

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL  
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 28, 2020

SONG “*Jesus Calls Us*”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good Morning! Welcome once again to worship as the United Church of Christ Congregational in Wallace. It’s good to be together for this time of worship and prayer, listening and response. I give thanks for the gifts of God and of technology that allow us to gather in this way. In these days of social distancing and working to do what we can to not spread the coronavirus and to keep our neighbors safe, I trust God’s Spirit to move among and between us, to knit us together into one fellowship, one body, one community of Christ; for these assurances and countless others, I am deeply grateful.

Let me confirm what I said in an email a couple of days ago: the Executive Committee and Trustees met this past week, and agreed to continue this form of worship for at least another month. Given the dramatic increase in cases of the virus, including in Kootenai County, it seems safest and wisest to us to exercise caution and maintain our distance. We’ll revisit the conversation at the end of July and see where things stand then. Thank you to all of you who offered your input to that decision. It was extremely helpful.

Let us gather our hearts and minds now as we prepare ourselves to once again worship God.

SONG “*Jesus Calls Us*”

CALL TO WORSHIP

God calls into our midst those who are beloved in all their diversity:

**We welcome them.**

God calls into our midst all those who are vulnerable, in need of teaching, healing, shelter

**We welcome them.**

God calls into our midst all those with a word of challenge that proclaims God’s kin-dom for all

**We welcome them.**

Let us worship God, who calls us to be “prophets of welcome”:

**Alleluia!**

(Rev. Elsa A. Cook, UCC Worship Ways)

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (in unison)

**Holy One, who calls us into community, and invites us to welcome your prophets and messengers, let us experience your welcome to us gathered in various places but joined in this moment. Show us that we are beloved and honored in your presence and in this community. Show us how to put our resources at the service of all, help us know that the cup of water given in your name nourishes the one who gives and the one who receives. Satisfy our thirst to know your presence here and now. Amen.**

(Rev. Elsa A. Cook, UCC Worship Ways)

SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 10:40-42

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever

welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

## SERMON

I think you know that I follow a set of readings called the lectionary that offer me somewhere between 4 and 6 biblical passages to read, reflect on and preach from on any given Sunday. You tend to hear about that when I’m trying to assign guilt or responsibility somewhere other than me, saying, don’t blame me for reading this passage – the lectionary made me do it. That’s never completely true, because I make countless choices every week, but I keep saying it. Some weeks, when I read the passages, I wince and roll my eyes; on occasion I’ve even been known to whimper and whine. If I stay open enough long enough, I do some reading and finally figure out there’s something going on that I can work with and hope you can connect with. Other weeks, I read a text, smile, sit back and begin to get comfortable – only to then do some study and have all the good thoughts and feelings stomped on and thrown out like stinky socks. Like this week. Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me. Whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple will not lose their reward.

I love the word welcome, so the first place I go is to think about offering welcome. Fix a nice meal, set the table, throw open the door. Who can we welcome tonight? What dry and thirsty soul might appreciate a nice cool drink of water? The last couple of times I’ve been in Wallace I’ve seen Jennifer working on her flowers; maybe she’d appreciate something cold. Before I can get too lost in my warm, fuzzy feelings, I remember that in the earliest biblical tradition offering hospitality and extending welcome was all about welcoming the stranger, and that deflates my bubble a bit. Maybe it would be okay if we could pick the stranger, but we all know that’s not likely to be what Jesus has in mind. He’d probably zero in first on the one we’d choose last, so now what do we do?

Unfortunately for me – and for you – I kept reading. And for some reason, this time around they all seem to be fixated on saying something I hadn’t really heard before. This text isn’t even exactly telling us to offer welcome, though that is a biblical value that is always applauded. This text is saying whoever welcomes us, welcomes Jesus. And then the writers go on to remind us that we’re finally at the end of Jesus’ instructions about sending out the disciples. You know, how a couple of weeks ago he said, go cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Don’t take a purse or any means of self-support, so you can really demonstrate how good and faithful God is and how responsive the people are. He said he was sending us out like sheep in the midst of wolves. And now he’s saying, so when you show up on their door empty-handed, let’s see who welcomes you and who doesn’t. How they treat you will be the same as how they treat me. What can I say? Feel free to push me a bit on who I’m willing to welcome; I’m up for that. But be in a position to be empty handed and in need of being on the receiving end? Now he’s meddling. And I’m squirming.

