

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

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 6, 2020

SONG    *“When Morning Gilds the Skies”*

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Good morning, my friends! And welcome to worship. Welcome to this time when we gather as the United Church of Christ Congregational in Wallace. We come to sing God’s praises, to listen for the Word of God for us and for our lives, to lift before God and each other the prayers of our hearts and the needs of our world, and to gather around Christ’s table to be fed and nourished by the grace of God. If you don’t have something in front of you that can serve as the bread and cup of communion, now would be a good time to pause the recording so that you can get it. And if you would like words to help you participate in the songs and prayers, they are available by clicking on the PDF link that accompanies the recording. Having gathered all of the stuff of this time, let us pause for a moment and prepare our hearts and minds to gather in the presence of God.

SONG    *“Come into God’s Presence”*

Come into God’s presence singing, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

God has given us this beautiful earth and all that grows and runs upon it.

**Thanks be to God.**

God has given us breath to live and spirit to sing.

**Thanks be to God.**

God has gathered us into a community of care and worship.

**Let us worship God with love, thanksgiving and praise.**

(Maren Tirabassi, *Touch Holiness*)

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION** (in unison)

**Gracious and holy God, we come to you because you have first come to us. We know you because you have revealed yourself. Give us in this morning hour of worship a new sense of your Spirit breathing through us. Lift our hearts with the wings of song, heal our souls with the balm of prayer, enliven our minds with the words of scripture and interpretation, and newly enable us to dedicate our strength, our substance, and our service to your work in the world. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

(Maren Tirabassi, *Touch Holiness*)

**SCRIPTURE READING**    Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':

This is my name forever,  
and this my title for all generations.

## SERMON

If he'd been more like us normal, run of the mill people, that upbringing would have scarred him for life, or at least bought him hours of therapy. Was he a Hebrew or an Egyptian? We all know that if his mama changed his diapers, sang him to sleep and fed him through the early years, his foundation was built on the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and he was well acquainted with the lighting of Shabbot candles and the smell of chicken soup. But if he lived and grew in Pharaoh's house and was embraced by the king's daughter as her own, he was well schooled in the art of refined table manners and had grown accustomed to having servants at his beck and call. While it might be tempting to wonder if he straddled both worlds, I doubt that would be a positive; from what I hear, being biracial often gives more people the chance to reject you. Maybe he identified as one more than the other, or maybe he never really felt like he belonged anywhere.

Until that day when he was out in the brick yard, and saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave. Then the pieces clicked into place, he felt his mother's knee under him and heard her voice in his ear, and knew exactly who he was and where his heart lived. So he looked around for observers; seeing no one, he ended the beating by killing the Egyptian; he buried him in the sand, and went on about his day hopeful no one would be the wiser. But the next day, the wind scattered that house of cards when he learned that not only was the word out about the murder, but that Pharaoh had put a price on his head. Not risking a swing by the residence for a stitch of clothing or a sack of provisions, he fled from Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian. His kindness at the well won him the attention of a grateful father and the gift of a wife, which was soon followed by the birth of a son. Relieved to put palace life behind him, he settled down and made a life for himself and his family. He knew all too well what it was to be an alien residing in a foreign land, and finally, by the grace of God, Moses reveled in the joy of being at home.

That pleasant domestic scene played itself out for many years. One day he was doing what he did every day in his new life as a shepherd, but further out than usual, when something unusual caught his eye and held his attention. We can pause the story here and get mired in the curiosity of what in the world is going on when a bush is ablaze but not burning up or crumbling in a pile of ash. Or we can observe that Moses noticed what was happening and stopped to look and give it his full and undivided attention. I'm not sure which is the greater miracle. When was the last time something unusual grabbed your attention and you actually stopped to watch it? If I notice (which is always up for grabs), I'm much more apt to

keep moving while I consider what I just saw. I don't remember ever watching a spider spin its web or the colors of the rainbow until they disappear. Or as Mary Oliver wrote in her poem "The Summer Day":

Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean -  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down -  
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

