

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

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 14, 2020

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Good morning! And welcome together again for worship with the United Church of Christ Congregational in Wallace. As I stand here looking in to our little camera, I'll admit to feeling a kind of time warp dynamic that you'd think I'd be used to by now. When we made our weekly trip to Wallace the other day, it was good to be in our building. We checked the water under the piano and I gave my spider plant it's weekly drink. Ben walked the building and fixed the bank deposit while I changed the color of the paraments in the sanctuary; it's set now for this long season of Ordinary Time, the green, growing everyday life of faith when we're encouraged to look for signs of God moving among us and consider our response of faith. It was wonderful to see the flowers that Jenniffer is tending in front of our building, as well as the ones that have been distributed around town. It was good to see lots of cars parked along the streets, even as I felt a nervous kind of caution about the virus. And now I've come back to our home, an hour away, to talk with you, pray with you, to ask God to continue to move among and between us, to hold us close and keep us safe. It's a strange time we're living in, and in the midst of it all, there is so much to celebrate and be thankful for. At the top of that list is the privilege of being knit together with all of you and countless others in the Body of Christ, the people of God. Thank you for joining with me and with each other in this time of worship.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

In the beginning, before time, before people, before the world began,

**God was.**

Here and now, among us, beside us, enlisting the people of earth for the purposes of heaven,

**God is.**

In the future, when we have turned to dust, and all we know has found its fulfillment,

**God will be.**

Not denying the world, but delighting in it; not condemning the world, but redeeming it; through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit,

**God was, God is, God will be.**

*(A Wee Worship Book, Fourth Incarnation, Wild Goose Worship Group)*

**SONG**   *"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"*

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father, There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not; As Thou hast been Thou forever will be.  
Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided – Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest, Sun, moon and stars in their courses above  
Join with all nature in manifold witness To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love...

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside!...

## OPENING PRAYER

**In you, gracious God, the widowed find a carer, the orphaned find a parent, the fearful find a friend. In you, the wounded find a healer, the penitent find a pardoner, the burdened find a counselor. In you, the miserly find a beggar, the despondent find a laughter-maker, the legalists find a rule-breaker. In you, Jesus Christ, we meet our Maker and our match. And if some need to say, "Help me," and if some need to say, "Save me," and if some need to say, "Hold me," and if some need to say, "Forgive me," then let those be said now in confidence by us.**

*(Pause)*

O Christ, in whose heart there is both welcome and warning, say to us, do to us, reveal within us the things that will make us whole. And we will wait, and we will praise you. **Amen.**

*(A Wee Worship Book, Fourth Incarnation, Wild Goose Worship Group)*

## SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 9:35-10:8

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

## SERMON

He'd been at it for awhile. More than just a casual while, it was getting painfully close to feeling like forever. Maybe even felt like he'd never done anything else. He'd wrapped up the Sermon on the Mount some time ago, and since then it had been one healing after another. A leper followed by the centurion's servant and Peter's mother-in-law. He tried to catch a nap in the boat but the disciples' anxiety cut that short, so the next thing he knew he was scolding the wind and waves for getting things all riled up. Two demoniacs charged him on their way out of the tombs and he sent them head first into a herd of swine and over the bank, then moved on to heal a paralyzed man. He called a disciple and then got into it with some Pharisees over dinner. A leader of the synagogue showed up, pleading for his daughter's life, only to be interrupted by a desperate woman who had reached the end of her rope after 12 years of hemorrhaging and socially distant isolation. Once he'd seen to both of them he moved on, only to be followed by two blind men crying out for healing; and they were followed by yet another demoniac.

I won't try to speak for Jesus, but if I'd been in his shoes, I likely would have been whimpering long before he got to this point. Let's be honest. Three months and I'm whimpering, even though I've been heard to say more than once that in a lot of ways, my life isn't much different than it was before. Before COVID cancelled my singing and all the plans we might have made and the option of inviting people to dinner and made me think twice about how close or far away I stand from every person I meet on

our walks. Before COVID separated us by miles and walls and masks and introduced me to a camera and us to You Tube and Zoom, relegated us to email and snail mail, and forced me back to picking up a telephone and actually calling people if I wanted to hear their voice. Before COVID cooped us all up and left us climbing the walls and scrounging in the cupboards and binging on Netflix and ice cream. Some of you have been marvelously creative and resourceful, stitching up masks and purging unused clutter, taking on long deferred projects and developing new skills and routines, while others of us have frittered and chafed and struggled to get our footing. Eventually we reached that moment of “Enough!” and pushed the timetable of experts and scientists out of the way so we could get out the door and back to life. Memorial Day happened and then George Floyd was killed in police custody. Minneapolis exploded in violence and streets and parks around the world have become places for the socially distant to gather and chant, protest and sing, dream of a new day of justice and love while spreading the virus particles we’ve worked so hard to keep to ourselves. And now, as hot spots emerge in new places and hospitals fill to ICU bed capacity and the stock market again shakes in its boots, we wonder if there will ever be an end and what’s going to happen next and who can we turn this over to to make it go away and leave us in peace.