There’s a lot in the text that is uncomfortably challenging, and we’re not likely to accomplish all of it this week, so let’s start with the part that we’ve already got down and see where we can go with that. The heart of this passage and this whole block of Jesus’ teaching is that his followers are being sent out. I can’t begin to tell you how many writers specifically said that this text is saying that we have to get out of the church and into the world. The most compelling form of those words was written by one of my favorite preachers and writers, Barbara Brown Taylor. She said, “In a world that can be hard and scary sometimes, it is tempting to think of the church as a hideout, the place where those of us who know the secret password can gather to celebrate our good fortune. As we repeat our favorite stories and eat the food that has been prepared for us, it is tempting to think of ourselves as consumers of God’s love, chosen people who have been given more good gifts than we can open at one sitting:

healing, forgiveness, restoration, resurrection. Then one day the Holy Spirit comes knocking at the door, disturbing our members only meeting and reminding us that it is time to share. We are not to be consumers after all, but providers of God's love, authorized agents sent out to speak and act in Christ's name." ("Heaven at Hand", *Bread of Angels*)

That hits way too close to home to be comfortable. Here we are, through no fault of our own and with a debatable amount of choice, out of the building and in the world. It's natural to feel adrift and homesick for our familiar worship habits and routine, for each other's faces and the sound of each other's voices, but we're in exactly the same place Jesus sent his first disciples – in the world. I think we're pretty hesitant about what to do now, and trust me I include myself in that hesitance. And all the more so if we ask the question about how we as a church should be in the world, not just any of us individually. I trust that a lot of you are active and generous in the world, but what about us as the body of Christ? The Chili Supper is amazing, and I hope we'll get back to being able to resume that, but for now, how do we carry on Jesus' ministry, serve God's people, do the work of the church in the world?

I'm haunted by one paragraph I read by Pam Driesell, a Presbyterian pastor in Georgia. She wrote, "Inasmuch as the church has been preoccupied with institutional survival, rather than being God's people, we have essentially *not* been the church. The term itself, though, is simply redundant: there is no such thing as a church that is not a missional church. When we cease to be missional, we are no longer the church; we are simply one more cultural organization serving consumerist needs as if there were nothing more significant than consumption." (*Feasting on the Gospels, Matthew, Vol. 1, page 282*)

I believe we're called to serve God in the world. If we are part of the church of Jesus, members of the Body of Christ, what do we do to carry on the work of Jesus in the community where we live? In the world where we're sent. Jesus sent his first twelve followers out into the world to continue his mission to love, save, bless and be reconciled to that very world. Taylor said we should shift from thinking of ourselves as consumers to providers of God's love, authorized agents sent out to speak and act in Christ's name. St. Francis of Assisi is given credit for having said, Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary, use words. Pick your frame of reference. What does it mean for us to live out and share, plant and cultivate the love of God, even in these days? You know the community better than I do. Where is the pain? Who is hungry? Lonely? Grieving? Unemployed? Where is the hate? The fear? The meanness? Where are helpers needed? To whom can we speak a word of peace? Shine the light of compassion and kindness? Clean up a yard? Who needs a good listening to, so they can feel heard and we can learn and grow and understand new realities, maybe even build some bridges while we're at it?

Jesus sent them out, and I believe he's sending us out. He doesn't promise us high marks of achievement, 5-star accommodations, lavish rewards or record breaking growth in membership numbers, but he does promise us faithful love. Clearly, some will welcome us, others will not; but if they do receive us, they will receive him, and if they receive him, they will receive the God who sent him. And if we love and serve, feed or heal anyone in his name, we will indeed love and serve, feed or heal him. If we offer a simple cup of cold water to any of the thirsty, isolated, rejected or wounded ones living on the margins or in the shadows – in his name – we will offer it to him. May it be so. Amen.

