

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL  
Wallace, Idaho**

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 10, 2020

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Good Morning! And welcome again to our worship as the United Church of Christ Congregational in Wallace. It's good to be together, even when we gather remotely and virtually. It's good to be together in the love and grace of God, empowered and embraced by the Spirit of Christ. It's good to walk through these days of isolation and separation knowing that we belong to God, and through God, we belong to each other. It is good to live in the confidence that God holds us close and knits us together as one in the Body of Christ. It's good to be God's people, and to know that the life and example, love and compassion of Jesus tie us to each other and to all of God's people.

As we gather today, I also want to wish each of us a Happy Mother's Day, whether we experience that in the love and gratitude we receive from our children and grandchildren, or in remembering gifts of love we have received and continue to cherish from our mothers, or if not from our mothers, the nurturing, life-giving care we were blessed to receive from others – teachers, coaches, friend's mothers, caring women along the way. It is a good day to remember and give thanks for the gift of love.

As usual, I'm sending along a PDF of the words for this service, in the hope that you will join with me in the responsive and unison portions of the worship, as well as the singing. Let us gather together to worship God.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Jesus said, "I go and prepare a place for you, and I will come again."

**We gather together from many places to know your presence and your love, now and always.**

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. If you know me, you know God."

**We pray to know you more deeply, that we may know God more intimately, now and always.**

Jesus said, "Ask me for anything, and I will do it."

**Help us to ask for the right things, Lord Jesus Christ, that we may fulfill your will, now and always.**

Jesus said, "Believe in me, and Follow me."

**Help us to worship you fully – believing and following – now and always!**

(Rev. Elizabeth Dilley, United Church of Christ Worship Ways)

**SONG**    *"In the Lord"*

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful, in the Lord, I will rejoice!

Look to God, do not be afraid; lift up your voices, the Lord is near;

lift up your voices, the Lord is near.    (repeat)

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION** (in unison)

**Ever-gracious, Way-Making God, we celebrate the gifts of your Spirit. You have not fed us a diet of shame or shrinking, but with the milk of your truth you have made us strong and faithful servants of Christ. You call us to take up the mantle of justice and to follow wherever faith leads us. You fill us with strength and hope, and you invite us to share in the cost and joys of discipleship. You promise us splendor and beauty in this life and in the world to come. Meet us**

**here, we pray, that your word will be fulfilled in our hearing and that your Spirit will fill us with courage. Amen.**

(Rev. Elizabeth Dilley, United Church of Christ Worship Ways)

SCRIPTURE READING John 14:1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

May God make a home in your heart for these holy words. Amen.

SERMON

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Seriously? You’re kidding, right? Controversy and hostility are swirling everywhere, all around them and all focused on him. He’s just had it out with Judas and he’s stormed out of the room. And then he told them he was leaving but that they can’t come with him. Not now anyway. Peter said what they were all thinking, that he would follow him anywhere, lay down his life for him if need be. Hadn’t they already walked away from everything and followed him up hill and down, around every corner, across every border and through every obstacle? Why now? What’s changed? At which point, Jesus looked him in the eye and spoke softly, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times. So there sits Peter and his companions, mouths hanging open, hearts pounding, totally at a loss for words or thoughts or next steps. Bewildered, incredulous, hurt, the earth gives way beneath their feet, and what does he say? Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Seems to me we could legitimately identify with their predicament. Things were going along okay. We were hearing some rumors and talk about a virus, but it seemed out there far enough that we weren’t all that troubled. And then one day while we were out buying groceries or teaching class or playing with the grandkids, the whistle blew and we were sent to our rooms, and told not to come out until we got the signal. More than a million point 34 cases and nearly 80,000 deaths later, and we’re standing on the threshold saying, what do we do now? So we flattened the curve in New York and Washington, but things are wild and wooly in Michigan and Minnesota. Nobody’s diagnosed any cases here, but does that mean we’re safe or just waiting for the inevitable? People are hungry and restless; restrictions are lifting and doors are opening, but not as fast as the tensions and protests; and about the time we got toilet paper back on the shelves, the meat supply dried up and went away. And you say to us, do not let your hearts be troubled. Really? Is that the best you’ve got?

Episcopal writer Debie Thomas describes what happens next with these words: “Unsurprisingly, the anxious disciples respond to their predicament by demanding certainty. Thomas asks Jesus for a roadmap: ‘How can we know the way?’ Philip asks for proof: ‘Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.’ What they want— what we all want, if we’re honest — is the religion of the GPS, the five point plan, the twelve steps, the ten commandments. ‘Do A, B, and C, and you will unerringly arrive at Destination D.’

Jesus’s response? ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled.’ ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’ ‘If you know me, you will know my Father also.’ No roadmap. No master plan. No PowerPoint presentation. Just himself. Just the messy, intimate, ever evolving, and often confusing business of relationship. Of trust, patience, and vulnerability.” (Journey with Jesus, “You Know the Way”)

I don’t know that the disciples knew it yet, but by the time John wrote the Gospel, he was fully aware that they were fast approaching the end of the incarnation. They’d had three years of walking and working with Jesus, eating beside him, laughing and sparring with him, watching him teach and heal, feed and welcome, and yes, do the miraculous. He’d taught them an enormous amount, and had coached them into amazing accomplishments of their own. Beside him and under his watchful eye, they’d been able to do things they never would have imagined they were capable of. But that was just about over. Before the night was gone, he’d be arrested in the garden and the final chapter would have begun, and he was doing everything he could to prepare them for that moment. While some of the verses in this passage have been used by modern Christians to define who is in and who is out, pointing to words like “no one comes to the Father except by me”, for Jesus this was a profoundly pastoral, tender moment. He needed them to know that his imminent departure was not about abandoning them, but it would in fact lead to a greater intimacy. He was saying, today we walk side by side, but in the days to come, I will live in you and you will live in me. Today, you walk in my footsteps, but in the days to come, you will be my feet and my hands, my body and my word for a world in need of healing and good news.

