

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

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

Trinity Sunday

June 7, 2020

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good morning, my friends. And welcome together again as the United Church of Christ Congregational in Wallace. It is very good to gather for worship this morning. It feels especially good, important even, to be here with you today. This has been an exceptional week. I can't speak for you, but I know that as I've watched and listened to the news from around the country, I've encountered wave after wave of images and feelings, dynamics and realities, outrage and despair, passion and powerlessness, heartbreak and promise, faith and yes, the dawning of hope. It's good to turn off the news for now and turn to worship and prayer with you, to soak in the comfort of coming together as a community of God's faithful people, to pause and take a breath, see the beauty all around us and appreciate the gift of this day. Encouraged and nurtured by those gifts, we can then look together for the presence and leading of God, which can help us discern our call and find our place in the work that stretches ahead. I celebrate the truth that even in these days of social distancing, when we aren't bringing our bodies together in one place for worship, we can still gather heart to heart in the presence of God, trusting that God continues to knit us together. Whether we are gathered or scattered, we are indeed still the Body of Christ, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

A word of reminder that near the end of this time of worship, we will share together in the Sacrament of Communion. If you haven't already done so, I invite you to pause this recording so that you can find something that will help you share in the breaking of bread and drinking from the cup. Bread and juice, coffee and doughnut, cracker and tea. God can and will bless whatever we bring to the table. Also, I'm sending along a PDF of the words of this service, to assist you in joining me in the unison and responsive pieces, as well as the singing. Come, let us worship God.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Awesome, wondrous God, dark, deep and holy One, we come to feel the mystery of your name.

Green growing God, Christ of many stories and disciples, we come to hear the parable of your love.

Bright, flashing God, blowing wind and Holy Spirit, we come to speak the gospel of your fire.

Distant yet intimate God, woven, puzzled, grained by time, we come to find the Trinity of your grace.

(Maren Tirabassi, Before the Amen)

SONG *"Praise with Joy the World's Creator"*

Praise with joy the world's Creator, God of justice, love and peace,
Source and end of human knowledge, grace bestowing without cease.
Celebrate the Maker's glory, power to rescue and release.

Praise to Christ who feeds the hungry, frees the captive, finds the lost,
Heals the sick, upsets religion, fearless both of fate and cost.
Celebrate Christ's constant presence – Friend and Stranger, Guest and Host.

Praise the Spirit sent among us, liberating truth from pride,
Forging bonds where race or gender, age or nation dare divide.
Celebrate the Spirit's treasure – foolishness none dare deride.

Praise the Maker, Christ, and Spirit, one God in Community,
Calling Christians to embody oneness and diversity.
Thus the world shall yet believe when shown Christ's vibrant unity.

OPENING PRAYER

God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity, we ask for your presence to enter this space. We know that in self-giving love, your very nature teaches us how to love one another. Father and Creator, Son and Redeemer, Spirit and Advocate, we call upon you to teach us this hour. Teach us to pray. Teach us to love. Teach us to be one, as you are one. With all of our divisions we create with our own biases, from social class to race, from gender to age, from ability to different abilities, we know we still have much to learn. Teach us this hour, we pray, in the name and after the example of Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Rev. Dr. Libby Grammer, Senior Pastor at First Baptist Church in Martinsville, VA)

SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

SERMON

I've been picturing a fire. I'm not enough of a historian to tell you when it was initially laid or by whom, but then again, I suspect it wasn't just one person or one moment in time. It likely didn't start here, in this country, but for at least 400 years the coals have been here, red and hot, not always roaring and launching sparks, but alive and burning nonetheless. Four hundred years ago, in 1619, African slaves arrived in Virginia, and the rest, as they say, is history. Since then, we've stoked the fire with years of slavery followed by sharecropper nightmares; lynchings and cross burnings, segregation and Jim Crow laws. The civil rights marches, voting rights act and Brown vs. the Board of Education did a lot to calm the fire, but the assassination of people like Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers and those four little girls in a Sunday morning church bombing fanned the flames and kept the coals alive. We could talk all day about the fuel and water on that fire since then: affirmative action and economic injustice, men and women elected to the Senate, House and White House, gentrification of housing that moved the poor out of their homes, unclean water and lead poisoning, the ability of some to climb the ladder and open the way for others to follow. In recent years, there's been the growing list of names of people shot down and locked away: Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, interspersed with marches like the one in Charlottesville and the coals are glowing red, the flames reaching high. I name all of that as backdrop to this current moment, when what should enter stage left but the coronavirus. It didn't take long to see that African Americans are disproportionately likely to be infected as well as to die, which is tied to pre-existing health conditions as well as their general access to health care and the lack of insurance to cover the costs. If a whole bunch of us had our heads spinning when the markets tanked and just about everybody was sent to their rooms, it's hard to comprehend or calculate the impact for those on the margins, barely holding the ends together in the good times, and playing without a thread of a safety net to catch them when the bottom fell out. Was it better to have a job to go to that left you vulnerable to infection or be required to stay at home when to do so would be to place your home and access to food on the endangered species list? We've watched repeatedly as Ahmaud Arbery was shot and killed, and then along come four police officers to arrest a man and then hold him down with a knee on his neck for nearly nine minutes,

while some anonymous viewer recorded it for all to see. It was a tankful of gas poured on a burning fire. Was it any surprise that the country went up in flames?

I don't say all of that to make you squirm or because I don't think you watch the news. I say all of that because I think we need to hear it – and hold it – in the presence of God. Take in to our hearts the ways in which some of God's people suffer, needlessly, unfairly. And hold it in prayer for healing and changing, and then offer ourselves as helpers ready to be assigned our role in the work of putting the fire out once and for all.

Okay, so maybe I really have lost it, but in my defense, Matthew is the one who suggested it. The words I read a little while ago are the very last words of the Gospel, and they open with a reference to the 11. The first thing we should hear in that is Judas' absence, and the fact that the circle of disciples is even smaller than it was before. That doesn't seem to phase Jesus. No, he just charges ahead and sends them out: go and make disciples of all nations. The whole world, Jews and foreigners alike; tell them to obey everything I commanded you. Presbyterian preacher Tom Long summarizes it with these words: "Telling this little band of confused and disoriented disciples that they were to herd all the peoples of the earth toward Mount Zion in the name of Jesus would be like standing in front of most congregations today – many of them small and all of them of mixed motives and uncertain convictions – and telling them, 'Go into all the world and cure cancer, clean up the environment, evangelize the unbelieving, and, while you're at it, establish world peace.'

"That is the point, or close to it. The very fact that the task is utterly impossible throws the disciples completely onto the mercy and strength of God. The work of the church cannot be taken up unless it is true that 'all authority' does not belong to the church or its resources, but comes from God's wild investment... in Jesus the Son and the willingness of the Son to be present always to the church in the Spirit." (*Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 3, pages 47, 49*)

That last part is important: before they have a chance to gulp too hesitantly, or decide how far out on a limb they're willing to go trusting Jesus' proficiency with all of his authority, he closes by reminding them: I am with you always to the end of the age. We aren't sent off to whack away at the impossible all on our own, but with the company and compassion of God. And while I usually talk about the presence of God as a reassuring and comforting one, I think in this case it is that as well as the coaxing and calling of one who knows what needs to be done and who believes in our abilities to make a difference. I believe that it breaks God's heart to see the racism and hatred that stalk this country, and so we are sent out but not by ourselves; with the company of each other and the comforting, challenging, empowering presence of Jesus.

One of the pieces I've heard frequently and that has reverberated loud and clear in my brain is the sentiment that many of the people we've seen protesting, don't feel heard. It seems that one of the places we can make a response to the rage and hurt we've seen over the last two weeks is to focus on hearing people. To invite their stories, to try hard to comprehend their experiences and what has brought them to the place where they are now. Whether they're the people we admire and understand or the ones we want to condemn and reject, how did they get that way? A loving grandmother or an abusive step-father? Being offered a fresh start even though they'd done nothing to deserve it or being accosted for being black and in the wrong neighborhood at the wrong time of day? For those of us who live with the privilege of being white, it's hard to get our heads around the experience of not daring to take a walk in your own neighborhood without your daughter, because you're tall and black and male, and you live in a predominantly white neighborhood; if you're alone, no one believes you belong and tries to drive you out. Or the 17-year old who loves nothing more than running, but whose mother pleads with him not to run, because a running black man is too often suspected of running from a crime

scene. We need to hear that and try to comprehend that and then begin to use our voices to say no, not here, not now, not on my watch.