Moses noticed and stopped, stepped closer and examined the strange sight in front of him, and in that attentiveness he heard God call his name. When Moses responded, God told him to stay where he was and to take off his sandals, because he was standing on holy ground. As a person who has always preferred shoes off to shoes on, that word of instruction resonates with me, but I don't assume that puts me in touch with God's instruction to Moses. As I think about it, I'm aware of the role that shoes play: they protect our feet and create distance between us and the surface we're walking on. I think God wanted to do away with that protective, insulating distance, inviting Moses in close. I also think about how often we ask people to take off their shoes when they come in to our houses – which is honestly a way of asking them to leave the dirt outside. In Moses' day, a similar request was more an offer of hospitality: come in, take off your shoes, sit a spell and be comfortable. Words from God to Moses of intimacy and hospitality. Come close, join me here, listen to what I have to say to you, receive the passion and longing that burden my heart.

I won't speak for Moses, but I know I've received a lot of invitations over the years that, as I've accepted them, I've wondered if there was more going on than meets the eye. Is this an opening for a friendly chat or is there more going on? What's the agenda at work here, and how long before I know? Even if that was the sort of question Moses might have asked, I don't think he had time to wonder. One minute God is saying, take off your shoes and come in. Without even taking a breath, God plows ahead and launches in: I have observed the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cry at the abuse of their task masters. I know their sufferings, and I've come down to deliver them from Egypt, to bring them up to a good and welcoming land. So come, I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt.

In my imagination, the moment Moses slid his feet out of his sandals and God started to speak, a smile broke out on his face: Finally, God is going to intervene on behalf of his enslaved kin. Finally the agonizing years of slavery are coming to an end. Finally... but before he can relax into the music of it all, the sound turns shrill and the smile fades as it becomes clear how God intends to accomplish this long delayed, overdue deliverance. God has come down, not to act by divine declaration, but through an unlikely shepherd who is on the Most Wanted List in Egypt and who has no burning desire to return. One writer describes the next part of the conversation this way: "...Moses responds to God's call to 'go' with unqualified reluctance, asking: 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'... God immediately corrects the implicit assumption in this sentence that Moses will accomplish this act of deliverance. Moses will return to Egypt, but he will not go alone. He will lead his people out of Egypt, but he will not do so alone. Moses will lead his people in a celebratory worship service on Mount Horeb, but he will not do so alone. Moses has a critical role to play in this divine initiative, but it is God will bring out the people of Israel from captivity." (Gary W Charles, Feasting on the Word Year A, Additional Essays)

I've told this story as if it's about Moses and his daring adventure to liberate the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, about how he single handedly took on Pharaoh and worked every angle there was to work until Pharaoh caved and the people fled – but this story honestly isn't about Moses at all, except in an extremely secondary way. It's about God. About God's deep, deep compassion for the beloved people of Israel. About God's willingness to come down and enter the fray of this messy old world long before God came down in Jesus, in order to relieve the suffering of God's people. It's about God's faithfulness to the promises God has made. About the amazing capacity of God's heart to hold our pain and sorrow, our misery and struggle. And about God's intention to turn that around, to take decisive action, to find willing participants, to commission and equip followers willing to become leaders who will go with God in order to do what needs to be done.

In this story, Moses was going about his ordinary everyday chores and activities, and was both attentive and responsive enough to stop and look at the attention grabbing gesture of God. And when God invited him to come close and be at home, Moses stepped forward. When God's plan of approach became clear, Moses argued a bit and then set out, accompanied, equipped and empowered by God.

If this story is about Moses at all, it's about his response to God, God's compassion and God's commitment to acting; and that's precisely where it becomes our story as well. God's heart, God's compassion, God's faithfulness to God's promises, God's trustworthy presence in the midst of this messy old world are no different now than they were in Moses' day. The question for us is whether we'll give God the time of day, pay attention to the unexpected, listen for when and where God is calling our names, allow God's compassion to enter and dwell within our own hearts so that we too might feel and reject the suffering of God's people, and then go where we are sent, accompanying God on the mission of deliverance and healing, compassion and mercy, justice and love. May it be so. Amen.

