouceur, Bubby McEntire, Janice McHolland, Joe McMillan, John Nobles, Glenda Pierce, Adam Randolph, Debbie Reeves, Mary Jane Rich, James Rizoti, Mary Sallie Styers, Gerald Stierwalt, Mary Summerford, Keith Summerford, Amber Thornton, Donnie Thornton, Bob Taylor, Lee Tedder, Kim Tetzlaff, Cecil Walters, TA. Welborn, Dorothy Wilcox, Edgar Wilcox, Derrick Wilson, Becky Wilson, Seth Wilson, Ernie Winslow, Gavin Young, Hispanic neighbors, Ukraine, our planet in crisis, for God to bring Peace, for the hearts our president and our country's leadership to be "strangely warmed" with God's love, those affected by storms, our unhoused.

**SENIOR LIVING FACILITIES:** Brenda Dale (Wilkes Health and Rehab), Cathy Freeman (Harmony at Brookberry Farm/Winston), Wanda Garwood (Rose Glen Village), Barbara Groce (Wilkes Assisted Living), Caroline Randolph (The Pines in Davidson), Troy Harmon (Rose Glen Village).

*Rev. Karen H. Roberts,  
Pastor  
Wilkesboro United Methodist Church  
336-293-3697*

Series: Love That Will Not Let Us Go  
Sermon: Held in Love – Surprised by Grace  
Scripture: John 4:5-42

Third Sunday in Lent  
March 8, 2026  
Rev. Karen H Roberts

I'm not sure why, this year, Lent has an old-time country playlist running in my head – but it does. Every scripture has elicited some nostalgic blast from my A.M. radio childhood. As I read the story of Jesus and the woman at the well, I realized I was picturing her to look like Jeannie C Riley. Anybody else remember her? Jeannie C Riley had one wildly popular hit, written by master storyteller Tom T Hall – The day my momma socked it to the Harper Valley PTA. It was a song about a single mom, Mrs. Johnson, who all the other PTA moms gossiped about. She dressed too flashy – lived too loosely – and that was not a good way to raise a daughter. So, they sent a letter home explaining their “concern.” Which compels her to march into the next PTA meeting and spill each member’s dirty little secret for public consumption. Even as a kid, listening to this song I knew their only concern was in shaming Mrs. Johnson – not helping her. There is a darkness in human nature that finds casting shame such an easy thing to do. And if we’re honest, most of us have seen a little Harper Valley PTA behavior in our own lives too. We fill in the blanks of other people’s stories.

We’ve done it to the woman at the well for ages. We assumed that she was at the well in the heat of the day alone because she wanted to avoid the gossip and judgment of the other women in her village. We’ve assumed her five husbands and current live-in situation are the result of some wild ways or “lose” living. We assume much. We know little.

Here is what we do know: In Jesus’ day, only men held the power of divorce. If she had five husbands, then it is because of two things – either those men divorced her – or they died. And if they died, it is possible that she was caught in the ancient custom where a childless widow would be given to the next brother in marriage. She could have been passed from husband to husband as a product of culture, not morals. We also know that women had very little way of supporting themselves. A woman in that day was always at the mercy of a man. But marriages were business transactions. A dowry had to be paid. Laws had to be followed. It is possible that she had lost all ability to have another legal match declared. She had to live with a man who wasn’t her husband because she couldn’t afford it any other way.

In other words—her story may not be scandal at all. It may be survival. We assume much, but what we know can lead us to see that the shame we have cast upon her is unfair. So, this morning, let’s give her a reset and see what else is at work here.

Jesus is thirsty...and with all the talk of food and harvest, I’d say a bit hungry too. He goes to the well – a very famous well that you can still visit today. But the well is deep – it isn’t like a spring where he can dip his hand into the cool water and drink – he needs a jar to lower down – and he doesn’t have one.

The woman, whose name we don’t even learn, is thirsty too. We don’t know why she is at the well at an odd time of day, but I’m not ready to rule out the possibility that maybe she wasn’t even sure. Maybe she just had a nudge of the Spirit to go – and she went. The important detail is that she brings a jar...she holds the vessel that Jesus needs. So, he asks...and because we talk to strangers all the time, we don’t understand what a big ask this is – but in their culture Judean Jews didn’t talk to Samaritans – and men didn’t talk to women they weren’t related to. There are cultural barriers that Jesus is quickly climbing over. This is why she is shocked – Who are you to ask water of me? She isn’t

being cheeky – although their whole conversation has a playful hint to it – she really is curious about what kind of man is willing to ask for her help.

From their exchange we know she is witty, smart, and curious. Jesus is...well..Jesus... answering questions with puzzles and metaphors that have to be deciphered – which she easily does, unlike the Disciples who return all kinds of confused about what they are witnessing and hearing.

But she isn't confused – she understands fairly quickly what she is being offered – living water – refreshing peace – surprising grace. She is surprised when Jesus brings up her five husbands – but I don't think he does it to stir shame in her – I think, given what we know of their culture – he does it so she knows she is seen. She is a woman whose life has not been her own – but Jesus is there offering something just for her – the grace of being seen and still gathered – the grace of being seen AND being loved and needed and filled.

The Disciples are not as quick. The disciples are focused on lunch. Jesus is focused on harvest. They just want to leave – but Jesus is determined to linger here – hungering and thirsting for only one thing – to gather this woman and all who will listen into the beloved community.

And this is where the story brilliantly flips: She is so excited to be seen and loved that she runs off to tell the whole village what has happened and who she met. She runs to the village and says, "Come meet a man who has told me everything I've ever done." The truth is, he hadn't. He had told her one thing – about her marriages – but obviously that was the depth of her life as far as she was concerned...but Jesus knew there was more. And we can tell the moment she realizes there is more...it is the moment she runs toward town and leaves her jug behind. What was essential to draw water lays discarded in the dust while she runs to take living water to the people of her village.

