

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

Aice M.C. Ling, Pastor

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2020

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good Morning! And welcome once again to our online worship as the United Church of Christ Congregational in Wallace. I have no way of knowing who is with us today, but I do know that on any given Sunday, we are likely to be joined by folks in Wallace, Silverton, Osburn, Mullan and Kellogg; as well as Coeur d'Alene and Post Falls; parts of Texas, and Florida, and even random parts of New England; rumor has it that on Easter Sunday we made it all the way to Japan. It strikes me as a powerful and wonderful thing that especially when we feel isolated in our homes and cut off from each other, God's wondrous Spirit works with and through us as well as the marvels of technology to bind us together as one. As much as I deeply miss seeing your faces, I cherish the good news that whether we are gathered or scattered, we are still the Body of Christ. We are still knit together as one. We are still united in the love and faith that we share, and the God from whom all of our blessings flow.

This morning, our circle is going to expand even further than usual, as we share pieces of a worship service that was created by the Conference Ministers of the United Church of Christ. There are 36 Conferences spread across the country, and the leaders of each of those communities worked together to craft this service and then offer it to us to use as we saw fit. I'm going to share a few of the pieces of that worship with you, interwoven with words from me, as a way of introducing you to some of our extended family in the United Church of Christ, and with the hope that we'll come away with a larger sense of the Body of Christ to which we belong.

As usual, there is a PDF of the words of this service attached, so you can join in the responsive and unison portions of this worship, and the song. Let us worship God together.

MENTAL HEALTH SUNDAY

(Written by Brigit Stevens, Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota Conferences)

The timing of this worship video is in the month of May 2020. And during the month of May in the United Church of Christ, we honor Mental Health Sunday. This year it is marked as May 17th. Regardless of the date, we honor and celebrate our siblings in Christ who struggle with mental illness.

Individuals caught in the grip of mental illness are all around us. They are our friends, our coworkers, our family members, our parishioners. They are us. They, we, are beautiful in our gifts—our love, our talents, our wisdom, our play. And then they, we, are not so lovely. We are needy or angry, withdrawn or unreliable, demanding, ungrateful, or unendingly sad. And they, we, are beloved children of God, just the way we are.

In the United Church of Christ we embrace three core values: God's continuing testament, extending extravagant welcome, and changing lives. All three of these values are lived out well as we affirm that mental health and wellness are components of human health and wellness. And then, we create practices, advocate for policies, and seek out leadership, not just inclusion, that ends stigma around mental illness and supports holistic approaches to health and wellness.

Welcome to worship. May you be blessed in your whole being by the gifts and graces of God offered here.

SONG “Halle, halle, halle-lu-ja”

Halle, halle, halleluja. Halle, halle, halleluja.

Halle, halle, halleluja. Halleluja, halleluja.

CALL TO WORSHIP

(Written by Lynn Bujnak, Vermont Conference)

When we feel isolated and alone, O God, your word comes to us:

I will not leave you orphaned.

When we face an uncertain future, the Bible reminds us:

We walk by faith, not by sight.

When we are scared and anxious, we hear your whisper,

Be not afraid, for I am with you.

We come to this time of worship remembering the promises of our God, strengthened in hope and saturated with holy Love.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

SONG “Halle, halle, halle-lu-ja”

Halle, halle, halleluja. Halle, halle, halleluja.

Halle, halle, halleluja. Halleluja, halleluja.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (in unison)

Gracious God, comfort of the grieving, peace of the troubled, joy of the righteous, we turn to you. Bring to our minds awareness of what it means to live in Christ’s presence. Give us heart to love and to risk as your friends. Send your Spirit to guide us in everything, through the word and promise of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

(Ruth C. Duck, *Touch Holiness*)

SCRIPTURE READING Acts 17:22-31

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said,

‘For we too are his offspring.’

Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

THE MESSAGE “*Things change. God doesn’t*”

(Written by Marilyn Kendrix, Southern New England Conference, UCC)

God has indeed reordered our world. The way we were before seems so long ago and we find ourselves living in a new reality. We have discontinued practices that we thought were unchangeable. It turns out that the God who made the world and everything in it does not live in shrines made by human hands.

