

# Bethany

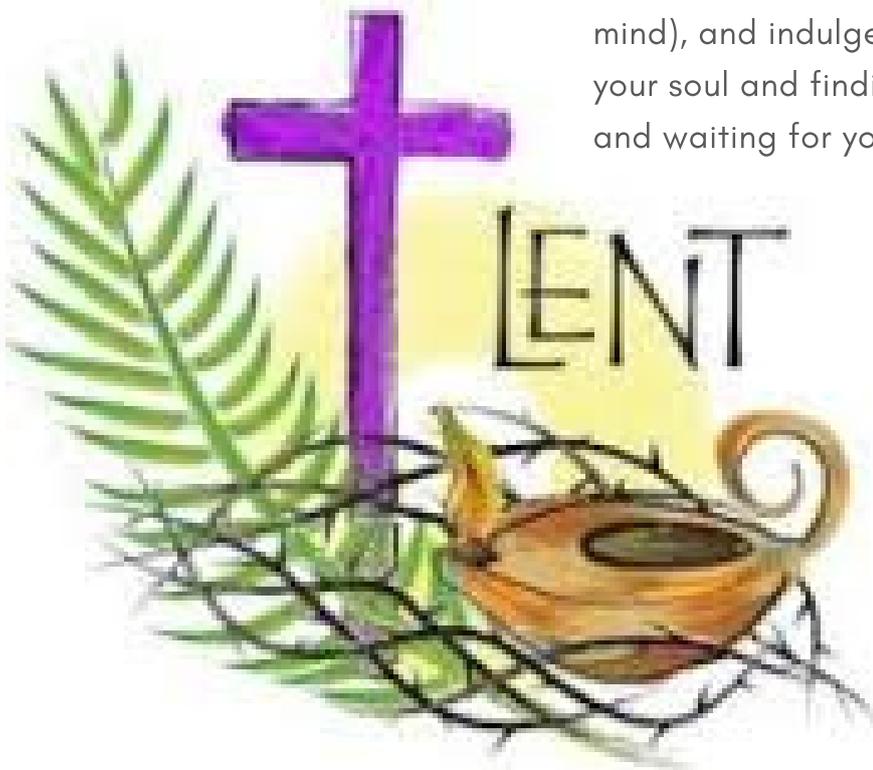
## UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

3501 W 1st Ave ♦ Denver, CO ♦ 80219

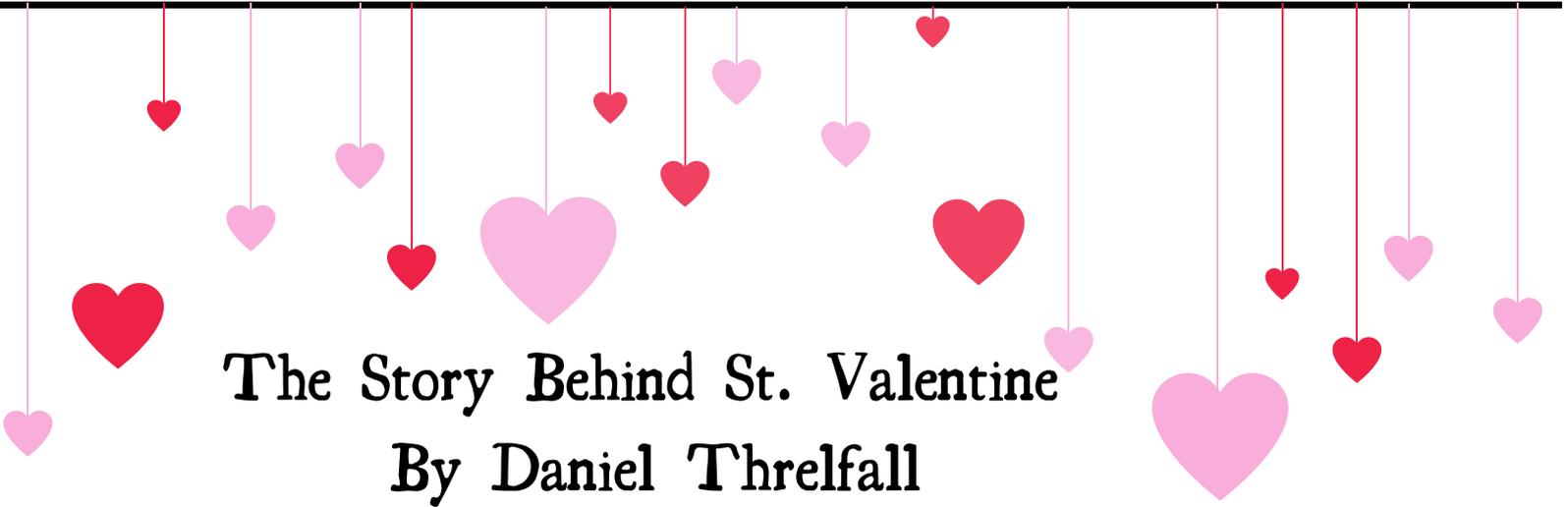
What is it about winter that makes comfort food like stews, mashed potatoes, noodles, and popcorn so appealing? We have had such a mild winter here in Denver so far, temperatures near 60 degrees some days, and yet I crave those starchy, yummy, creamy, warm and luscious dishes that only our mothers seemed to have been able to make. I can make a pretty good stew, but my mom's was something really special.

