

UPCOMING SERMON SERIES: THE SEVENTH STORY

This summer, we will begin a new sermon series called The Seventh Story. The basic idea is simple but powerful: the stories we tell shape the lives we live. Some stories teach us to see the world through “us” and “them.” These stories are old, familiar, and deeply embedded in our families, churches, communities, politics, and culture. They can feel normal because we have heard them for so long.

But Jesus tells a different story. The Seventh Story is a story of love, reconciliation, liberation, justice, mercy, and peace. It is a story where no one has to lose in order for someone else to win, where power is used for healing instead of control, where enemies are not dehumanized, where neighbors are not treated as threats, and where Love becomes the main character. Over eight weeks, we will explore these stories together:

- June 7 — The Stories We Live By
- June 14 — Us Over Them: The Domination Story
- June 21 — Us Against Them: The Revolution Story
- June 28 — Us Apart from Them: The Isolation Story
- July 5 — The Nation-as-God Story
- July 12 — Us Without Them: The Purification Story
- July 19 — Us Above / Beneath Them: Accumulation and Victimization
- July 26 — The Seventh Story: Love Is the Protagonist

This series will invite us to pay attention to the stories shaping our hearts, our relationships, our church, and our world. Some weeks may be challenging. Some may feel deeply personal. Some may name patterns we would rather avoid. But the purpose is not shame or blame. The purpose is to listen again for the story Jesus keeps telling: a story big enough to heal what fear, violence, division, and scarcity have broken.

The world keeps teaching us “us versus them.” Jesus keeps inviting us into a better story, where there is only us.

HELP SHAPE WORSHIP THIS SUMMER

This summer at First Church, we are planning a couple of fun and meaningful ways for the congregation to help shape our worship together.

First, we would love to know your favorite hymns! Throughout the summer, we will be using hymn suggestions from the congregation as part of our worship planning. Whether it is a hymn that has carried you through a difficult season, one that reminds you of someone you love, or simply one you love to sing, we want to hear about it.

Second, Pastor Jeremy will be preaching several “Ask the Pastor” style sermons this summer. These messages will be shaped by questions, thoughts, and topics submitted by the congregation. This is a chance to ask about faith, Scripture, theology, the church, life, or anything else you would like to hear reflected on in worship.

You can submit both hymn suggestions and sermon questions on your connection card and turn it in any Sunday between May 17 and June 7.

PHOTO DIRECTORY

Photos will be taken each Sunday in May during fellowship time after worship at the Downtown Campus. There’s no need to sign up—just stop by the photo area when you’re ready. Photos can be taken for individuals, couples, or families. Gary Poole, our photographer, will have prints available for purchase directly through him—no pressure, just an option if you’re interested. Print sizes will include 8×10, 11×14, and 16×20.

What's Happening

SUNDAY, MAY 31

9:30AM - Worship @ Paris (North) Campus
10AM - Worship @ First Church (Downtown) Campus
11:15AM - Fellowship / Coffee Hour @ First Church (Downtown) Campus

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3

10AM - SOUL Circle @ Downtown Campus
5:30PM - “Purpose Driven Life” Dinner / Book Study @ North Campus
6:00PM - UMMMC Leadership Team @ Downtown Campus

THURSDAY, JUNE 4

5:30PM - Community Dinner @ Downtown Campus

PASTOR JEREMY - UNAVAILABLE MAY 26 - JUNE 6

Pastor Jeremy will be out of town and unavailable May 26 - June 6. During this time, please contact the staff member who best aligns with your needs. For administrative or general questions, or if you don't know which staff person you need to talk with, please contact Barbara Erb in the church office.

FAMILY MEETING & POTLUCK - JUNE 7

On Sunday, June 7, we'll gather for a UMMMC Family Meeting and Potluck immediately following worship at our downtown campus. This is one of the key ways we come together as a whole church—to connect, share a meal, and stay engaged in the life and direction of our ministry. You'll hear updates about what's happening across our campuses and where we're headed next. Everyone is invited, and if you're able to bring a dish to pass, it's always appreciated. Make plans to stay and be part of the conversation!

SENIOR ENRICHMENT DAY - WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24

Senior Enrichment Day will be held at Big Rapids High School on Wednesday, June 24, 2026. The seminar series offered this year includes a choice of more than 40 diverse educational sessions, providing a “one-stop shop” for vital information for seniors. Such options include fitness classes, painting, long-term care, and financial planning options, help with Medicare, Veteran's benefits, and more. The sessions are 45 minutes in length and are designed for seniors, their children, and caregivers. Registration materials for the Senior Enrichment Day may be found in the Information Center outside of the church office. You may also register online: www.seniorenrichmentday.com

STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION

Barbara Erb - Director of Administrative Services
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Rev. Jeremy Wicks - Executive Pastor
jeremy@ummecosta.org / (231) 224-6545

To schedule an appointment with Pastor Jeremy, contact Barbara Erb or schedule online @ calendly.com/jeremy-ummecosta

Week of May 31 - June 6, 2026

Family News



UNITED METHODIST MINISTRIES OF MECOSTA COUNTY

304 ELM STREET, BIG RAPIDS MI 49307 • (231) 796-7771 • WWW.UMMECOSTA.ORG

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE HOURS: TUES - FRIDAY, 9AM - 3PM
PASTOR OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAY & THURSDAY, 9AM - 12PM & 12:30PM - 3PM

NORTH CAMPUS - PARIS

109 Lincoln St
Paris, MI 49338
ummecosta.org/paris

Worship Gathering
in-person
Sundays @ 9:30AM

DOWNTOWN CAMPUS - FIRST

304 Elm Street
Big Rapids, MI 49307
bigrapidsfirst.org

Worship Gathering
in-person and online
Sundays @ 10AM

Order of Worship - May 31, 2026

A SERVICE IN SONG AND STORY

Prelude

Welcome & Announcements

* Call to Worship (Reader / *People*)

We gather with songs old and new.

