

**Red Lodge Community Church
United Church of Christ**

PO Box 786, 308 S. Broadway Ave.,
Red Lodge, MT 59068

www.redlodgecommunitychurch.com

406-446-1444

Seventh Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2026

GATHERING MUSIC

Dr. Lynell Kruckeberg

WELCOME

Lance Franz

Welcome to Red Lodge Community Church, United Church of Christ.
No matter who you are, or where you are in life's journey,
You are welcome here.

RINGING OF THE BELL

We invite the children and anyone who would like to join them to ring
the church bell.

PRELUDE

Come, settle into worship, with a gift of music.

*CALL TO WORSHIP

from Psalm 33

XXXXX

Shout joyfully to the Lord!

Sing to God with a new song!

Because the Lord's word is right;

The Lord's faithful love fills the whole earth.

Look here: the Lord's eyes watch all who honor God,

all who wait for God's faithful love.

We put our hope in the Lord.

The One who is our help and our shield.

Lord, let your faithful love surround us,

because we wait for you.

*OPENING PRAYER

God of resurrection power, break through the locked doors of our certainty,

encourage our wonderings and our questions.

Break through the walls of our fears and our longings,

that we might trust your steadfast love and kindness.

Break through our doubts and confusion,

that we might come to know your presence more fully.

When we seek to judge ourselves or others,

open the locked doors of our hearts

and give us the patience of the risen Christ,

in whose name we pray. Amen.

*HYMN

“Jesus, Still Lead On”

TNCH # 446

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Please greet one another with a sign of Christ’s peace.

TIME WITH CHILDREN

Patty Schuessler

THE LORD’S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day, our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen.

Children are invited downstairs for Sunday School.

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 32:24-30

But Jacob stayed apart by himself, and a man wrestled with him until dawn broke.

When the man saw that he couldn't defeat Jacob, he grabbed Jacob's thigh and tore a muscle in Jacob's thigh as he wrestled with him.

The man said, "Let me go because the dawn is breaking."

But Jacob said, "I won't let you go until you bless me."

He said to Jacob, "What's your name?"

And he said, "Jacob."

Then he said, "Your name won't be Jacob any longer, but Israel, because you struggled with God and with men and won."

Jacob also asked and said, "Tell me your name."

But he said, "Why do you ask for my name?" and he blessed Jacob there.

Jacob named the place Peniel, "because I've seen God face-to-face, and my life has been saved."

John 20:24-29

Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn't with the disciples when Jesus came.

The other disciples told him, "We've seen the Lord!"

But he replied, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won’t believe.”

After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them.

Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them.

He said, “Peace be with you.”

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!”

Thomas responded to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus replied, “Do you believe because you see me? Happy are those who don’t see and yet believe.”

The word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

MESSAGE “Wrestling, Struggling, Hope” Lance Franz

Early Years in Church

- Parents made me go to church
- Confirmation classes were primarily memorization, and a lot of emphasis on sin and guilt, earning redemption
- Confirmed in early 60’s
- Continued to go to church until college
- No significant intimate relationship with God
- Left religion in college, mid 60’s significant social upheaval

Mid forties

- I needed help to overcome a difficult time in my life
- I was in a program emphasizing a spiritual connection to remove self-centered behaviors, and to encourage self-analysis
- The requirement was to seek a God of my own

understanding

- I wrestled with that search, not willing to go back to religion

Wrestling with God

- Unlike Jacob, I didn't physically wrestle with God

- I did mentally wrestle and generally at night, when all was quiet and everyday distractions were behind me

- I finally came to believe in an unconditionally loving God

- I found God, accepting the gift of Grace, not by earning it but by accepting it

- This was a significant step for me and allowed me to really do some serious self-analysis, which I could not do by myself

- God helped me eliminate my self-rationalization that had led to my problems and God continues to help me

- Unlike Jacob, I did not see the face of God, and I cannot describe God to you, other than I feel His presence

- When I have gratitude, I can love myself and love others, and I am at the closest connection to God

The Doubt, Unbelief, and Struggle

- Thomas was a devout follower of Jesus and was willing to walk with him knowing that it might be violent

- After Jesus was crucified, Thomas thought that the movement had come to an end. He, like the other disciples were fearful that their lives were in danger

- Death was an ultimate end, resurrection was a difficult concept

- Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the other disciples, but they told Thomas what they saw and experienced

- Thomas was having a difficult time taking in the crucifixion and the appearance of a risen Christ

- Scott Peck relates to this difficulty in a section on Grace in the last third of the book *The Road Less Traveled*

- Peck was a very learned man, but he made a statement that has stuck with me, "No matter how smart or intelligent you are, there are some things that you will never understand"

- Thomas continued to meet with the disciples, he did not isolate, although they were fearful of the Romans. They were in hiding and meeting behind closed doors.

- There is little mention of what the disciples did during the

eight days that occurred between the first appearance of Jesus and his second appearance.

- The eight days are significant. There is tension and struggle, yet it is on God's time and not on the disciples' time.
- After eight days, Thomas is with the other disciples when Jesus appears. Jesus tells Thomas to touch him.
- Jesus was well aware of Thomas' difficulty of understanding, Jesus did not require blind faith, he accepted Thomas struggle.
- Thomas immediately believes "My Lord and my God!"
- Jesus says "Happy are those who don't see and yet believe"
- I had to be one of those who believed without seeing, I had to take that leap of faith, beyond what I could see or reason.

Hope

- I had to wrestle with God, accept Grace, and I had to struggle with the fact that there are some things that I will never understand
- I am glad that I did, and that my life took a new course and has been a joyful journey
- Like all of you, I have my struggles, and there are times when I think that life isn't fair, that bad things happen to good people, and my faith is filled with doubt
- A Pastor friend of mine once said "I grow in the dark, I love in the light"

- How true that is. That when those struggles are over, my faith has been tested, and I can be living life on life's terms, then hope is fulfilled, sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly
- With that Hope may you find yourselves "loving in the light"
- Peace be with you

HYMN

"Be Now My Vision"

TNCH # 451

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Gather prayer requests ...

Let us offer our prayers of intercession to God, saying,
Keep us in faith **that we may have life.**

Resurrecting God, in a doubting world,
Keep us in faith **that we may have life.**

We pray for the church universal.
Breath on us your Holy Spirit,
that we honor and pass on the great inheritance we have received.
Keep us in faith **that we may have life.**

We pray for the Earth,
that we may touch her wounds with healing care and love.
Keep us in faith **that we may have life.**

We pray for the whole world,
its nations, its leader, and its people,
that your wisdom and peace may prevail.
Keep us in faith **that we may have life.**

We pray for all those in need,
the suffering, the oppressed, the ill, the dying,
and all those who care for them.
Keep us in faith **that we may have life.**

We pray for ourselves, our families, and those we love
Keep us in faith **that we may have life.**

Blessed are you, O God,
who through Jesus Christ, crucified and risen,
and in the community of the Holy Spirit,
gives us an inheritance that is imperishable and unfading,
now and forever. Amen.

JOYS AND CONCERNS OF THE CHURCH

MISSION MOMENT: STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Siblings in Christ, we have no good apart from God.
Therefore let us keep God at the forefront of our minds
and give generously from all that we have been given,
that others may also receive from the fullness of God.

OFFERTORY

*RESPONSE OF PRAISE

TNCH # 785

**We give you but your own, whate'er the gift may be;
All that we have is yours alone, we give it gratefully.**

*PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**Generous God, you are our portion and our cup. In you our
hearts are glad, our souls rejoice, and our bodies rest.
Bless and multiply offerings and pledges that they may bring the
joy of your presence more deeply into the world. Amen.**

*HYMN

“ My Hope is Built on Nothing Less”

TNCH # 403

*BENEDICTION (from Romans 15:13)

May the God of hope
fill you with all joy and peace in faith
so that you overflow with hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Go in peace Amen.

*SENDING SONG

“Halleluja”

TNCH # 236

Please join us downstairs for a time of fellowship.

An asterisk () notes an invitation to stand in body or spirit;
Congregational parts are in **bold print**.*



We are an Open and Affirming Church

Serving

today:

Deacons.....	Kiyoko
Carlson, Cathy Tobin	
Technology.....	Jay West, Leslie Bowman
Nursery Attendant	xxxxxxx
Sunday School.....	Liz Beard, Kylee Jurvi
Fellowship Time Host(s).....	Beard Family

Pastor Teresa Clark is available for **pastoral care** visits, including emergencies. Call or text her at 406-717-9745 or email her at rlccminister@gmail.com.

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Opening Prayer is adapted from *Before the Amen: Creative Resources for Worship*, editors Maren C. Tirabassi and Maria I. Tirabassi (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2007), 88.
Prayers of the People, Invitation to the Offering and Prayer of Dedication adapted from *Feasting on the Word Worship Companion, Liturgies for Year A, Volume 1*, ed. Kimberly Bracken Long (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 140-141.