I can remember a Sunday practice from my childhood. Many Sundays after church, my mom and dad would load us kids up in the family car and we would go for a Sunday ride. No destination in mind, Daddy would just drive. Invariably he would get lost somewhere on Long Island. In my younger years I would cry because I was afraid that we were lost. But my dad would say, "You are not lost. As long as you are with Mommy and me, you can't get lost." As I grew, I came to understand that and find comfort that no matter where I was, if I were with my parents, I could never get lost.

In these long weeks, when we've been cloistered in our houses even though we've been right at home, many of us have been feeling lost. We went into this time of Stay Safe, Stay Home fearing deep in our hearts that being physically separated from our faith communities would cause us to be separated from God. Fearing that if we were not in our familiar pews, that we would not be able to find God. We thought we needed our church buildings, our beautiful sanctuaries to feel God's warmth enveloping us in love. But It turns out that the God who made the world and everything in it does not live in shrines made by human hands.

Friends, it's not only the separation from our buildings that has us feeling off kilter. We've all been living through a nightmare, an international nightmare. Some of us have lost loved ones. Some of us live in fear of losing loved ones. Some of us are suffering from the virus. Some of us are suffering from lost income because of the virus. Some of us are bored from too many days looking at the same walls. Some of us are forced to work at home. Some of us wished we could stay home and not work, endangering ourselves and our loved ones to keep essential 10 businesses open for the rest of us. Some of us, the heroes among us, are working in hospitals, and nursing homes, working as EMTs and police officers and firemen and orderlies, many of whom are overwhelmed and over worked trying hard to keep people alive. Some of us don't know if we can continue to watch as more and more people get sick and die. This is indeed a long, national nightmare.

Those people whom Paul encountered in Athens, they had some inkling that there was a God whom they did not know. Paul had observed as he walked around their city that they had objects of worship in their shrines, and that among them was an altar to an "unknown god." He understood that these were people hungering for an experience of the holy. And so he told them about the one true God. He let them in on the secret that the one true God could not be confined to their temples. No, he shared with them that the one true God was not far from each of them, not far from each one of us. He let them know that "in God, we live and move and have our being."

And Paul told them about Jesus – how he'd lived and how he'd died. But most importantly, he told them about how he had been resurrected. He shared with them the saving balm of the Good News that we are a resurrection people. He told them and he is telling us still, that death does not have the final word.

We are living in a time when we need to remember every day, that we are a resurrection people. These are indeed hard times that we are going through. These are times when it seems as if we have been abandoned by God. But Paul is right here, speaking to us from 2,000 years ago. The Apostle Paul is reminding us that no matter how bleak the time, God is still Emmanuel, God with Us. He is reminding us that we are God's people and that no amount of sheltering-in-place can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. No tiny microbe can take away from us the truth that we are a resurrection people.

You know, when I grew up and had children of my own, we would sometimes take those Sunday rides after church. And we would purposely turn down streets that we'd never been on. We would jump off of the interstate at an exit that we'd never taken before. This was before GPS and we would always lose our way. We grown-ups had to look to the sun for direction and keep turning until we found a familiar street or a business that let us know what town we were in. But in the back seat, our children just

looked out the windows, not worried about a thing because they knew that they could never get lost while they were with their parents.

We are in a difficult time right now. We feel lost and afraid that nothing will ever be the same. Nothing will ever be like it was before. But we've also learned so many things in this time. The most important thing we've learned is that the God who made the world and everything in it does not live in shrines made by human hands. We've learned that no matter what, in God, we live and move and have our being.

Things may change, God doesn't.

We can never get lost. We have Jesus as our Guide and God as the foundation of our lives. We have the Holy Spirit filling us with such love that it just has to spill over onto others.

Things change. God doesn't.

Things change. God doesn't.

