

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

Alice M.C Ling, Pastor

October 4, 2020

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

SONG    *“Bread of the World”*

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Good morning! And welcome to worship. Today is one of my favorite days in the life of the church, because today is World Communion Sunday. Eighty-seven years ago, the idea was sparked by a Presbyterian pastor, and then adopted by the Presbyterian Church throughout the United States, and finally by the National Council of Churches. The first Sunday of October is routinely observed as a day to be aware of Christians around the world who feast at the same table we do, to watch and listen for the work of God’s Spirit in people and places both different from and amazingly similar to us, and to pray for unity among us as the Body of Christ. I wonder if today, after months of worshipping together while apart and in different places, perhaps we are more able to recognize the ways in which that can be true for us on a global scale as well. Whether we are gathered or scattered, whether we can see each others’ faces or not, understand each others’ languages or not, share the same traditions or different ones, the Spirit of God knits us together and makes us one through the love and grace of God. What a gift that is!

As with other Sundays, I’ve attached a PDF of the words of this worship. If you click on that link, you should be able to see the responsive and unison prayers as well as the songs. If you print them or have them available to you in some way, my hope is that you will be more fully able to share in this time of worship. And let me also remind you that, if you have not brought something with you to represent the bread and cup of communion, this would be a good time to get it.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

The whole world is in God's hands.

**Everything that lives and breathes. Everything that simply is. Everything.**

From the farthest spaces, to the inmost places!

**God is with us and we are with God. Alleluia!**

As people of Christ, gathered at table, with our sisters and brothers around the world, to remember whose we are, we praise --

**Alleluia! Thanks be to God!**

Shall we pray? With all that we have, with all that we are, we worship you, God-of-all-Being. Bless this day. Bless this time. Bless this gathering. Bless this world, with your overflowing love. Alleluia!

**Alleluia! Amen!    (Canada)**

SONG    *“The Bond of Love”*

We are one in the bond of love; We are one in the bond of love.

We have joined our spirit with the Spirit of God; we are one in the bond of love.

Let us sing now, everyone; Let us feel God’s love begun.

Let us join our hands that the world will know We are one in the bond of love.

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION (in unison)**

**God of brilliant sunsets and shining rainbows, God of golden daffodils and glowing autumn leaves, God of all the blues of sunlit seas, God of all the shades of green in bush and field, in**

**rivers and oceans and lakes, in rough stones on a beach and polished jewels in a showcase, God of people, brown and amber, pink and ebony, artistic and athletic, practical and visionary, compassionate and laughter-bringing, God who colors us a world of variety, We thank you that you have made each of us unique, that you call us to contribute our special colors to the life around us. We come to you in thanksgiving and worship. Amen. (Aotearoa / New Zealand)**

SCRIPTURE READING Philippians 2:1-13

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

SERMON

I recently watched a TED Talk, in which Sydney Jensen described the mascot for the school where she teaches. According to Sydney, Lincoln High School, in Lincoln, Nebraska is the only high school in the world whose mascot is links, as in links of chain. When I went to the school's website, I learned that that mascot has been around since at least the 1920's, and that the class of 1970 gave the school a statue that sits on the front lawn featuring four large links of chain connected to each other to form one small chain. I haven't learned where or why this idea started, but from both the website and the TED Talk, I've learned that those 4 links in the statue have come to stand for tradition, excellence, unity and diversity. Sydney said that she's developed an ice breaker activity for the first day of school, through which she works with her ninth grade class to help introduce them to the mascot and each other. She gives each student a slip of paper and asks them to write something on it about themselves: something they love, or hope for, whatever they want. Then she walks around the room with a stapler in her hands,

and one by one, adds each link to the others to form a chain. (“How Can We Support the Emotional Well-Being of Teachers?”)

I’m not enough of a student of history to be able to tell you what was going on in the ‘20’s, or earlier, in Lincoln, Nebraska or anywhere else, that would birth that mascot. But the more I think about it, the more brilliant I think it is. As I think about high school students, both from back in the dark ages when I was one and from what I’ve known and seen in working with them since, I think one of the greatest needs they have is to belong – to something, to somebody, a group of friends, a significant other, a club, a team, a pack, a tribe. Sure, there are loners, who at least on the surface, don’t care about such things, but overall I think being liked, fitting in, having a place and a people is very, very important. And let’s be honest. Not just to high school students. It’s different in different ones of us, but I think belonging matters. Being a part of something bigger than us, having a role to play, being a link in a chain. For me, that truth was captured clearly when Sydney reported that she leaves the chains that her ninth graders make on the first day of high school up for the entire four years they are at Lincoln High, and that late in their senior year, a few of them come back to room 340 and point to the link that they know is theirs. They remember what they wrote, where their place is, how they fit in alongside the other links.