In a lot of ways, he was saying to them, my body and I are leaving you, but you know me; trust me and the God who sent me – we’ll be right here for you every step of the way. When that proved more than a little confusing for them, and they came back looking for coordinates and tangibles, Jesus said, you already know the way! You know the Way we’ve been traveling, the Truth we’ve been learning and the Life we’ve been living – so keep at it. Keep going, and when you do, I’ll be right there with you, because I am the Way, the Truth and the Life! Keep going and learning and living toward God, and we’ll be together every step of the way.

Jesus prepared his disciples for the future by pointing them toward their time together, and all he had taught and done with them and through them. And earlier that very night, he’d summarized all those teachings and experiences by giving them a new commandment. He’d knelt and washed their feet and then said, I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another. If they can manage to do that, they’ll be walking in his way, living his truth and sharing his life.

There was a story in the March issue of Forbes Magazine that told that years ago, the anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked by a student what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a culture. The student expected Mead to talk about clay pots, tools for hunting, grinding-stones, or religious artifacts. But no. Mead said that the first evidence of civilization was a 15,000 years old fractured femur found in an archaeological site. A femur is the longest bone in the body, linking hip to knee. In societies without the benefits of modern medicine, it takes about six weeks of rest for a fractured femur to heal. This particular bone had been broken and had healed. Mead explained that in the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, you cannot drink or hunt for food. Wounded in this way, you are meat for your predators. No creature survives a broken leg

long enough for the bone to heal. You are eaten first. A broken femur that has healed is evidence that another person has taken time to stay with the fallen, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended them through recovery. A healed femur indicates that someone has helped a fellow human, rather than abandoning them to save their own life.

Margaret Mead told her student a very similar truth to the one Jesus told his followers: if you want to follow me along the Way that we've been traveling, take care of one another. Do what you've seen me do, heal and feed, embrace and encourage, forgive and love as you have seen me do and as you have done beside me. And if you come to a time when you don't know what to do or which way to turn, walk in the Way that I have walked, live by the Truth that I have lived, immerse yourself in a Life that comes only from God. If you don't know what else to do, go with love: incarnate, tangible, down-to-earth love. If you want to make your way to God, walk in my way, which is the way of love. And believe me when I say, I'll be right there with you in every step you take, every choice you make, every act of compassion you share. And in light of that promise, please, don't let your hearts be troubled. Amen.

#### PRAYER REQUESTS

Christi's father, John, for his balance and reflexes and ability to drive, and tests coming up this week  
Continue prayers for lockdown continuing to lift up good jobs for the people that are opening up their stores and going back to work

Please pray for the Valley to stay virus free, especially if they allow the blues Festival (1,000-5,000 possible visitors) to go on as planned. Up until now I have felt pretty secure but the thought of so many tourists coming here is truly frightening.

Prayer for wisdom in how to hold and honor the needs of the sick and the hungry

#### PASTORAL PRAYER

(written by Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, one of the officers of the United Church of Christ for the National Day of Prayer this past Thursday)

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us. Holy God, called by many names, we raise our voices on this National Day of Prayer in the United States, mindful of the needs of the world around us. You are Creator God who continues to create among us, God who heals, God who provides peace and comfort. We give thanks for your presence among us Holy One. We give thanks for the ways in which you are present for us and for the ways in which you give us wisdom and strength to bring change to the world. We call on you O God.

In the midst of self-isolation, social distancing and 14-day quarantines, we are reminded that we are not alone. We are a part of this fabric of humanity you have woven, united in our diversity that is reflected in each face. In our diversity we reflect your wisdom and your grace. We live in these days the desire for unity and community. We pray for your love to be made evident among us. We ask that your love surround us in ways that will continue to move us to live into the call to be witnesses to your work in the world, bringing salt and light to the world.

We pray for the communities in which we live. Communities that are aching with loss, grief and mourning. The whole earth groans as we witness the destruction of life and the impacts of the corona virus, as it spreads among us. As we navigate the uncertainty, we cry: How long O God! How long? We pray your healing presence fall upon us. We pray for comfort in the midst of suffering. We pray your peace rest with us. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us.

#### PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

## OFFERING

God has lavished upon us an abundance of blessings: musical talent, the melody of laughter, the use of our hands in cooking and repairs; the use of our minds in problem solving; curiosity, compassion, patience, urgency; spiritual reservoirs, financial resources, obedience and courage to act. All these gifts and others which bear our personal imprints are available for us to use in service to God and on behalf of Christ's church. What will we give and how will we live to express our gratitude to God for all our gifts, and to share with the world the marvelous love and grace of our faithful God?

## SONG *"They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love"*

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,  
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,  
And we pray that all unity may one day be restored:  
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,  
We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,  
And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land:  
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will work with each other, we will work side by side,  
We will work with each other, we will work side by side,  
And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride:  
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

## BENEDICTION

God go with you in all that is gentle.  
Christ go with you in all that is brave.  
And the Spirit go with you in all that is free.  
Go now in peace, to love and serve our God. Amen.