Believe it or not, I actually have some hope. It's been a grizzly couple of weeks, but in the midst of the violence and rage, looting and death, I've seen a lot of peaceful protests. City streets filling up and spilling over as people call for transformation and an end to systemic racism. City Councils saying no to choke holds, and demanding an end to excessive force. Police and protesters marching together, talking, listening, blocking violence. White and black, red and brown joining together as one humanity to do the long hard work of envisioning and ushering in a new day. Protesters have gathered on horseback, on surf boards, using yoga stances. They've sung and chanted, lit candles and kept silence. There won't be anything quick or easy about it, but if as a people we decide to take it on, if we work together even after it's out of the headlines and the news has moved on, we might be able to make a difference, especially if we remember we don't work alone. But with the full force of all the holy authority in heaven and on earth, and accompanied by the presence of Christ.

I'm still thinking about that fire. There's a lot of heat built up in those coals, and it's not going away anytime soon. But what if, rather than try to put it out, we work to convert it from a destructive fire to a warming one. A place where people can gather, share stories, sing songs, usher in the new day and weave together our one humanity. The Holy Spirit came as fire to spark passion and ignite energy. May it burn within and between us and show us how to embrace new life. Amen.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Evy May sends her love and prayers

Prayers for Gretchen's friend's med school classmate, Manolo Ramírez, who has contracted the virus and is on ventilation

For our leaders and world leaders to be zapped by God with wisdom to make the tough decisions that our world needs now.

A worry about the carefree nature of summer and what it might do to the pandemic numbers. A prayer for people to keep safety and respect in their brains when they go on vacation.

PASTORAL PRAYER

O Holy God, the earth and its weary people cry out to you. The surround sound of these past few weeks and months pulses in our ears and hearts, and as much as we want to turn it off and close it out, we turn first to you. Keep us attentive to the wounds and hungers, rage and grief, hopes and dreams that surround us. We ask you, O God, to be with all those who suffer: with those who continue to contract and battle COVID-19, for medical personnel who continue put themselves at risk in order to care for their patients, for first responders and essential workers and all who give so generously for others. Thank you and thank them for their service. We pray for those who are out of work or beginning to return, trying desperately to recover, for those who wait in line for food, and those who fill bags and boxes in order to place them in trunks; for those who are trying to juggle more needs than they know how and who grow weary. For businesses that are trying to reopen, customers and clients who are deciding whether and when, how and for what to venture out. Keep us careful, and mindful of the ways in which our choices effect others.

As protests continue to fill the streets of this nation and countless cities and nations around the world, we pray, O God, for peace. Hear and hold and heal the rage that has been triggered yet again in too many, and open our ears as well as the ears of our neighbors and leaders; show us the path that can lead us forward to a new day, a day of justice and well being for all. Help us to recognize the difference between peaceful protesters, rioters who seek to sow violence and looters who destroy businesses; between police who do their very best to protect the needs of the weak, and those who've become too

comfortable using excessive force. Pour out your wisdom upon the leaders of our country and all countries that they might lead and decide, serve and protect, build up and restore in the way of love.