While I like all four of the qualities they’ve assigned to the four links in that statue, I’m especially drawn to the notions of diversity and unity. When I was in high school, I think it was more a question of conformity than either diversity or unity, and certainly not some intricate balance between the two. Why else would we all insist on wearing the same brand of jeans or the same style of shoes? Diversity and unity are popular as ideas and mottos, but how deep and real does it get beyond the words? I was struck by one source (Ekaputra Tupamahu, Working Preacher) I read who used long, elaborate words to tell me what the mottos are for both Indonesia and Malaysia, but I’m not going to even try to pronounce or spell them for you. From there, he went on to say that the motto of the United States is *E pluribus unum* (from many, one) and that all three call us to unity in diversity. Sounds wonderful. Tugs on my heart. But what does it mean and how well do we live it out? Maybe they excel at it in Lincoln, but overall, I’m not sure how many of us get a passing grade.

As I hear it, there is something inherent in the whole notion of diversity and unity that recognizes the ways in which we are different from each other, and not only respects but even affirms those differences. And yet, it’s so hard. How much difference are we comfortable with? Aren’t most of us inclined to seek out the people who are most like us, think like us, live like us, vacation like us, share the same hobbies and professions as us? And the more divided we become, the more true that is. I have little interest in hanging out with people who are going to tell me how wrong I am; respectful give and take is one thing, but there’s not a lot of that going around these days. So we seek out commonalities and shared commitments, and turn away from the folks with the opponent’s sign in their front yard. I think that kind of tribalism is dangerous, and yet I know I participate in it as much as anybody else.

I’ve thought a lot about a panel I listened to last spring. It was a group of church folks, I think two white people and three black, talking about race. They all live and serve and worship in predominantly white churches, and I was really struck to hear the black women talk about their experiences of going to their churches. People want them to blend in, to think and talk, act and move like the white folks who are in the majority and were there first, rather than being who they are. They said that if they show up as themselves, people are uneasy and a whole lot less welcoming. Conformity is alive and well, and we often struggle with the task of affirming our differences while also reaching toward a vision of unity.

As I live with the text Janice read from Philippians, I hear Paul encouraging us to keep working on this tension. On the surface of it, it’s tempting to think he’s calling us to jump into the melting pot and stay there until we’re all just alike: he calls his listeners to be of the same mind, having the same love, being

in full accord and of one mind. But the more I read, the less I think he wants us to all be paper cut out look alike. He talks about how we should respond to the other: don't do anything from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Don't look to your own interests, but to the interests of others. And then he tells us to be like Jesus. It's all about humility, and letting go of our privilege and comfort in order to meet others where they are, to hear them, to welcome them, to learn from them, to walk with them, to serve and love together so that we can build up the community we share.

We've heard a lot about Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the past couple of weeks, and I think her friendship with her colleague Justice Antonin Scalia is well known. They were pretty much on opposite ends of the conservative-liberal spectrum when it came to interpreting the Constitution and the laws of this country, but they loved the opera, and laughing together. Who hasn't seen that photo of them both on top of an elephant in India? I don't see that either one is about to push the other one off. One of the new pieces I've read in the last couple of weeks is the report that Scalia encouraged President Obama to nominate Elaine Kagel to the court, another person from the other side of the divide – because her intellect would be a positive addition to the debates in the court. We need more of that kind of give and take, diversity that leads to unity.

I also think a lot about the relationships Ben and I have been honored to have with folks in Zimbabwe. Nearly 25 years ago, we were privileged to be part of forming a partnership with folks in the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe, a partnership that was committed to building relationships that were mutual, committed to the concept that all of us had something to give, and all of us had a lot to receive. I remember the puzzled looks I got when I talked about how much the folks in Zimbabwe had to give us that we desperately needed. Few people ever said it, but the looks asked what those poor, needy Third World people could ever give us – to which I would eagerly say, joy – and hope. Generosity and hospitality. A readiness to walk in faith and trust God with every fiber of their beings. We learned much from them, and were deeply transformed because of the ways in which we were exposed to and blessed by our differences. Our sense of church is greater because of them.

As I've thought about that TED Talk, and Lincoln's mascot, I've also thought about us, and our life together as the United Church of Christ Congregational in Wallace. There are undoubtedly limits to our diversity, but I think we have more of it than we sometimes acknowledge. I wonder how our life would be enriched and blessed if we listened more for the ways in which we're different from each other, the uniquenesses that others can offer, the things you know that I don't - but might like to, and how that could stretch my faith and outlook. We're largely a congregation of white people, but not completely; there's some black skin and Native American legacy. We're largely an older congregation, but not altogether: we have some children and younger adults, with energy and perspective and understandings that could freshen up some of our dustier thinking. Many of us are professionals or retired professionals: teachers and clergy, nurses and a lawyer, a professor of audiology and pharmacists; but we also have cleaners and truckers, artists and gardeners, cooks and bakers, people who work with their hands and people who live in their heads. Some of us have traveled, others of us prefer to stay home, others of us have family living in Japan, China, New Zealand. And by the grace of God, we're linked together and have become one. Our diversity can enrich and inform our unity, expanding our outreach, deepening our fellowship, multiplying our love.

The chain that's hanging here has about as many links as I came up with when I considered all of you. Each of you has a valuable and personal place in our community. I expect I've only begun to scratch the surface of all the richness and uniqueness, possibility and potential that exist as we live and worship, walk and serve together. May God guide us in a time of discovery and learning, listening and growth. Amen.

