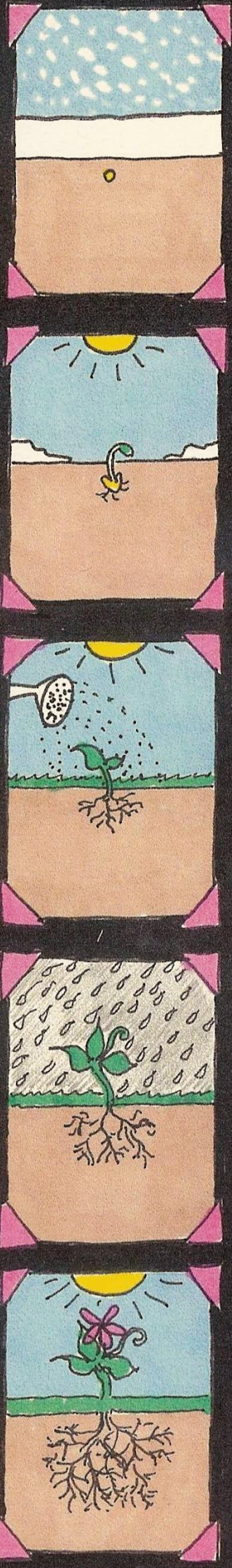


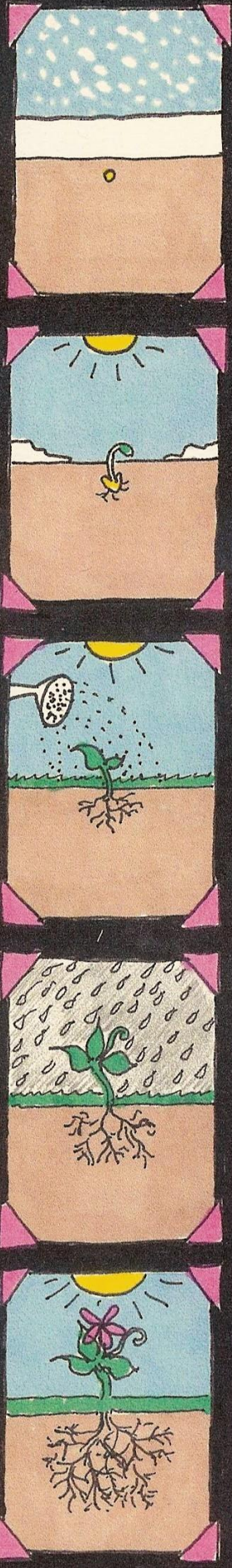
March 14

## A TRADITION OF THE EARLY SERVICE

Since its current inception, I have been associated with the First Service (also known as Early Service) at First United Methodist Church. I'm not sure but I believe that spans the last 20 years or so. Over the years, First Service has developed some traditions of our own – we don't do them every year and to be honest sometimes they get forgotten for whatever reason until it's too late to add them to the service.

One such tradition is our Lenten wreath. The wreath itself brings back memories because it was created by my dear circle of, I believe, Hawthorne branches without serious damage to herself is beyond me. If you ever have to handle it you'll know what I'm referring to. It has spikes two to three inches long that sometimes, I swear, like to bite anyone unwary enough to handle it casually.





This wreath is put in the Chapel on the first Sunday in Lent. It has six candles inside its circle. All the candles are lit before the service, at the same time as the altar candles. Then at the beginning of the service, someone from the congregation goes and announces – “Jesus is the light of the world and the world knew Him not.” They take a burning candle from the wreath and walk it out of the Chapel. This happens every Sunday in Lent until, on Palm Sunday, the last candle is removed leaving the wreath in darkness.

How dark our world would be without the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross – the sacrifice that opened the gates of heaven for us for all eternity. We can rejoice in the fact that we serve a living God and that Jesus, is the Light of the World.

John 1:9-14 from the *Message* translation by Eugene Peterson says:

The Life-Light was the real thing:

Every person entering Life He brings into Light.

He was in the world,

The world was there through him

And yet the world didn't even notice.

He came to his own people,

But they didn't want him.

But whoever did want him,

Who believed he was who he claimed

And would do what he said,

He made to be their true selves,

Their child-of-God selves.

These are the God-begotten,

Not blood-begotten

The Word became flesh and blood,

And moved into the neighborhood.

We saw the glory with our own eyes,

The one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son,

Generous inside and out,

True from start to finish.



Darlene Wiley