Holy and loving God, we give you thanks for all of the ways you bless our lives and gift us with your presence; for the joys and wonders, mysteries and grace that fill us up and take our breath away. Send us out to do what we can to reflect your light, share your love, tend your creation and build up the Body of Christ. 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 my opening words of welcome, I admitted the feelings of powerlessness I felt at times in the past week as I watched riots and looting, protests and deep, deep rage blanket our country. I could also say that's been part of my reaction over the course of the past three months as well as I've watched the COVID-19 death toll rise, people protest their way out of their houses so they can flock to crowded places without masks. I used that word knowingly, even as I knew deep in my bones that I am not powerless. Neither are you. All of us have something we can give, something we can do, something we can share. That may be a welcoming smile, an outstretched hand, a bouquet of flowers or a cup of cold water. It may mean stopping in the middle of the rush to truly listen, so one less person has the ability to say they don't feel heard. It may mean challenging someone else's assumptions, being willing to be uncomfortable in order to learn and grow, sending a donation to help the efforts of an organization we believe in. It may mean wearing a mask, keeping a distance, leaving a larger than normal tip for a person who has just returned to work. When it feels like the world is spinning out of control and at risk of coming apart at the seams, giving our little may feel like a drop in the bucket – but drops are exactly how buckets are filled. All we're asked to do is what we can. And by God's grace, we're asked to do all we can.

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Invitation

This morning you are invited for Holy Communion in the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is not the loaf of bread you see on my plate on your screen. The Body of Christ is not even the bread on your table. The Body of Christ is us as we are strengthened by sharing together this meal of hope and grace and presence.

We pause to honor with tender memory and quiet anticipation the holy table in our church home, and to consecrate with love for all God's children these many holy tables in our home churches.

Prayer of Consecration

We Are the Body of Christ dispersed and gathered at the same time, which is always true though we do not always see it.

In your many kitchens, and living rooms, rest your hands lightly upon these elements which we set aside today to be a sacrament. Let us ask God's blessing upon them and upon us and upon all those who are in our prayers this morning.

Gentle Host, rest upon us as you rested upon water and light, earth and creatures, human beings, all in your image, and holy Sabbath. Send your Spirit of life and love, power and blessing upon your children who are staying at home so that this Bread may be broken and gathered in love and this Cup poured out to give hope to all. Risen Christ, live in us, that we may live in you. Breathe in us, that we may breathe in you. Amen.

Words of Remembering

We remember the Creator blessed all creatures and all human beings with plants of the ground and fruit of the trees. We remember Sarah's hospitality to angels, manna in the wilderness, oil that never gave out, and the Psalmist speaking down the ages, "Taste and see that God is good. We remember.

We remember a twelve year old at a Passover in Jerusalem, a meal cooked by Peter's mother-in-law, a small boy's lunch, Zacchaeus' feast, Martha's one-dish hospitality, a story about a fatted calf and dancing, another Jerusalem Passover, broken bread in Emmaus, and fish on the beach. We remember.

We remember communal dining inspired by the Holy Spirit, Peter's unkosher dream that meant all God's children are accepted, Paul's communion on a sinking ship and a vision of the fruit of the trees in the New Jerusalem. We remember.

Our tables are as various as these and they are as truly the meal of grace blessed by Creator, Christ and Indwelling Spirit.

Sharing of the Elements

We remember that the night before he died, Jesus met at table with his friends. He took the bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them saying, this is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

Let us at our many tables receive the gift of God, the Bread of Heaven.

We become the Body of Christ in the Bread we share.

We also remember how after supper, he took the cup, lifted it in thanksgiving to God and then poured it out saying, this is the cup of the new covenant, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of this, all of you, in remembrance of me.

Let us in our many places receive the gift of God, the Cup of Blessing.

We are one in Christ in the Cup we share.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

In thanksgiving for this meal of grace, rejoicing that, in the holy dispersion of online worship, we claim the risen Christ's love is not limited by buildings made with human hands, nor contained in human ceremonies, let us pray ...

O Holy One, our tongues have tasted the good news and our lives are filled with the Spirit that hovered over creation and blew fresh hope on Pentecost. Creator, open our hearts. Word, speak peace in our voices to all the people in all the hotspots and hurts of the world. As we journey masked through our lonely or dangerous or over-busy day, Holy Spirit, fill us with this blessing -- that it is good. Amen (Maren Tirabassi, Gifts in Open Hands)

SONG "Let There Be Peace on Earth"

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me;

Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.

With God, our Creator, family are we. Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me, let this be the moment now.

With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow:

To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally.

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.

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)