## PRAYER REQUESTS

Prayers for the country and healing the division that has become more prevalent.....that morals and values will take a priority, not popularity....that we can go back to being the "one nation under God" that it used to be! That the pledge is returned to our school system.....

SONG "Santo, Santo, Santo" (from Argentina)

Santo, santo, santo, mi corazon te adora! Mi corazon te sabe decir: santo eres Dios.

Holy, holy, holy, my heart, my heart adores you! My heart is glad to say the words: you are holy God.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, as we gather around this wonderful meal everywhere and in every place; bless all your children. As we eat this bread and drink this cup linking arms around the world, pour your grace into us all. Grace us with your presence as we quietly and loudly pray to you. May we see in each other your light, your love and you. May it not matter our differences, our names, our languages, our looks, and our way of doing things. May what matters today and everyday be that we are one in you.

And as we pray may we call to mind the brothers and sisters we don't see but whose needs lie heavy on our hearts. May you bring comfort to those who are grieving, lonely, heartbroken, ill or broken of spirit. May you strengthen those whose lives feel shattered, don't make sense, in crisis, and experiencing loss. May you say the healing word to those who need it. May you bring the human touch of love to those who have not been touched. May you love the unloved through us.

May you shine your light into those whose world is covered in darkness. May you use us to feed the hungry, clothe the ones who need clothes, give a cup of water to those who are thirsty, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and those in prison.

May lives be awakened to you, Lord, to your love and to your kingdom whose door is always open to all. Hear us, as we join our voices in the prayer that Jesus taught: Our Father...

(based on a prayer by Rev. Abi, posted on *A Place for Prayer*. <http://revgalprayerpals.blogspot.ca/>)

## PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

## OFFERING

God has richly blessed us, and invites us to live lives that share our blessings with others. When we give of what we have, we honor God. When we reach out to others with care and compassion, we do the work of Christ's church. When we extend a hand of welcome, offer a word of forgiveness, walk in paths of mercy, we open ourselves to the strengthening movement of God's Holy Spirit. Thank you, my friends, for all that you give, all that you share, all that you are. Amen.

## SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

### Invitation

In India right now, the Christians are tearing naan. In Russia the Orthodox are blessing khlep. In Ohio, they are pouring the Welch's. In California they are sipping some fine Napa merlot. And we, in our many places, are breaking and pouring what we have brought with us for this meal. But no matter how we break it, slice it, cube and dice it, this bread and this cup somehow make us one. If we can't see it, let us trust that Someone can. If we don't believe we are faithful or believing enough to take it, let us trust that Someone is, and invites us along. Let us not be broken anymore, one from another. It is ready and offered for all.

(Molly Phinney Baskette, *Before the Amen*)

### Communion Prayer

God be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to God.**

Let us give thanks to God Most High.

**It is right to give God thanks and praise.**

It is truly right and good to glorify you, at all times and in all places, O God. Through your living word you created all things and pronounced them good. You made human beings in your own image, persons capable of entering into relationships both with you and with each other. From Abraham and his wives Sarah and Hagar you brought forth nations of peoples. As Abraham opened his tent and shared hospitality you have shared of your grace with these nations. Through prophets, rabbis and teachers you have sought to be in loving relationship even when we have sought to go our own ways. You have called us as sisters and brothers to be a great family. We have brought others pain and heartache and yet you offer us a way of reconciliation. So today we join with all your people on earth praising your name in unending song, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy God of love and majesty, the whole universe speaks of your glory, O God Most High. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God! Hosanna in the highest!**

In the fullness of time you sent the Chosen One, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, your own, to call your splintered creation together again. He came preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins and to those who responded he announced they are joint heirs of eternal love with him. When the stubborn forces of evil threatened to bring his life to an end, he called his followers together and took the bread, broke it, and said: "Take, eat, this is my body broken for you." Then he passed the cup and invited all, "Drink from this, it is my blood of the new covenant. Do this in remembrance of me." Now on this day, his followers all around the world are gathering at table to remember and share, and we are among those who are coming to this feast of love. In remembrance of these your mighty acts in Christ, We offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving.

O holy God, Creator of all people and worlds, send now upon our bread and cups your life-giving Spirit. May this outpouring of the promised Spirit transfigure this thanksgiving meal that our bread and these cups may become for us the body and blood of Christ. As we partake of this holy meal, fill us with the Holy Spirit that we may be one body and one spirit in Christ. All glory and honor be yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen. (David Schmidt, *Before the Amen*)

Breaking the Bread and Pouring the Cup

Take and eat. Through the broken bread, we participate in the body of Christ.

Take and drink. Through the cup of blessing, we participate in the new life Christ gives.

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 "In Christ There Is No East or West"

In Christ there is no East or West, In him no South or North;  
But one great fellowship of love Throughout the whole wide earth.

In Christ shall true hearts everywhere Their high communion find;  
God's service is the golden cord Close binding humankind.

Join hands then all ye of the faith, Whate'er your race may be;  
For men and women live in God, and all are kin to me.

## 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.