
Newaygo Congregational United Church of Christ

432 Quarterline Newaygo, MI 49337

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Rev. Jonathan Riedel, Pastor

“THE CHURCHMOUSE”

March 2022

Amistad Sunday

“Don’t return slaves to owners if they’ve escaped and come to you.” Deuteronomy 23:15 CEB

Sometimes it is wiser not to treat the Bible as God’s Little Instruction Book, straightforward and free from confusing context. Far better is to treat it as library, book after book reflecting a people’s centuries’-long journey with the Divine. Many issues that we ask the Bible to provide guidance on do not have singular recommendations. We have to sift carefully, balancing one citation against another until we come to a conclusion we can put to work. Our ancestors in this country found slavery to be one such issue. The Bible defends the holding of slaves. Slaves, in those times, were those who were paying off debts with labor or were prisoners of war. Both were common practices among the lands they lived among so they felt the need to address the issue in their law codes. The people of Israel were also aware of what it was like to be enslaved. The primal story was one of escape from bondage. Their laws forbade the return of runaway slaves and severe limits on any term of indentured servitude. Even in the early Christian period, Paul advised both Philemon to let his slave go and slaves to remain under the ownership of their masters because Christ could be seen as a slave doing the will of God. This conflicting double argument has rent Christian communities, caused wars, and contaminated conversations between people of different cultures and races ever since.

On the 20th of March, my denomination celebrates Amistad Sunday. This day commemorates an event that happened during August of 1839. A US. brig, on routine patrol, came across the Spanish ship La Amistad off the coast of Long Island. The ship had originally en route to Cuba with a hold full of illegal slaves. The captives revolted and seized control of the vessel. The U.S. Navy arrested those on board, setting in process of a long court battle that drove the burning issue of slavery to the forefront of the United State political arena. The revolted, led by a West African named Cinque, were imprisoned for murder and piracy. These charges were quickly dropped, but lingering moral and illegal questions about the human status of the men. Were they contraband? Were they prisoners of war? Did they need to be returned to their owners? Were they kidnapped people who needed to be set free?

Then President Martin Van Buren tried to have them quietly deported back to Cuba to appease Spain. But, a group of abolitionist clergy, raised money for a legal defense, secured translation services so that the accused could tell their side of the story, and took the U.S. Government to court. In January 1840, Hartford’s U.S. District Court ruled that the men were not Spanish slaves, had been illegally purchased, and should be repatriated. The government attorneys, under White House pressured to keep Spain happy, appealed the case to

the Circuit Court. That jurisdiction affirmed the lower court's verdict. This set the stage for a final showdown at the U.S. Supreme Court, which heard the case in the winter of 1841.

The defense did not take any chances with such a pivotal case so they hired John Quincy Adams, a former President and, at the time, a member of the House of Representatives. His hiring was not an act of showboating because he had successfully won a case before the justices and was a strong anti-slavery voice in Congress. Adams argued against Van Buren's decision to deport the men, reasoning that they were simply trying to achieve a promise placed within the Declaration of Independence-that every person has a right to life and liberty as an inalienable right. He prevailed upon the justices to live up to the ideals that lay at the very core of the American experiment.

On March 9th, in a 7 to 1 decision, the Supreme Court agreed with Adams. They recognized the freedom of Cinque and his fellow captives. They did not, however, provide any resources to pay for their journey back to Africa. Even the boat they commandeered was sold for scrap and the profits rendered to the U.S. Navy for their troubles. Once again, the abolitionists who had paid for their legal expenses raises the funds needed for the tickets for their voyage. By November of 1841, the men were on their way back to West Africa. This is one of the few Nineteenth century American legal cases where blacks took the advantage and emerged with some semblance of their rights and dignity intact.

It is a small beginnings perhaps but it was sign of greater victories to come.

I only discovered this story a few years ago and even then I only knew it in outline. The details I first encountered had a familiar ring to them. Heroic white men had to come to some poor unfortunates rescue. Now when I reflect on this story I think about Cinque and the men who took over the slave ship. Yes, I knew they committed murder in slaying their captors and they committed theft by taking over the boat. Yet in my heart, I do not blame them. They knew the fate they had waiting for them. They knew they would never see their families again if they did not do something extreme. Met by a violent, dehumanizing set of circumstances, they rose up. It is easy for me in my comfort to wish for a pacifist's resolution. What they did was sharp and courageous and may have been the only solution they had available to them. The true tragedy here was how their society had treated them as non-human, non-human to be sold as property, leaving them with few options to protect their humanity.

This brings me back to where I started from-the Bible as a library full of the experience of God and human interaction. It demands that I read it deeply-not for picking out verses to win easy arguments but to note the overarching aims of where God wants us to go and to grow. And my reading leads me to believe God calls me to recognize the unique gifts and abilities of each human being as a created gift of God-no matter what their color, their ethnicity, their gender, or their sexual orientation. I am called to work for a world where each can reach their God-given potential, even if I must sacrifice something of my comfort and my preconceived notions in the process. Only then can we have hope in a better world, a world more to God's liking. That is not a simple task but it is the only one that matters. Amistad Sunday is a reminder that there is still much work that remains to be done.

The Rev. Jonathan D. Riedel-Pastor, Newaygo Congregational United Church of Christ

What's Happening at NCUCC March 2022

Events, Anniversaries and Birthdays

Worship is in person and on ZOOM at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84864699096>
or phone 1-312-626-6799 ID: 848 6469 9096

Pastor Jon's Tuesday noon class is in person. Will also be on ZOOM by request
or due to bad weather. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84229731057>
or phone 1-312-626-6799 ID: 842 2973 1057

Wednesday Night Prayer Time 7 pm. Call 978-990-5000 then 283560#

Tu. 1: Noon class - "How To Be An Anti-Racist"/Survival
Don S. b'day
Linda S. b'day

We. 2: Ash Wednesday Service 7 pm
Communion and Sharing of Ashes
The Readings of the Season

Th. 3: Administration Meeting 10 am
Circles 6-8 pm

Fr. 4:

Sa. 5:

Su. 6: Worship w/Communion 10 am
First Sunday of Lent
The Rev. Sal Sapienza
"Open and Affirming and the Life of the Church"

Mo. 7:

Tu. 8: Noon class - "How To Be An Anti-Racist"/Summary

We. 9: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)

Th. 10: Worship & Pastoral Care 11 am (phone)

Fr. 11:

Sa. 12:

Su. 13: Worship 10 am
Second Sunday of Lent
"Stories We Could Tell"
Luke 13: 31-35
"Strong and Tender"

Mo. 14:

Tu. 15: Noon class - Biblical Holidays-Passover

We. 16: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)

Th. 17: Council Meeting 10 am

Fr. 18:

Sa. 19:

Su. 20: Third Sunday of Lent
"Stories We Could Tell"
Luke 13: 1-9
"Open Invitation"

Mo. 21: Audrey E. b'day

Tu. 22: Noon class - Biblical Holidays-Day of Atonement

We. 23: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)

Th. 24:

Fr. 25:

Sa. 26:

Su. 27: Fourth Lent
"Stories We Could Tell"
Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32
"Embracing Love"

Mo. 28:

Tu. 29: Noon class - Biblical Holidays- Succouth

We. 30: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)

Th. 31: Circles 6-8 pm

Members and friends in need of Prayers: Steve D., Allen R., Marilyn S., Carolyn S., Fred V., Gloria W.

Deadline for information to be printed in the April newsletter is Wednesday, March 30.

Evening Prayer

On Wednesdays at 7 pm we will join over the phone for a time of meditation and prayers for ourselves and others. To join us, dial 1- 978-990-5000 then 283560#.

Mission and Social Action Community Outreach

Check out the bulletin board in the main hall to see how the church's outreach missions have been helping the community.

We continue to ask for input from you, the congregation, on outreach missions that may interest you and would help fill a need in the community. Please give your ideas to any M&SA Commission member.

Thank you,
Mission and Social Action Commission

Tuesday Noon Adult Forum

This month we have a variety pack of topics to discuss. For March 1 and 8th, we will conclude our discussion on How To Be An Anti-Racist by focusing on Survival and by summarizing how we can apply our faith to how to be more inclusive. On March 15, we will start a new series on Biblical Holidays. We will look closely at the stories behind several Jewish and Christian celebrations. Here is a schedule of topics.

March 15-Passover

March 22-Day of Atonement

March 31-Succouth

Open and Affirming

On Sunday March 6 Rev. Salvatore Sapienza, pastor of Douglas UCC, will be at NCUCC and give a sermon on living as an Open and Affirming Church. He will talk about the affects becoming a certified Open and Affirming church had on the Douglas church. Please plan to attend in-person or on ZOOM.

The following two books and website are good resources of information:

"A Time to Embrace: Same-Gender Relationships in Religion, Law, and Politics"-William Stacy Johnson-a good overview of the issues from a mainline Presbyterian Perspective

"God and the Gay Christian"-Matthew Vines-an excellent overview of the issue from a more conservative Evangelical perspective. Vines has also prepared some excellent filmed lectures on the topic which can be accessed by typing his name into the YouTube search engine.

www.welcomingresources.org/welcoming

Ash Wednesday Service

NCUCC will be having an Ash Wednesday Service March 2 at 7 pm. The service will include the receiving of ashes and communion. The service will be in person and also a live audio/visual feed is available on ZOOM using the following link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87605817945>

Those without internet access can receive an audio feed by using the following phone number and meeting ID:
1-312-626-6799 Meeting ID: 876 0581 7945

Ways to Worship with Us

Here is a reminder of the different ways that our worship services are available to you.

- Everyone is welcome to attend our services in-person every Sunday at 10 am.
- You can also access a live audio/visual broadcast using ZOOM on your computer or smart phone by using the following link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84864699096>
Those without internet access can call the following phone number and Meeting ID:
1-312-626-6799 Meeting ID: 848 6469 9096.
- If you would like to access the services on your own schedule, they are added to our website www.newaygoucc.org and Facebook page following each service.
- Links to Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve services will be provided as needed.

Treasurer's Report Jan 16 – Feb 15, 2022

Income

Jan 16	\$1,459.00
Jan 23	\$2,525.00
Jan 30	\$ 680.00
Feb 6	\$2,865.00
Feb 14	<u>\$ 750.00</u>
Total	\$8,279.00

Expenses: \$6,492.87

Difference: \$1,786.13

Phillips Fund \$192,120.78

Family Fund \$82,409.63

Thanks for all your generosity. We are truly blessed.

Dawn Anderson Treasurer