#### PRAYER REQUESTS

For Kasey's 15-year old cousin Riyana who tried to commit suicide earlier this week

#### PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy and loving God, we marvel that you come to us yet again, calling our names, inviting us to take off our shoes, and to sit a bit on this holy ground. You draw us close that we might find comfort and quiet in your presence, inviting us to set down the worries and burdens that we've carried too long, to entrust them to your care, and in your presence find rest. Relieve us of the grievances and anxieties that weigh us down, the shame and insecurity over which we stumble, the sense of inadequacy that prevents us from raising our hand to join you in the work of your heart and the care of your children. We especially seek your healing embrace of all those who consider suicide, that they might receive the support and care they need to help them cherish life and discover hope.

On this Labor Day weekend, we give thanks that your welcoming invitation includes not just us, but all those who labor, and pray especially for farmers and bakers, bus drivers and miners, truck drivers and those who stock grocery shelves, those who pick fruit and work in meat plants, housekeepers who keep motels COVID-clean and food service folks who wonder when and for how long they'll have work. We pray for the jobless and waiting, for those in mandatory overtime and those who work in dangerous conditions. We pray for all those for whom eeking out a living has become much more difficult in the days of a pandemic. Keep them safe, and show all of us together how to create a safety net that protects home, provides food and keeps children safe.

We pray yet again for our community, our nation and our world. As people observe the long weekend that forms a bridge between summer and fall, we pray for nourishing laughter, restorative rest, and wise

choices that won't trigger another COVID spike. We give thanks for the return to classrooms and the adventure of learning, even as we hold our breath and pray for good health, wise choices and safe learning spaces. Painfully aware of the tensions and hostilities that are present throughout our country, we pray for calm, for peace, for a willingness to listen and to speak to one another, for steps forward that reduce the likelihood of violence while honoring the dignity of all. Pour out your wisdom upon us, that we might act with courage, listen with compassion, serve with humility, and walk in love. Knit us together in all the richness of our diversity, yet still able to come together as one.

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)

OFFERING

We've talked about several offering opportunities in the past few months. With the email I sent this morning, I included a link we received recently from the Pacific Northwest Conference, directing us to a video that was just released to say thank you to all of the individuals, congregations and other organizations that made this summer's Camp Campaign a success. Our church gave the money budgeted for camp scholarships, and several of you also contributed to the campaign, so thank you for those gifts as well. If you haven't already seen the video, I hope you will watch it.

Last Sunday, I opened a conversation with you about One Great Hour of Sharing, an offering of the United Church of Christ that both enables development around the world and emergency response to times and places of disaster. I was struck this week to find a story about a Congolese refugee named Sandra who arrived in the US in 2018. Sandra is one of more than a dozen refugee women who have received training at Refugee One's Sewing Studio; they are now using their new skills to sew masks. Like many of the refugees, Sandra and her husband were laid off from their manufacturing jobs because of COVID-19. As of May 1, Sandra and the other sewers had made 1,000 masks for essential workers and people in need. They've been working from home, using the brand new sewing machines that were given to Sewing Studio graduates. They were donating the masks to places like a retirement community, connections for the homeless and the local alderman's office to distribute to those in need. Refugee One and the Sewing Studio are programs supported by One Great Hour of Sharing. A couple of you have already made a gift to this fund, and I hope others of you will at least consider the opportunity to support its vital ministry.

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Words of Invitation

We come again to the time of sharing together the feast of Jesus' last supper, and of his love for his disciples and friends. Even though we still sit at our separate tables, we come together around his table, joined by Christ's love for us and for all God's children. Christ invites us to come, not because we must, but because we may; come, not because we are fulfilled, but because in our emptiness we stand in need of God's mercy and assurance; come, not to express an opinion, but to seek a presence and to pray for a spirit. We're invited to come to this table as we are. Here we partake and share. Christ's table is spread for you and me, that we might again know that God has come to us, shared our common lot, and invites us to join the people of God's new age.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Lift your hearts to our God.

**We offer them to the One who loves us.**

Let us join in glad songs of praise.