January moves into February and the start of Lent. For me, Lent is a time of cozy introspection - although, as with all introspection, at times there is a sharp edge to what I find deep in my heart. The things I didn't say to those I love last year, the thoughts I didn't share - or even worse, the thoughts I did share. I turn to the comforting arms of God when I am feeling particularly prickly towards myself - reminding me that I am enough. I am worth the time I take to look deep into my soul as I prepare for this journey of Lent.

So, at this time of year, I pray that you will indulge in the comfort foods of choice (keeping your health in mind), and indulge in taking time to look deep inside your soul and finding that Jesus is there loving you and waiting for you to love yourself. Amen.



*Love, Pastor Denise*

The page is decorated with numerous hearts of various sizes and shades of pink and red, hanging from the top edge by thin vertical lines. The hearts are scattered across the top half of the page, creating a festive and romantic atmosphere.

## The Story Behind St. Valentine

By Daniel Threlfall

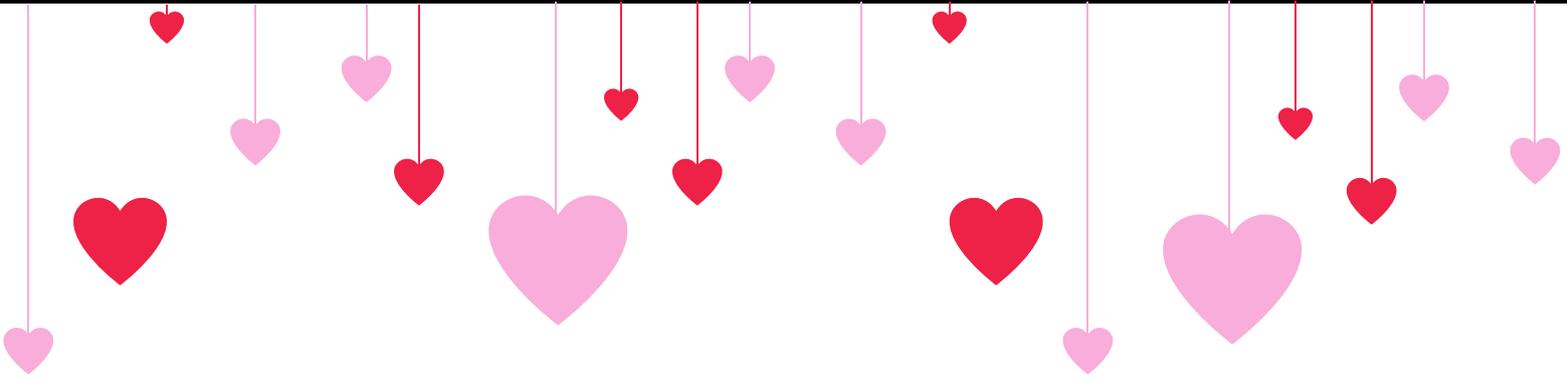
We don't usually think of Valentine's Day as an explicitly Christian holiday. Other major holidays have obvious Christian origins: Christmas (Christ's incarnation) and Easter (Christ's resurrection), sure, but Valentine's Day? It's true that Valentine's Day is not connected with an event in the life of our Lord like Christmas and Easter are, but Valentine's Day does have some intriguing Christian roots. Along with most holidays, Valentine's Day has suffered from its share of commercialization and confusion, yet the poignant story of the original Valentine's Day is worth remembering.

In the interest of full disclosure, after about 1,700 years of history, it's kind of hard to know exactly who Valentine was and what he did. The truth is, there were probably several Valentines. Also, the truth is probably not as highly dramatized as we may wish. The truth is embedded somewhere in the depths of history, never to be known until we get to heaven. What follows may be part tradition and part truth, but completely fascinating.