Songs of hope, grace, justice, mercy, and praise.

We gather with melodies that carried faith through generations.

Songs that comforted the grieving and strengthened the weary.

We gather to worship the One who is faithful through every season.

Let us sing with grateful hearts.

* Hymn - "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" UMH #140

Children's Message

Opening Prayer (UNISON)

God of every generation, you have met your people in whispered prayers, spoken words, and songs lifted in faith. Today, as we sing familiar hymns and hear the stories behind them, remind us that Your grace has carried Your people through every age. Open our hearts to worship, encourage us through community, and let these songs once again become prayers upon our lips. Amen.

Scripture Reading - Psalm 100 (NRSVUE)

Hymn Story - "It Is Well With My Soul"

Hymn - "It Is Well With My Soul" UMH #377

Testimony Moment - What hymn has carried you through a difficult season?

Scripture Reading - Psalm 8:1-9 (NRSVUE)

* The Doxology, UMH #95

Hymn Story - "How Great Thou Art"

Hymn - "How Great Thou Art", UMH #77

Pastoral Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn Story - "Blessed Assurance"

* Blessing and Sending

* Hymn - "Blessed Assurance", UMH #369

Postlude

Altar flowers are given in celebration of Charles Madden's birthday.

* PLEASE RISE IN BODY OR SPIRIT

Welcome to First Church!

Welcome to First Church, the downtown campus of United Methodist Ministries of Mecosta County - we're so glad you're here! This is a community where every person belongs, every story matters, and every question is welcome. If you're new or exploring, we'd love to get to know you. You can learn more about who we are and find helpful information for your first visit at bigrapidsfirst.org.

Need directions? Curious about something? Our welcome team is nearby and ready to help. Truly, we're delighted to worship with you today.

NOTES:



Check In Here

SERVING TODAY - MAY 31

Reader: Pat Little

Ushers: Pat and Marion Williamson

Greeter: Barbara Ross

Nursery: No Nursery Today

Fellowship Host: Brenda Chaffee

Organist: Shirley Jernstadt

Accompanist: Kathy Bell

Tech Team: Ken Draves, Gary Poole

SERVING NEXT WEEK - JUNE 7

Reader: Emmanuel Jadhav

Ushers: Pat & Marion Williamson

Greeter: Nancy Spedowski

Nursery: Sarah DeLany, TBD

Fellowship Host: Family Meeting & Potluck

Communion Stewards: Marlene Rodgers, Cheryl Richardson

THINK ABOUT IT THIS WEEK - THE SONGS THAT CARRY US

There is something powerful about the songs we carry with us.

Long after sermons are forgotten and conversations fade, hymns often remain. They echo through hospital rooms and funeral homes. They rise from sanctuaries during baptisms, weddings, and moments of deep grief. They become prayers when we no longer know what to say.

This Sunday's service is centered around hymns not simply because they are familiar or nostalgic, but because they teach us something about faith itself.

"It Is Well With My Soul" reminds us that faith is not pretending everything is okay. It is learning to trust that we are not abandoned even in sorrow.

"How Great Thou Art" calls us to slow down long enough to notice wonder again — to pay attention to beauty, creation, mercy, and grace in a world that constantly demands our attention elsewhere.

"Blessed Assurance" reminds us that our hope is rooted not in certainty about life, but in the assurance that we are loved and held by grace.

These songs endure because they were born from real human experiences: grief, awe, perseverance, joy, and trust. They remind us that worship is not about escaping life. It is about bringing our whole selves honestly before God.

QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON THIS WEEK

- What hymn or song has stayed with you throughout your life?
- Why do you think music has such power to shape memory and faith?
- Are there songs that carried you through grief, uncertainty, or difficult seasons?

ACTION STEPS FOR THE WEEK

- Listen intentionally to a favorite hymn or worship song this week and pay attention to the words.
- Spend a few quiet moments outside noticing creation without distraction.
- Reach out to someone who may need encouragement and remind them they are not alone.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

God of every generation, thank you for the songs that have carried your people through every season of life. When we are weary, remind us that we are not alone. When we are overwhelmed, help us notice beauty and grace again. And when words fail us, let songs of faith become prayers within us. Shape our hearts through worship, and teach us to live with compassion, hope, and gratitude. Amen.

The church has always sung its faith — through joy and sorrow, certainty and doubt, peace and struggle. May we continue that song together, not only on Sunday mornings, but in the way we live, love, and move through the world each day.

SINGING METHODISTS

From the very beginning of the Methodist movement, singing was central to worship, spiritual growth, and community life. Charles Wesley alone wrote more than 6,000 hymns, many of which were intended to teach theology in ways ordinary people could understand and carry with them into daily life. Early Methodists often gathered in homes, fields, and small meeting spaces, and singing became one of the ways faith was formed and shared. Hymns taught people about grace, justice, mercy, holiness, hope, and the love of God long before many had access to formal theological education. In many ways, Methodists learned their theology by singing it.

That tradition continues today. Hymns connect generations. They remind us who we are. They give voice to grief, joy, doubt, gratitude, and hope. Sometimes they become prayers when spoken words are difficult to find.

Your generosity makes a difference! To avoid any confusion in our giving systems, please make your checks out to **First Church. Thank you for your continued support!**