

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

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

August 23, 2020

SONG *“Breathe on Me, Breath of God”*

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good morning, my friends. And welcome together for worship. It is good to be together as the United Church of Christ Congregational in Wallace; as the people of God, the Body of Christ, drawn together from our respective homes and hide outs across north Idaho and places far beyond. And it's very good to be knit together as one by the loving, moving, ever-faithful presence of the Spirit of God. Welcome!

I heard a question this week that helped me realize that I've taken some things for granted in relation to our online worship, and so – more than a little belatedly – I want to take a minute to explain to you the materials I send every week. In the Sunday morning email, as well as on the church website, there are two links: the first is a You Tube link, and when you click on it, you get a video of our worship. The other is a PDF, and when you click on that, you get all of the words of our worship. I do this in part for the households that don't have internet; every Monday a copy of this goes in the mail. I also share it with you so that you can follow along as much as you like: there's usually a responsive call to worship, a unison opening prayer, words to a couple of hymns, as well as the Bible reading. I suppose you could read the PDF on your computer and watch the video on your phone, or vice versa, but personally I'd find that distracting. It might work best to print out the PDF, so you have it to refer to when you want (similarly to the bulletin). Or of course, you can ignore it and just watch the video. Whatever is most helpful and meaningful to you as we seek God's presence and listen for the word of God.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Out of a world of cut-throat competition, of winners-and-losers, and too many left behind, we come together.

The world's ways are not our ways. The world's ways are not Christ's ways.

Out of a world of hatred, violence, individualism, and life-taking power, we gather as *Koinonia*, as God's people.

God's ways are inclusive, expansive, and life-giving for all peoples.

Come and worship the One whose love knows no limits! Swim and splash in the cleansing waters of divine community! Resurrect your spirits and souls in worship of the One God!

Praise be to the Everlasting One! (Tim Graves, posted on Liturgy Bits)

SONG *“Lavish Love, Abundant Beauty”*

Lavish love, abundant beauty, Gracious gifts for heart and hand,
Life that fills the soul and senses – All burst forth at your command.
Lord, our Lord, Eternal Father, Great Creator, God and Friend,
Boundless power gave full expression To your love which knows no end.

I am yours, Eternal Maker, All my body, mind and heart.
Take and use me to your glory, Form yourself in every part.
Lord, your love brings joy and gladness Flowing forth within my soul,
May my very breath and being Rise to you, their source and goal.

OPENING PRAYER (in unison) (based on Psalm 38)

Faithful God, we come into your presence with thanksgiving, deeply grateful for the unfailing love and faithfulness you have shown toward us, your people. When we call out to you, you answer. When we are exhausted, you give us the strength to go on. When we find ourselves in trouble, you are there, standing beside us. And so we come before you with gratitude and praise, offering you the worship of our hearts and lives. Open our eyes to see and know you here among us; open our ears to recognize your voice. And then send us out from here, to live and work in the world as your faithful disciples. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

(Christine Longhurst, re:Worship)

SCRIPTURE READING Exodus 1:8 – 2:10

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.” But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?” The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews[a] you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.”

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

SERMON

I don’t remember if I’ve told the story about the first time I drove on the right hand side of the car, on the left hand side of the road. It was in downtown London. My friend Cathy and I had carefully charted

our course, so once we picked up the car, we put our parents in the back seat, told them to keep their nerves to themselves, and headed out. Cathy had the map in hand, and I was behind the wheel. GPS has improved things exponentially, but one of the things old-fashioned paper maps didn't usually communicate well were one-way streets, so things didn't go exactly as planned. But she never lost me, and I stayed calm. Or at least calm enough. She occasionally looked back at our parents and reported to me later just how white knuckled they were, but they kept it to themselves. And we eventually reached our destination, which was my father's birthplace and a group of family he hadn't seen since he was 4 years old. The next night our English family threw a party for us, and sometime in the midst of it, the bartender called me over and said, I hear you drove in downtown London. When I nodded, he said, you're a plucky lady.

I've worn that title with pride for years, even though I haven't always lived up to it, and honestly I fear I deserve it less every year. I don't know that I've ever heard anyone else use the word, but I knew what he meant. And I knew what the word meant, even before the dictionary spelled it out as "marked by courage". I think being plucky is a very good thing. But just because the word is used, doesn't mean we've answered the question of whether or not we're plucky when it matters most. Being marked with courage is one thing when you're facing a roundabout or city traffic in London, but another thing altogether when challenged to speak truth to power, to stand for what you believe to be right when the stakes are very, very high. Which is precisely why when it comes to being plucky, two of my role models are Shiphrah and Puah, women who demonstrate for me what it means to be marked with courage.

Shiphrah and Puah were Hebrew midwives in a very hard time and place. They lived and worked in Egypt. The Hebrew people were in Egypt because of a terrible famine, and because Joseph had lured his brothers and their families there - which fed them and saved their lives, but also led them into a life of servitude that eventually became slavery. Once Joseph died, a new king rose over Egypt; he didn't know that it had been Joseph's dreams and wisdom that had spared them in the years of famine, and rather than having any softness in his heart for the Hebrew people, he saw them as a threat. They'd been doing all too well for themselves: the text says they were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew so that the land was swarming with them. And since no king likes to admit fear directly, this king cloaked his insecurities in a domestic security proposal. He was convinced that in a time of war these foreigners-turned-immigrants would gang up with Egypt's enemies, fight against them and escape. So he imposed harder and harder labor on them, but the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread.

Finally, when ruthlessness and bitter treatment didn't work, the king called in the two midwives and gave them a set of instructions. From now on when they squatted before Hebrew women on their birthing stools and caught their babies, as soon as they could tell whether the child was a boy or a girl, they were to go into action. As far as the king could see, females posed no threat, so girls could live, but no Hebrew baby boy was to be allowed to take his first breath. Cover the mouth and nose just long enough, before the crying begins, and then tell mom that her child was stillborn.

Now when your business is bringing life into the world, snuffing out life is a pretty hard order to obey. And even more importantly for them, because their lives were rooted and grounded in the ways of God, they knew they could never follow the way of fear-driven death. I don't know when they knew they wouldn't obey the king's orders, whether it was as they received them, or the next time their hands pulled a baby boy into the world. But they didn't follow his orders, and they let the boys live. And when they were called in and made to account for themselves, they took advantage of the fact that a king in those days was as good as clueless when it came to childbirth. They told him a tale about the strength of the Hebrew women, how vigorous their labor was, and how those little babies just popped forth from

the womb before the midwives could even get there. The king didn't know enough to punish their disobedience, and God blessed their faithfulness.

But the word about the strength and vitality of the Hebrew women just made the king more frantic to squash the threat. Since his death-at-birth scheme had failed, the king tried a new edict: every boy that is born to the Hebrews is to be thrown into the Nile; since girls pose no threat, you can let them live. But the king was wrong again. The pluckiness of Shiphrah and Puah was perpetuated by three more females who set about preserving one particular life. A Levite woman gave birth to a baby boy, and she tried desperately to hide that baby for three months. But hiding a baby is hard - especially in slave quarters. Finally in desperation, probably as Egyptian soldiers approached, she decided that her son's best chance at survival was to set him afloat on the Nile and pray to God that he'd drift to safety. Curious as big sisters tend to be, the baby's sister secretly tracked the basket's progress down the river, and watched as the king's own daughter found the basket, reached in and lifted the baby up to the light of day. She recognized him as a Hebrew baby, which is when his sister popped out of the bushes and offered to go and fetch one of the Hebrew women to nurse and raise the child. And so the king's daughter took the enemy's child into the king's household, and let his own mother nurse and train him. When mom eventually took the infant to the king's daughter, she embraced him as her own son and named him Moses.

Five plucky women who were so marked by courage and faith in God that they gave birth to the story of Moses and the freedom and future of the people of Israel. Through their acts of civil disobedience, uppity love and persistent faith, they dared to take matters into their own hands. As a result, a boy lived and grew, a people was led to freedom, a nation was born and a living relationship with a loving God was established.

When you think of your life and our life together - as a congregation, a culture, a country - would you use the word plucky to describe it? I know that I'm grateful for the times plucky people dare to share hard things with me. And I know I have my strong, courageous, straightforward moments - as well as many that are much less than that. It's often hard for us to say the things that need to be said, and to say them directly to the people that most need to hear them, rather than to say them to people who sit on the sidelines or who agree with us. It's much easier to talk about what we think other people ought to be doing to make a difference than it is to speak up and step into the ring ourselves. We talk, but do we talk to the people who need to hear us? Do we act? We applaud Shiphrah and Puah's acts of civil disobedience, but would we consider doing likewise? How much uppity love and persistent faith is visible in your life? I know there's not nearly enough in mine.

The last few weeks we've heard a lot about John Lewis, and I'm still getting to know him, but from where I listen, I see and hear a loud and clear example of a plucky person, who was marked with courage, grounded in a persistent faith that led to all manner of uppity love. He wasn't afraid to say no to power when his faith convinced him the power was wrong; he wasn't afraid to offend or upset; and he wasn't afraid to be arrested when the people around him opposed the action he felt compelled to take. He focused on his moral compass which was intimately tied to his faith and his understanding of love, and he asked the people around him to do the same. In 2016, at a House sit-in following the Pulse shooting in Orlando, he said, "We have been quiet for too long. There comes a time when you have to say something. You have to make a little noise. You have to move your feet. This is the time." And then a few years later he said, "When you see something that is not right, not just, not fair, you have a moral obligation to say something. To do something. Our children and their children will ask us, 'What did you do? What did you say? ... We have a mission and a mandate to be on the right side of history.'"

The point is not courage for the sake of courage, but rather courage that is grounded in God. In the opening verses of Romans 12, Paul urges us to present our bodies, which really means our whole lives, body, heart, mind, soul and strength, to God - that by the grace of God we might not be conformed to this world, but transformed by God, so that we might discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect. If we can do that, we just might be fit to wear the title God's plucky people.

What would have happened if Shiphrah and Puah had not dared to embrace life, and instead had obeyed the death orders they received? And where would the Hebrew people be now, all of Judaism as well as Christians whose faith is built from our ancestors', if that mother and sister and the king's daughter hadn't gone out on a limb to save Moses' life? Just what might God do through us if we let our lives be transformed by the will and word and way of God? Are we ready to be known as God's plucky people?

PRAYER REQUESTS

Prayers for the Striker family. Jim passed away Thursday morning at the nursing home in Kellogg

Prayers for the Kellogg nursing home residents and staff

For Robynn (Thielman) Freiburger as she heals from a very bad fall from a ladder outside at her daughter EMA's in Moscow a week a half ago.

Continued healing and good health progress for Penny & Jim Derbyshire.

For Judie LaBau and her family in Florida, that God will surround them with safety from the virus while it is in heavy flare up in that state.

The celebration of welcoming Janice Josephine Flohr-Crumpton, Bruce Flohr's new granddaughter, born on August 10.

For our great leadership in our Alice Ling & Ben Crosby...Thanksgiving for their talents, gifts and love they share with each one of us and with the community.

Prayers for a friend of Ed and Kathie's and her family as she begins her Chemo for pancreatic cancer on Monday

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy and loving God, we come before you once again with hearts full to overflowing for all the gifts and graces that you pour out upon us. We thank you for the beauty and bounty of creation, especially in this season as gardens lavish upon us the richness of their harvest, and trees and bushes bend to us under the weight of all they have grown. We celebrate the miracle of new life, the delight of watching a toddler explore the world and discover their voice, the joy of birthdays remembered by loved ones near and far, the gift of long bike rides and quiet camping trips, the refreshment of cooling swims in the hot summer sun. We give you thanks for all that offers rest, provides meaning, nurtures love, restores hope, triggers laughter and prompts joy.

Holy One, we lift before you all who are in need of healing and comfort, rest and renewal, safety and shelter. We pray for those who are headed down the long road of treatment, those who grieve the death of a loved one, those who stumble and falter in the dark of depression and the hopelessness of homelessness. We pray, O God, for those in the southeast who brace for the arrival of Laura and Marco, for those who run from and battle wildfires across the west, for those who continue the long hard work of recovery after tornadoes and floods, droughts and disaster. Loving God, strong in your tenderness and tender in your strength, we lift before the needs of our country: all those who continue to suffer the reality of Covid, medical personnel and essential workers who put themselves at risk while working eternal hours, as well as those who look for work, small businesses that struggle to hold on, homeowners who wonder how long that will be the case. We pray for the unrest in our streets and parks, even as we listen to the cries for justice and equality; help us to hear the hurt and anger, and to

offer ourselves as partners in creating new pathways and participants in imagining new possibilities. We pray for all who return to school: teachers, students and staff, as well as the families who juggle added responsibilities at home. Keep them safe, show all of us together how to encourage learning and growth while offering shelter and care. Pour out your wisdom upon our leaders, our educators, our scientists and researchers. Ground each of us and all of us in your courage, and help us to live and move with relentless love and persistent faith.

Hear our prayers, spoken and unspoken. And hear us as we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught: Our Father...

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (depts)

OFFERING

What an abundance of gifts we have to offer: 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 marks are symbolized in our offerings for the work of the church – both within our organization and in the world. Thank you for all that you do, for all that you give, for all of the ways that you serve God and the church through the use and giving of your gifts.

SONG “*Arise, Your Light Is Come*”

Arise, your light is come! The Spirit’s call obey;
Show forth the glory of your God which shines on you today!

Arise, your light is come! Fling wide the prison door;
Proclaim the captive’s liberty, good tidings to the poor.

Arise, your light is come! All you in sorrow born,
Bind up the brokenhearted ones and comfort those who mourn.

Arise, your light is come! The mountains burst in song!
Rise up like eagles on the wing; God’s power will make us strong.

BENEDICTION

Life is short, And we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel the way with us. So: be swift to love, and make haste to be kind. And may the blessing of God the source, Jesus the reconciler, and the Spirit who animates life be among us all. Amen.