The year was 270. The Roman Empire was engaged in a desperate attempt to retain the Pax Romana that had endured for centuries. Christianity was active during the 3rd century. Although Christ had died over two centuries prior, Christians were eagerly propagating their faith and churches were springing up everywhere. These early centuries of the church were the times of the great apologists such as Clement, Ignatius, Origen, Polycarp, Athanasius, and Chrysostom. But the 3rd century was also the time of the Christian martyrs. Prior to Constantine, the empire was not friendly to Christianity—not at all. Claudius, the reigning emperor of the time, was a warlord, intent only upon preserving his empire and routing his enemies. Christianity was not on his like list. His primary interests were military, and he would stoop to nothing to ensure that his mighty army remained loyal to him.

It was Claudius's maniacal grip on the military that led him to install a very foolish policy empire-wide. Claudius had a problem on his hands when it came to the army. Believe it or not, his men would actually prefer to get married and stay home with their wives and families rather than risk their lives and sacrifice for their country! Military recruiting was suffering because of the petulant affection between man and wife. Love was getting in the way of patriotism! Claudius would have none of it. Being the man with the big stick, he could make laws and enforce them, too.

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## The Story Behind St. Valentine (continued)

So he did. Claudius passed a law forbidding anyone to get married. Obviously, this was an outrage. Was he serious? No marriage?

Living in this anti-Christian and anti-marriage climate, was Valentine. Valentine was a Christian priest in Rome. He knew from the Bible that marriage was good and honored by God. He knew that marriage was lawful according to the Christian faith, so he took it upon himself to perform Christian marriages—contrary to the law. As a priest, he performed secret marriages for couples who desired to be married bravely defying the anti-marriage edict. It wasn't just marriages that Valentine was working on. He was also trying to protect persecuted Christians who were being chased down and haunted by the aggressive Roman leaders. Christians knew that they could flee to Valentine to find protection.

Valentine was taking a huge risk. Not only was it absolutely forbidden to marry or to perform marriages, but it was also a criminal offense to aid or abet Christians—especially ones whom the Roman Empire had on their hit list! Valentine was enmeshed in what the Roman Empire considered high treason and traitorous activity. Although he was being loyal to his faith, he was flying in the face of Roman law. The Roman government hunted him down and locked him up in prison. Now, Valentine—protector of Christians and performer of marriages—was himself suffering for his love and devotion to God.

It got worse. Valentine, true to his bold character, tried to convert Emperor Claudius to Christianity. This had gone too far. Claudius demanded that Valentine recant his faith and submit to the cruel and godless tyranny of Rome. Valentine staunchly refused. The Roman Prefect condemned him to torture and death. He was beaten violently, then beheaded.

Valentine was martyred for his faith.

According to legend (and probably false), Valentine himself fell in love during his time of imprisonment. The daughter of the prison guard met Valentine and fell head over heels in love. As the story goes, their romance was the prototypical saga of steadfast love, broken only by the tragic death of Valentine. He wrote a note to her, allegedly penned on February 14, the day before he was beheaded. He signed the note, "Love from your Valentine." Henceforth, we have the first Valentine's Day card.

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Dear Friends at Bethany UM,

Thank you so much for your support in 2020. We know that this was a difficult year for your congregation with COVID and the frequent closures and small meeting sizes. Your efforts to help us this year mean so much more as our number of people being served jumped by over 50%. Our records show that you helped us out in the following ways:

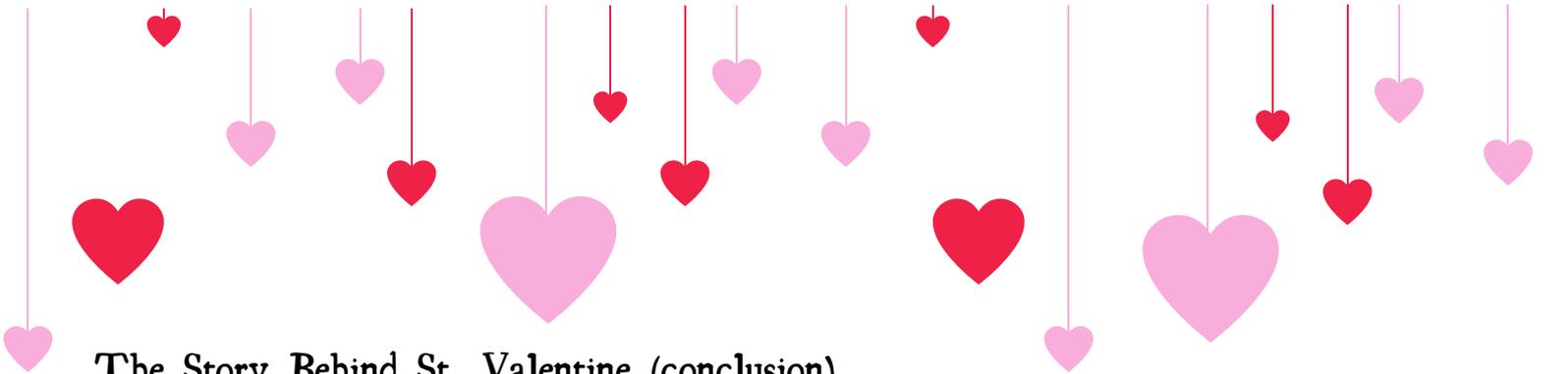
- Donated 84 pounds of food valued at \$163.00
- Donated 7 pounds of soup on Souper Bowl Sunday