One of the aspects of Jesus that I love most is that at the moment I want to either erupt in frustration or shut down in helplessness, he is moved with deep compassion. The crowd was all around him and their needs were overwhelming. He’d already traveled and taught, healed and mended everyone within his range of vision and some still too far away for him to see and done it for weeks on end, and when it was clear this was a line whose end he would never reach, he didn’t put up a closed sign and decide to call it a day. Jesus was not one to accept defeat. Jesus was not one to say that needs could not be met. Jesus didn’t know the word “impossible” and wasn’t about to learn it any time soon. Jesus refused to draw lines or set limits or turn away from those in need or give up on doing what needed to be done. Jesus was moved with deep compassion because the people he was trying so hard to help were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, at which point he moved into action. He was committed to the healing and wholeness of all of the people in that crowd and in the crowds yet to come.

That’s a place where for today, I can draw deep comfort. When I listen to the news and watch the COVID numbers climb, both the actual and the projected, when I feel unsure of when or where or how to venture outside our house, to say nothing of into our church, when I feel the fear stir and rumble in me as to where this is headed and if we will really let another 100,000 people die, I also hear and feel the compassion of Jesus right here in our midst. He hasn’t given up on this mess anymore than he gave up on the tired, walking wounded of his day. Somewhere in my head, I keep hearing the words I’ve heard several times and attributed to a variety of people, most recently John Lennon got the credit. Somebody said something like, “Everything will be okay in the end. If it’s not okay, it’s not the end.” Whoever said it, I fully believe that Jesus lived it. He isn’t done here or with us; his compassion lives on and stays present, so I need to stay calm and stay tuned – and stay available.

That’s the part that comes next in this story, and it’s not necessarily one we’re quite so quick to applaud and embrace. As Jesus watched and felt the illness and suffering all around him, and as he shifted into gear to tackle that pain, he didn’t necessarily act in the way that we might have suggested, had we been consulted. We would love to see a holy intervention that clears away the harassment and helplessness, the pandemic and trauma, the injustice and inequities. But when Jesus shifted into action, he didn’t look to the heavens; he looked at the circle of followers he’d assembled. A small motley crew of uneducated and unimpressive disciples that truthfully had little to nothing to show for themselves. The first person named, Simon Peter, was the one who denied Jesus as soon as he was arrested; the last one is identified as the betrayer. There were fishermen in the circle and they were near the bottom of any social ladder in their day. Matthew was a tax collector who worked for Rome and Simon the Cananaean was a zealot who worked against Rome. Many of the rest never rose to the surface enough for any

gospel writer to have a notable word to say about them. To those twelve, Jesus assigned precisely the work he had been doing: Proclaim the good news, cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.

When I look at the mess of the world we inhabit, I long to think that Jesus and God will find more capable agents to work in the field than us. And yes, there are highly skilled people hard at work, doing everything in their power and beyond to find a vaccine, to create a cure, to heal the sick and establish food and shelter for the destitute. But God seems to think that we can be helpful too, that Christ and the Spirit can work in and through us so that we too can be agents of healing and hope, compassion and kindness. Picking up on that word “compassion” that described Jesus’ reaction to the crowd, Dutch theologian and one of my seminary teachers, Henri Nouwen, wrote that, “Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless.”

I heard a story on the news the other night of a 9-year-old girl named Cameron who lives just outside Minneapolis, who doesn’t know the meaning of the word “impossible” anymore than Jesus did. When she saw the death of George Floyd on the news and then watched the resulting protests about 20 miles from where she lives, she felt strongly that she wanted to make a difference. A black girl, she quietly spoke into the camera and said, I wish they would treat us the way they treat other people, and then she gathered up her friends. They love to make colorful string bracelets, so they decided to sell them to help local black business owners whose businesses had burned during the protests. At the time the news piece was put together, she and her friends had already raised \$80,000 which will be given to those business owners. She said she likes to make other people happy. When the news reporter asked her why that’s important to her, she said, because that’s what God wants you do. Something small can make a big difference. (CBS Evening News)

There is a tenacious hope woven all the way through this story, both the profound hope that is ours because of the promise we have that God loves us, sees us struggling, and is committed to staying by our side until we come out on the other side. If we haven’t gotten to the time and place where everything is okay, we haven’t gotten to the end. So trust, and wait and hope. We’ll get there. And while we’re trusting, waiting and hoping, we’re also tasked with doing Jesus’ work of compassion: go where it hurts, enter into the places of pain, share in the brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Mourn with those who are lonely, weep with those in tears, share your bread with the hungry, speak a word of peace, tear down a wall of hostility, share your bracelets with those who need a reminder of beauty and kindness. May it be so. Amen.