Jesus asked for a drink, and she became the vessel that carried the water to all who would believe. Don't tell me Jesus didn't use women to preach. This woman is transformed from someone whose story was written by others into someone who writes her own story and calls others into God's kingdom.

It is hard to tell who is more surprised by grace here, the woman? The village? My money is on the disciples – who are still struggling to figure out what is happening in the place they really aren't even supposed to be...eating, drinking, laughing, with people they've been told to avoid. We can cut them a little slack; we know what it's like to get so focused on what we are not supposed to be doing that we miss what God is actually doing.

We are so quick to disqualify people from usefulness – but she's a woman, they are Samaritans, she's divorced, they aren't like us...the list could go on. We are then surprised that Jesus would ask someone like her for help – but maybe we are also surprised by the people He uses to transform us. Maybe a friend who struggled with addiction and now mentors others in recovery. Maybe an immigrant neighbor who gives generously and in life-giving ways to a community that at times rejects him. Maybe it's someone we wrote off.

But that is the power of grace – to gather that which we have separated – to affirm that which has felt defeated – to reveal that which has been hidden – to restore that which we thought was long lost. This story began in the wilderness of separation – Jew and Samaritan – male and female – woman and husbands – village and water-seekers – disciples and Jesus– all thirsty to have questions answered and things understood – are gathered around an ancient well to embrace mystery, to unite in their thirst and drink deeply of what Jesus offered.

Maybe part of why that old Harper Valley song stuck with people is that it gives voice to something deep in us. When shame has been pushed onto us, we want to push it right back. We want to sock it

to somebody. But the surprise of grace breaks that cycle. Jesus doesn't send this woman back into town with revenge on her lips. He sends her with an invitation. She came to the well carrying a jar. She left the well carrying a story. She doesn't say, "Let me tell you what's wrong with all of you." She runs through the village saying, "Come and see."

But let's not take our eyes off of the woman who makes this harvest happen, for she is our reminder that while the season of Lent begins by reminding us we are dust – the purpose of Lent is to remind us we are also called – called to be vessels that carry life-giving water to the world. It is our reminder that God's beloved kingdom is communal – we don't get there alone and we don't reside in it alone. Our labor is to gather, not exclude. To nourish, not deny. To love, not hate. To heal, not harm. To witness, not judge. We are dust, but we are also called to the harvest and be surprised by the grace over and over again – until the kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

*Let us turn our hearts toward God in prayer.*

Merciful and loving God,

you are the One who sees what we cannot see and knows what we cannot know. You meet us at the wells of our lives—in our ordinary routines, in our quiet thirsts, in the places where we wonder if anyone truly understands us. Today we lift before you the needs of this world you love. Open our hearts to see one another as you see us: with clarity, with compassion, and with the certainty that no one is beyond your gathering grace.

We pray for the nations of the earth.

Where conflict rises and weapons speak louder than wisdom, bring your peace. We remember especially those who now live under the shadow of war—civilians, children, families, and neighbors who wake each day in places shaped by violence they did not choose. We remember those who have fled, carrying only the weight of what they have lost. Protect those in danger. Comfort those who grieve. Guide leaders toward courage, restraint, and the hard work of justice and peace.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for our own nation.

In a time when suspicion and division can come easily, teach us again how to see one another clearly. Soften hearts that have grown quick to judge and slow to listen. We confess that we fill in the blanks of other people's stories without knowing the truth of their lives—their losses, their survival, their complicated journeys. Forgive us for the shame we have cast upon those we do not understand.

Help us become a people who seek understanding and who practice mercy in public life. Give us the courage to cross barriers—of politics, of culture, of assumption—to see the image of Christ in those we are tempted to dismiss. Make us bold in our curiosity about the stories of our neighbors, and generous in our willingness to be surprised by grace.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for our community.

We lift before you those who feel unseen or misunderstood—the neighbor whose story has been reduced to a single, shameful chapter; the family struggling in silence; the one whose life does not fit into the neat categories others have created. Meet them with your compassion. Make them know that they are *seen and still gathered* into your beloved community.

And give us the grace to notice one another more deeply—in our workplaces and neighborhoods, at our tables and on our streets. Help us become people who ask real questions, who listen to real stories, who refuse to let anyone among us feel invisible. As you lingered at the well with one woman and changed a village, teach us to linger with those we might easily pass by.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for your church.

Make us the kind of people Jesus gathers—people who cross barriers with kindness, who break down walls of separation, who offer welcome instead of suspicion. We are called to be vessels of your love, carriers of living water to a thirsty world. Fill us with your Spirit so that through our lives, others may hear the same invitation the woman heard at the well: "*Come and see.*"

Strengthen us that we might remember there is no holiness but social holiness, that grace transforms not just our hearts but our communities, that your beloved kingdom is communal and we do not reside in it alone. Give us courage to gather, not exclude; to nourish, not deny; to love, not hate; to heal, not harm; to witness, not judge.

And bless all who labor for your kingdom—those who teach, those who care for the sick, those who feed the hungry, those who speak for the voiceless. Remind them, and us, that the harvest is ready, and that you use ordinary vessels to carry extraordinary grace.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We place all these prayers before you with trust, knowing that your mercy is wider than our fears and your grace stronger than our divisions. You see what we cannot see. You know what we cannot know. And still, you meet us—at our wells, in our thirst, in the places where we doubt we belong—and you gather us into love....lead us Lord. Amen.