Thank you so much for your generosity and support.

Joyce Neufeld

Executive Director

303 935-3428



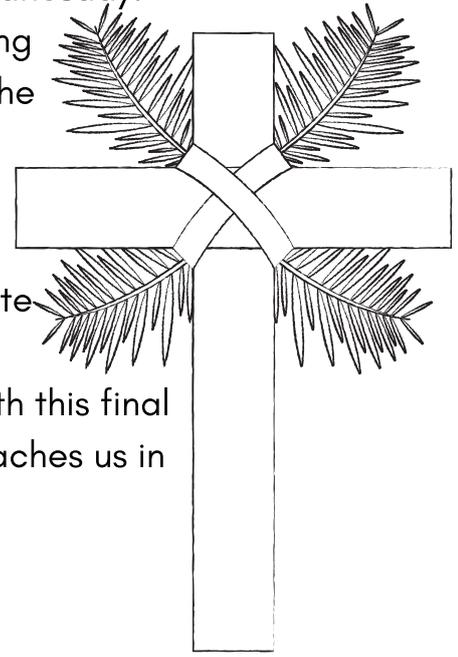
### The Story Behind St. Valentine (conclusion)

Although the story of Valentine's Day is shrouded in mystery, buried in tradition, and (thanks to commercialism) stripped of its significance, we can bring some of the truth back. The truth is, love can't be squelched, outlawed, or stamped out. The significance of Valentine's life was not that he defended love and romance and performed secret marriages. Valentine—a day now besmirched by cupids, chocolate, and candlelit dinners—is a day founded upon the life of a martyr. Valentine died a bloody death, beaten and beheaded. The truth is, Valentine was in love with his Savior, Jesus Christ. Love for Jesus trumped his love of self. Valentine nobly gave his life for the God he loved.

That is true love. But true love is deeper still. It goes beyond our love for God. "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. John 3:16 defines love: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

This Valentine's day, do something different. Sure, talk about love, but talk about true love—the love that God had for us. The love that sent Jesus to a cross. Talk about our love for Him—the kind of love that goes beyond mere comfortable Christian existence. The kind of love that is willing to take risks, to sacrifice everything, and even to give our lives for Him who loved us.

The season of Lent begins on Wednesday, February 17 with Ash Wednesday. This should be a great time for us at Bethany to work towards letting go of those things that have occupied our hearts and minds over the last year with regards to the future of our church. I am so pleased that we have all stayed committed with our time, treasures, and prayers. Over Lent I hope we will see the completion of our Sacred Doors shower room and the final cleaning, which is still quite a bit to do, so that we can aim for September or October to officially open this new ministry. We all need to plan on helping with this final push in whatever way we can. More as soon as the final permit reaches us in the next couple of weeks!



## 4 Ways to Observe Lent

Lent is a season of focus and preparation. It aligns our hearts with God's heart as we approach Easter. The following are just a few ways to focus and prepare.



### Give It Up

Consider giving up something that distracts from your important relationships: like too much time on Twitter or Clash of Clans.

Maybe cut out screen usage for several hours a day. Take a day of true rest: let go of toil for 24 hours.



### Plug In

Consider adding in something that helps you connect to God.

Read a book of the Bible, a devotional, or practice Lectio Divina on a daily basis.



### Serve

Start a new routine of service.

Volunteer regularly as an academic mentor, step up to volunteer in a local church, or visit a nursing home.



### Share It

Make it a communal event.

Share your Lent practices with others via a small group and/or attending worship.

## LENTEN STUDY

Our series for Lent will focus on the lectionary of the Psalms on Sunday mornings. An exciting new addition for this Lent is the study which Curtis will lead. Please consider joining this class on Zoom. More details from Curtis in the next week.