Amen

PRAYER REQUESTS

Penny underwent knee replacement surgery on Monday, and came home on Friday

A joy that Josie is turning 7 today

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy and loving God, they reminded us that things change, but we already knew that. We are living in a world and in a time when things are changing all around us, and at a pace that leaves our heads spinning. Truth be told, on our good days, it feels like change; other days, it's more like disintegration. We pass milestones and cross thresholds all the time: never since World War II, this resembles the great depression, no one alive has been here before... These are not welcome signs, but ones that leave us deeply troubled. The infection rate and death toll statistics, the economic crash alongside soaring unemployment numbers, questions about reopening businesses, restaurants and meat plants, summer beaches and schools in the fall. We worry for the vulnerable and the grieving, the hungry and the homeless, the unemployed and the over-stretched, the anxious and isolated, for those we love and for ourselves.

And even yet, when we slow our breath and calm our pacing, we remember that there are changes opening up around us that we welcome and embrace: new advances in technology that tie us together even while staying apart; scientists and researchers advancing possibilities for vaccine and treatment; medical personnel and first responders, essential workers and ready volunteers who offer all they can and all they are to ease suffering and offer comfort; the increase of compassion and kindness, connection and solidarity. Beauty is being born every day, and grace is flourishing all around us, and for all these gifts, large and small, we give you thanks.

They told us that things change, and they also reminded us that you do not, and for that great truth, we give you thanks, O God. We thank you for hope that holds fast even in the hard times, for your steadfast presence alongside us every step of the way, for enough light to grope our way forward, and for your steady, unrelenting promise that resurrection and new life will always have the last word. Not death or sorrow, not pain or hate, but love and life and you. Help us to trust in your promises and in your love. When we struggle to know where to turn and how to discern our next step, guide us to your path of love. Grant us wisdom and courage, compassion and mercy, that we might not be driven by fear, but always by love: love of you, love of our neighbors and love of ourselves.

Hear our prayers, O God, spoken and unspoken. And hear us as we join together in the prayer Jesus taught, saying: Our Father...

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

OFFERING

I can't begin to thank you for all of the things you do and all of the ways you offer your support to the life of the church. I received a text the other day asking if I'd like to have flowers planted in front of the church again this summer, to which I said, thank you! One of you makes a ministry of sending cards and greetings, another recently mailed a piece of jewelry that was ecstatically received, another shows up as needed to deliver toilet paper and change for laundry. And those are just some of the things I know of. I am confident the list is much longer, many of your gifts unseen and unnamed, but deeply appreciated and quietly transformative. Thank you for all that you do to support and encourage the Body of Christ.

Thank you also for the gifts you give to support our church's ministry. Ben and I come to Wallace once a week to walk the building, water the piano and check the mail. Every week, there has been money waiting to be deposited in the bank, and that's a good and generous thing; not something we take for granted or lightly. It is also true that the amount being given is not enough to cover our expenses, and so it seems appropriate this morning to remind each of us of the importance of remembering to do what we can to support our church's ministry. Feel free to mail a gift to 408 Cedar Street or drop it in the mail slot to the left of the door when you walk by or are at the post office. Or instruct your bank to mail a check to the church. Whatever works for you, and whatever your resources allow, know that your gifts are warmly received by a grateful church. And again, thank you for all you do to support and encourage the Body of Christ.

SONG "I Believe"

"I believe in the sun even when it's not shining. I believe in love even when I don't feel it. I believe in God even when He is silent."

(Anonymous, found scratched into a wall at Auschwitz concentration camp)

BENEDICTION

(Written by John Dorhauer, President and General Minister of the United Church of Christ)

Friends, as we gather as ONE BODY to worship in diverse places and spaces, may God bless you and keep you; may God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you; and give you peace.

Siblings in Christ Jesus our Lord, We are ONE BODY, united across time and space, walking in the calling, anointing and power of the Holy Spirit. We are ONE body, sharing our hopes and dreams for the kin-dom of God being salt and light in these days. And as ONE BODY we depart this virtual space united in love, united in hope and united in our commitment to serve God, to serve our communities and to serve the world.

Go, therefore, having received the blessing of the living God, the risen Christ, and the abiding, brooding Holy Spirit. Because you are blessed, become a blessing as you proclaim the love of God in word and deed to all the ends of the Earth. Amen.