SONG "The Summons"

Will you come and follow me If I but call your name?  
Will you go where you don't know And never be the same?  
Will you let my love be shown, Will you let my name be known,  
Will you let my life be grown In you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind If I but call your name?  
Will you care for cruel and kind And never be the same?  
Will you risk the hostile stare Should your life attract or scare?  
Will you let me answer prayer In you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?  
Will you set the prisoners free And never be the same?  
Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen,  
And admit to what I mean In you and you in me?

#### PRAYER REQUESTS

Praises that Kasey's daughter Sairah has a job and is doing great  
That the hate stops, across this country and in our community

#### PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, we give you thanks for the gifts and graces of this day. For the beauty and wonder, majesty and fragility of creation, and for the privilege that is ours as we enjoy and cherish, honor and protect, restore and renew the face of your earth. For the gift of family and friends with whom we work and play, make a home and share our lives, the joy of summer work and the comfort of hearing a familiar voice, the growth of a young child and the wisdom of accumulating years, the tender care of a loving companion and the gentle push of one who knows what we need, for the grace of forgiveness and the patience to stay by our side as we find our way through the valley of the shadow. For the chance to learn and grow, read and garden, create and repurpose, call an effort good enough and the clean slate of a second chance.

Loving God, the needs of the world cry out to us from every direction, and we come to you seeking healing and holding, wisdom and strength. As COVID-19 numbers climb and threaten, we pray yet again for the sick and the threatened, for loved ones separated to reduce risk and nursing homes locked down, for medical personnel who give generously to serve those in their care and hospitals filled to capacity and beyond. We pray also for the unemployed, for those seeking new benefits and the means to care for their families, for businesses trying to hold on. For families, a nation and a world that grieve – the loss of life, of hopes and dreams, of confidence in what tomorrow will bring. We pray too for the unrest and anger that fill many of our streets and homes, as blacks demand justice and safety, police reform and an end to the worry a child won't make it home from a jog or a trip to the store; for police officers who fear for their lives and try to do their jobs, and the confusion about who serves with distinction and who poses a threat to a person of color. Help us, holy God, to do the hard work of finding our way through the darkness of this time: that we might know when to go out and when to stay home, when to assert our needs and when to set them aside for the wellbeing of another, when to be patient and when to cry enough, when to speak up and how to listen and encourage another to speak, when and how and for how long to negotiate and confer and search for common ground as if our lives and the life of our country depend on it – because it does.

Our prayers are many, a few of them spoken, others brought to you in the silence of our hearts. Hear them. And hear us as we join together in the prayer that Jesus taught, saying: Our Father...

#### PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

#### OFFERING

As we come to the time of the offering, I want to again express my thanks for your faithfulness and generosity. Many of you continue to make your gifts available to the church, and we are indebted to

you for that. The expenses for our ministry and the care and maintenance of our building continue, and because of your gifts, we're holding our own and able to do what we need to do.

Alongside our ongoing efforts to maintain our ministry, I want to share with you another opportunity for generosity this summer. Our Conference's camps, N-Sid-Sen on the shores of Lake Coeur d'Alene and Pilgrim Firs on the Olympic Peninsula have both been forced to cancel their summer and fall programming because of COVID-19, and because those programs provide the majority of the funds for the rest of the year, the Conference is undertaking a camp campaign to raise the funds needed to cover our camps for the coming year. I want to share a video with you that has been created as part of that campaign, and invite you to consider making a gift to help.

(Changing Lives Video)

I'll send you an email in the next day or so that offers a bit more information as well as details on how to give. Thank you, in advance for prayerfully considering this ministry.

SONG    *"The Summons"*

Will you love the 'you' you hide If I but call your name?  
Will you quell the fear inside And never be the same?  
Will you use the faith you've found To reshape the world around,  
Through my sight and touch and sound In you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true When you but call my name.  
Let me turn and follow you And never be the same.  
In your company I'll go Where your love and footsteps show.  
Thus I'll move and live and grow In you and you in me.

BENEDICTION

And now go forth into the world in joy. Be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good. Render to no one evil for evil. Support the weak, strengthen the fainthearted, help the afflicted, honor all people. Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. And may the blessing of God Almighty, the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer rest and abide with you all this day and forevermore. Amen.