#### PRAYER REQUESTS

Jim and Penny Derbyshire are doing well, and ask for a couple of prayers:

Jim’s brother-in-law Larry has been put on dialysis

Their nephew died in a motorcycle accident and left 4 children behind

For Christi’s dad, John, who has started some water physical therapy, and having some discomfort with pain

For Christi’s cousin Gary, recovering from shoulder surgery, has had to rein in patience with the process

For Jim & Penny Derbyshire as they walk the road of recovering also!

For all of the world leaders, for all the issues they must make tough decisions about, may they have wisdom and the best interest of their people.

For scientists working to understand viruses

## PASTORAL PRAYER

O holy and gracious God, we bring before you the contents of our hearts and the abundance of feelings that swirl within us. We do offer you our thanks and praise for the gifts and graces of our lives, for the beauty and wonder of creation, for the wobbly legs of newborn deer and the regal flight of soaring eagles, for the fragility of hummingbird wings and the majesty of mountains, for the rain that soaks and waters, encourages new life and protects us from the threat of fire; for the warmth of the summer sun and gardens, fruits and flowers that burst with beauty and promise, nutrients and flavor. For the adventure of bike trails and fishing boats, the joy of campfires and gatherings at the river, the quiet of sunsets and rocking chairs. We give you thanks for family and friends, for all those who encourage and accompany us, who teach and coach, babysit and cook, repair and create, laugh and cry, cheer us on and bandage up our wounds. Your love is woven through all of the love in our lives, and we give you thanks for these and all your gifts.

We pray as well for our community, our country and our world. We've lifted up some names of those we carry on our hearts, those who are sick and grieving, in recovery and facing in to the final chapter of their lives. But there are others we carry whose names we rehearse in the dark and share only with you, prayers for the lonely, the vulnerable, those feeling isolated from the ones they love, those who battle addictions, who struggle with depression, who simply don't know where their next meal is coming from or how they will provide shelter for their children. We pray, O God, for all who continue to suffer the ravages of the pandemic: the sick and those who offer them care, those whose well-being has been endangered from loss of income and of shelter, for the hungry and those without hope; for scientists and researchers who search for a vaccine and a cure; for lawmakers confronted with decisions about how best to serve and lead and tend the people in their care. We pray for the anger and hatred of racism, and for all whose protests call for change and justice. We pray for all who work in law enforcement, giving thanks for those who serve and protect while putting themselves in harms' way, even as we call for an end to excessive force and unjust practices. Open our ears to hear the pain that cries out all around us, and open all our eyes that we might search together for new ways of living in community. Help us to not give in to fear or hatred, but to be bold and wise, living in your love, walking by your light. By your grace, help us to imagine new options and dream new dreams, until we usher in the new day of your longing, a day of peace and justice, love and kindness, compassion and mercy. Show us how to bring this day to birth, and if not now, tell us when.

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

## PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

## OFFERING

In large and small ways, with intentional decisions and just in the course of being who we are, all of us share ourselves, our resources, our time, our possessions with others. And when we do that, we build up, strengthen and bless the Church. Whether we're holding a door open or smiling around our face masks, writing a check to support the church or feed the hungry, making a phone call or leaving a significant tip, swallowing a mean retort or speaking a challenging word of truth, opening the door of forgiveness or helping a neighbor look for their dog, it all matters and makes a difference. It all spreads joy and multiplies love. It all serves God and honors Christ. Thank you for your generosity and witness, kindness and compassion.

## SONG "Here I Am, Lord"

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.  
All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.

I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.  
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?  
Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain.  
I have wept for love of them. They turn away.  
I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.  
I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I send?...

I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame,  
I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.  
Finest bread I will provide till their hearts be satisfied.  
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send? ...

#### BENEDICTION

So now we leave this time of worship. And while so much of the road ahead is uncertain, the path constantly changing, we know some things that are as solid and sure as the ground beneath our feet, and the sky above our heads.

We know God is love.

We know Christ's light endures.

We know the Holy Spirit is here, found in the space between all things, closer to us than our next breath, binding us to each other, until we meet we again,

Go in peace. Amen.

(Rev. Nora Vedress, Calvary United Church in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada)