

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL  
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 9, 2020

SONG “*All Things Bright and Beautiful*”

GREETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good morning! And welcome together for worship with the United Church of Christ Congregational in Wallace. No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you’re welcome here. This is a time and a place in which we are invited to explore our faith, deepen our relationship with God, increase our awareness of God’s presence in our lives and in our world, and to ponder – prayerfully – what response we will make to the mercy and grace of God. It’s good to be together.

A reminder that I am sending a PDF along with this video, so that you can join with me in the responsive parts of this worship as well as in the singing. Let us worship God!

SONG “*Gathered Here*”

Gathered here in the mystery of this hour  
Gathered here in one strong body  
Gathered here in the struggle and the power  
Spirit, draw near.

CALL TO WORSHIP

I will light a light in the name of the Maker who lit the world and breathed the breath of life for me.  
I will light a light in the name of the Christ who saved the world and stretched out a hand to me.  
I will light a light in the name of the Spirit who encompasses the world and blesses my soul with yearning.

**We will light three lights for the Trinity of Love: God above us, God beside us, God beneath us; the beginning, the end, the everlasting One.**

*(A Wee Worship Book, Fourth Incarnation, The Iona Community)*

OPENING PRAYER

Because you made the world, and intended it to be a good place, and called its people your children; because when things seemed at their worst, you came in Christ to bring out the best in us; so, gracious God, we gladly say:

**Goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, truth is stronger than lies.**

Because confusion can reign inside us, despite our faith; because anger, tension, bitterness and envy distort our vision; because our minds sometimes worry small things out of all proportion; because we do not always get it right, we want to believe:

**Goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, truth is stronger than lies.**

Because you have promised to hear us, and are able to change us, and are willing to make our hearts your home, we ask you to confront, control, forgive and encourage us, as you know best.

*(Silence)*

Then let us cherish in our hearts that which we proclaim with our lips:

**Goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, truth is stronger than lies.**

God, hear our prayer, and change our lives until we illustrate the grace of the God who makes all things new. **Amen.** (A Wee Worship Book, Fourth Incarnation, The Iona Community)

SCRIPTURE READING I Kings 3:5-12

At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.

SERMON

We've been praying a lot for wisdom lately, and something early this week got me to thinking about that, and wondering what we mean by that prayer. What do we even mean by that word? I sort of want to say, Indy started it – because for as long as I can remember, if she's been in the room when I ask for prayer requests, she's been looking for wisdom for world leaders. Now, I've never asked her what she means by that, but the prayer resonates deep and loud with me, so I've been off and running ever since, which is well before we got into the wild and wacky year of 2020. Now it feels like about the only thing I know how to pray for is wisdom, but what do I mean? If it's a prayer you utter, what do you mean? All of which led me to wondering what Solomon meant by it when he asked for it.

Solomon was King David's son, and after David had reigned on the throne for 40 years, when he recognized that the time of his death was drawing near, he called Solomon to his side and gave him a final set of instructions for how he should live and how he should reign. Some nasty and intense battles took place during the transition between the two kings, but when this morning's passage opens, Solomon is securely seated on the throne, but young enough and new enough to still be feeling unsure of himself. So when God appeared to Solomon in a dream and offered him anything his little heart desired, the king asked for wisdom. He spoke of God's great and steadfast love for David, his gratitude that he had become king as well as his sense of being wet behind the ears and green in the world of experience. You've set me king over this great people of yours, and I don't even know how to come in or go out, which end is up or how to tie my shoes. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil.

Our translation of the Bible says that Solomon asked for an understanding mind; another names it as a discerning heart. Walter Brueggemann is a highly respected biblical scholar (and member of the UCC) who I listen carefully to, and he has said that Solomon's words could also be translated as seeking a listening heart: a heart that is tuned to listen deeply and attentively to a wisdom that surpasses what any of us can bring on our own to a given situation, a heart that listens in such a way that truth is heard, good is honored and evil recognized for what it is. Can you imagine what a difference that would make