**Though we are scattered, we sing our thanksgivings to our God**

In just a moment, creation sprang forth from the emptiness of chaos, and you began to pour out all your goodness and genuine love, God of all moments. In just a moment, or so it seems, uncertainty and fear sprang forth from everything that we call normal. Yet, in these continuing times of isolation, distancing, wearing masks, the earth continues to rejoice with sunsets which take our breath away, the winds continue to whisper us to sleep as they drift through the trees, the kindness and generosity of neighbors as well as strangers, remind us that, in those moments when all hope seemed to be lost, that is when you sent your Beloved to come, to be with us, to walk with us.

So, we will join our voices with those who continue to follow faithfully as well as with those who stumble, singing our praises to you:

**Holy, holy, holy are you, God of Wonder. In moments of confusion, you make clear your grace. In days which seem endless, you hold our times in your hands. In the midst of fears and worries, you watch over us. Hosanna in the highest!**

Yes, you are holy, God of all creation, yet you listen to the prayers of the forgotten, sending Jesus to come and share your love with us. Knowing the cracks in our broken hearts, he came to craft stained glass windows of grace. Seeing our shattered relationships, he came to make us whole. Experiencing the fear of death which is especially profound these days, he came to defeat its supposed power. Hearing the silent whispers of our fearful hearts, he comes to remind us of the love which was revealed in the resurrection and which remains the promise to us.

In these days of wondering and wandering, we seek to remember, not just his words, his life, but the trust he had in you in every moment, even as we speak of that mystery we know as faith:

**In moments of grief, Jesus weeps with us. In moments of despair, Jesus hopes with us. In moments of fear, Jesus walks with us. In moments of uncertainty, Jesus comforts us.**

Whether sitting a safe distance from each other or at a table in the kitchen, or a desk sitting in front of a device, we pray you would pour out your Spirit upon all your people everywhere and the gifts to be used for this feast. As we prepare to gather around your Table, God of Love, pour out your Spirit upon us, and on the gifts of the bread and cup. Though broken, the bread is the rich food of grace and mercy, strengthening us so we may go forth to continue to care for friend and stranger, to feed those we love and those we distrust. With the cup of grace and justice, we pray you would quench our thirst for power, transforming us into the rich, full wine of servanthood, so we might choose caring over cruelty, denial over fame, humility over pride, peace over anger, love over evil.

And when you gather all our sisters and brothers from every scattered time and place, we will join our hearts singing your praise, God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.

(Thom M. Shuman, Lectionary Liturgies)

Sharing the Elements

We remember that on the night before he died, Jesus gathered with his friends around a table. He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them, saying: Take, eat, this is my body, broken for you. As you break the bread that sits before you, 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, Jesus 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. As you drink from the cup that sits before you, receive the

gift of God, the Cup of Blessing.

**We are one in Christ in the Cup we share.**

Prayer of Thanksgiving (in unison)

**Almighty God, we give you thanks for the gift of our Savior's presence in the simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. Unite us with all who are fed by Christ's body and blood that we may faithfully proclaim the good news of your love and that your universal church may be a rainbow of hope in an uncertain world; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.**

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

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. Amn.

# Invest in futures

Give to One Great Hour of Sharing



In Thailand, a 13-year-old girl arrives at the New Life Center, seeking relief from the cruel conditions that have brought her here. Her life up to this point has been mostly about survival. Here, she meets others like her. Some are survivors of sexual abuse, domestic violence or human trafficking. Some have been forced to work when they wanted to go to school.

What will the future be like when she is empowered to share her gifts with her community and the world?

At the New Life Center, she is met with the investment of time, support, and resources. And she is loved. She is allowed to imagine a new future. Finishing school. Learning a trade. Even going to University to earn a degree. In I Corinthians 3:9 Paul writes that we are all co-workers together in God's service. Some of us plant. Some of us water. But God gives the growth. Paul reminds us that we are all called into the service of God, who cares for each and every one of us. What could the future be like when we work to plant and water together, and trust God to give the growth?

When you give to One Great Hour of Sharing, you invest in the futures of these girls and countless others like them. Your gifts go to provide education, vocational training, basic necessities, and much-needed community support. When we share the love of Christ in this way, we see lives transformed. Not just their lives, but ours as well. Because when we empower girls to build a life for themselves, we help God build a better world for us all.

As we invest in futures and serve as co-workers with God, the future becomes one of endless possibility and opportunity. What a great return on our investment!