in our lives and our world? I hear the prayer request asking for wisdom for world leaders, and I ache in longing at the notion of leaders around the world, in our country and far beyond, listening with their hearts and minds for wisdom and truth beyond themselves; for the ability to discern what is good and right, and what is evil and false, to know who to trust and what to believe in the words coming at us. And not just presidents and kings, but all of us. A listening heart could be exactly what we need to help us discern among all the voices that clamor for our attention on Facebook and Twitter and in the media. A listening heart would be welcome at any dinner table where people gather for a meal and time together at the end of the day. A listening heart could transform the dramas that play out in board rooms. A listening heart that is attuned to God and God's ways at the center of our government and our communities could prompt us to dream as boldly as Solomon did about what our life together might look like, and help all of us discern between good and evil, between our own self-interests and how they relate to the well-being of all God's children; to dream of a day of sharing and cooperation, of justice and mercy, goodness and grace.

One of my favorite examples of living and acting with wisdom follows almost directly from the story we heard today. Sometime after Solomon woke from his dream and began to live with the gift that God had poured out upon him, two women came to him and asked him to settle a dispute that had them so hot and bothered that scratching each other's eyes out wasn't out of the question. He agreed to see them, and the first woman immediately launched into her story. We live in the same house and were pregnant at the same time, and in fact gave birth to our sons just three days apart. This woman's son died in the night because she lay on him, and then she got up, left her dead son beside me and carried mine away to nurse and care for. When I woke, I saw that the baby beside me was dead, and once the light of day began to dawn, it was crystal clear to me that the dead child was hers, not mine. From there the two of them began such a verbal tug of war over the living baby that it was clear he'd be lucky to survive the day. Solomon was wise enough to know that there are cases of she said – she said disagreements that simply can't be settled in court, so he turned the question back on the mothers. He asked to have his sword brought to him, and prepared to cut the baby in two so that each woman could have an equal portion. The only way to be fair was to give them each half. As he raised his sword, one woman said, please, my Lord, give her the boy, but whatever you do, don't kill him. And then the other woman said, it shall be neither mine nor yours, divide him. At which point Solomon gave the child to the one willing to give the baby away, trusting that the love of a mother would choose life even if it meant letting her son go.

For those who are willing to listen, wisdom has an innate ability to sort through the questions and quandaries at hand in order to lead us to a clarity and resolution that are beyond logic or reason, book learning or cold facts. It's grounded in a profound humility, a readiness to admit what we don't know and a deep desire to be open to receiving gifts that only God can give. One writer refers to Solomon's request for wisdom as having to do "...with 'alignment'. The intent of the exercise of biblical wisdom is to bring the soul into alignment with God's ways, because as I suspect we all know, the human soul has a tendency to become out of alignment." (Thomas W. Blair, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 3* page 266)

That image of needing to keep our souls in alignment with God really helps me as I face into some of the dynamics of COVID-19. I first became aware of an untenable tension back in April when talk began about springing people from their homes so they could go back to work. I was terrified of the likelihood of spreading the virus further and wider than it had already spread, with the extreme likelihood of claiming who knows how many more lives. But – or is it and? - I was horrified by the images of people sitting in lines of cars that stretched for miles in order to get food, calling unemployment offices hundreds of times before anyone would answer to tell them where their benefits were, and then the questions of evictions and abuse and the well being of children. I knew that the

question couldn't be framed as a public health vs economy question. We had to find a both/and answer, but God help me if I knew what that was. And now we're looking at schools and the myriad questions of what should happen in the next few weeks, if not sooner. Kids do need to be in school. They need to be learning, they need the social outlet, they need to be released, and hopefully healed, from the trauma they've already experienced as much as possible. And everyone – teachers, students, parents, other generations living in the homes, need to not be further exposed to the virus. Some parents can help with the learning at home, but some have got to get back to work. Some homes have internet and some do not. Some kids have good immune systems and some do not. God help us all; I don't know what the answer is. And I don't know if there is a one-size fits all answer. But I'm certain we need to face into this with listening hearts, while seeking to have our souls as closely aligned to the heart of God as possible. This is not a place for political posturing or ego massaging or trying to out-shout each other in an attempt to declare who's right and who's wrong. This is a moment to pray for wisdom, to listen to each other, to our children and parents, teachers and friends, and make every effort to be as loving and compassionate, creative and cooperative as we know how to be. Maybe there are ways that some of us on the sidelines can step up and play a role. However it happens, the way through is together, gathered around a wisdom that can only come from God, and can only be found in the listening, discerning, loving, aligning work of walking as one.

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#### SONG “*Seek Ye First*”

Seek ye first the kingdom of God And God's righteousness,  
And all these things shall be added unto you – Allelu, Alleluia!

Ask and it shall be given unto you, Seek and ye shall find,  
Knock and the door shall be opened unto you – Allelu, Alleluia!

#### PRAYER REQUESTS

For Christi's friend, Sandy and her family: Danny, her husband of 53 years, passed away from a heart attack brought on by his rheumatoid arthritis on July 14th, he was 71....He was a truck driver for over 50 years...Danny was a co-worker, mentor and good friend of Christi's.

Continued prayers for those struggling with depression and other mental illness during these uncertain times....that are being complicated by the restrictions and new normals.

Prayers for wisdom for our world leaders.

Special prayers for school administrators as they put new plans in place, prayers for all the teachers.

Prayers for the lawyers who are trying to stop the developer who wants to build condos in our hills.

#### PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy and dearly beloved God, we come before you once again with hearts full to overflowing. We are deeply grateful for the gifts and graces of summer: for cooler weather that follows heat, for ripening huckleberries and peaches, tomatoes and carrots, for long bike rides and refreshing summer swims, time away with family and the gathering of grandchildren for a week of camp, for good books, breathtaking sunsets and peace at the end of a long day. We see your hand in the beauty and bounty of earth, feel your presence in the miracle of love, drink deeply of your joy when laughter bubbles up and tests come back negative.

We also bring to you the heaviness of our hearts, as we grieve the death of loved ones, carry concern for those who suffer under the weight of depression, the pressure of addiction or struggle to maintain an equilibrium with mental health; for those unable to make ends meet or find food with which to feed their family, and who worry about how long they'll have a place to call home. We offer to you the brokenness of those who struggle to hold on to hope for the dawning of a new day or the possibility of a fresh start. We pray, O God, for our community, our country and our world, for those lives ravaged by the coronavirus, the sick and vulnerable, for those without work and those whose work never ends, for parents and teachers, students and support systems, for government leaders and elected officials, for impossible choices and the wisdom and courage we need to make them. We pray for the people of Beirut and those who search in the rubble for pieces of the past; for those whose lives and homes have been flooded out, burned up, blown down or broken over; for the question of development, who it helps, what it threatens and how to respond; for those who live every day with the knee of racism on their necks. Move among us, O God, and stir in us a willingness to listen, the compassion to care, a readiness to offer what we have and do what we can, the courage to do what needs to be done to build up and encourage life.

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

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

OFFERTORY

My friends, our God has richly blessed us, and I marvel on a regular basis the ways in which you share those blessings with others. Your gifts help to sustain and support the work of our church, through the money that enables our ministry, and also through the planting and tending of flowers, the exchange of phone calls and post cards, the lifting of prayers and the sharing of burdens, the gift of fruit and the delivery of groceries. Your gifts also serve to express the presence of God, whether you're helping at the food pantry or donating food that will be given away there, offering welcome to a visitor on the street or reading to a child over Zoom, building a set of shelves for a neighbor or sewing masks in order to give them away. Large and small, seen and unseen, visible and known only to the heart of God, all of your gifts are gratefully received and gracefully blessed. Thank you for all that you do, for all that you give, for all that you share.

SONG "God of Grace and God of Glory"

God of grace and God of glory, On Thy people pour Thy power;  
Crown thine ancient Church's story, Bring our bud to glorious flower.  
Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage, For the facing of this hour, For the facing of this hour.

Lo! the hosts of evil round us Scorn Thy Christ, assail your ways!  
From the fears that long have bound us, Free our hearts to faith and praise.  
Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage, For the living of these days, For the living of these days.

BENEDICTION

The peace of God which passes all understanding, that peace which the world can neither give to you nor take away, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of Christ Jesus our Risen Savior. And the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, be upon you and remain with you, this day and forevermore. Amen.