

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

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

November 8, 2020

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

SONG *“Blest Be the Tie that Binds”*

GREETING AND ANNOUNCEMENT

Good morning, my friends! And welcome again to worship as the United Church of Christ Congregational. It’s good to gather for worship. It’s good to come together in the presence of God. It is very good to live and love, worship and serve in the loving embrace of God. Especially at the end of a week when Covid numbers have climbed and set new records, as votes were and continue to be counted and results announced, as emotions swirl and spin in us and around us, I am profoundly grateful that we live our lives in the love and embrace of God. In this time of worship, may God draw us together as one, fill us with the loving spirit of the living Christ, and send us out to share that love with our wounded, weary world.

I’d like to express my gratitude this morning to Indy for both reading our scripture and sharing her flute music with us. Let us worship God.

CALL TO WORSHIP

We have been called to walk the faithful road and to choose the way of God’s justice.

We are here because we believe strongly that our God is good, and that we live in that goodness. We are here to proclaim our faith and to seek direction along this faith journey.

Come together, then, to be God’s people. Follow Christ and listen for the good things that God has done. Rise up in praise and thanksgiving.

We will share with others the goodness that we have found in God. May our lives be an expression of that goodness.

(Sandra E. Graham, *Touch Holiness*)

SONG *“How Can I Keep from Singing”*

My life flows on in endless song: above earth’s lamentation,
I hear the sweet, though far-off hymn that hails a new creation.
Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear the music ringing;
It sounds an echo in my soul – how can I keep from singing?

What though my joys and comforts die? My Savior still is living.
What though the shadows gather ‘round? A new song Christ is giving.
No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that Rock I’m clinging;
Since Love commands both heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?

I lift my eyes; the cloud grows thin; I see the blue above it;
And day by day, this pathway smooths, since first I learned to love it.
The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart, a fountain every springing;
All things are mine since I am Christ’s – how can I keep from singing?

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (in unison)

Holy Spirit of God, who gathers the church into one body, gather us once again in your presence and strengthen the bonds of affection that hold your people together. Bless us with grace to

cooperate with one another in love and service that we may be the signs of your uniting love to our fractured world. Teach us to show compassion for those in need, to face challenges with imagination, and to counter disappointments with prayerful trust. So may your church bring forth your will and your reign. Amen. (Margaret Gay MacKinnon Godfrey, *Touch Holiness*)

SCRIPTURE READING 1 John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

SERMON

I haven't quite decided if I've become hopelessly redundant or pathetically simplistic, but just so you know, I am aware that the majority of what I talk about these days is love. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength; and your neighbor as yourself. God is love. Love one another. Love, love, love. Give me a heart, put some lace on it and fill it with chocolate. Give me a break and get a grip already! It's almost as if I think love will fix what ails us, and make everything all right again. Like that time however many decades ago when Los Angeles was burning and people were rioting and everything was exploding and Rodney King said, can't we all just get along? Now that I think might have been a tad naive and simplistic, but love? There's nothing naive or simplistic about it, and yes, truth be told, I do think love can fix what ails us. In fact, I think it's the only thing that can. The catch is I'm not talking about lace and chocolates. I'm not talking about sitting around holding hands and singing "Kum Ba Yah". I'm talking about roll up your sleeves, get to work, put your words into action and make God's love visible.

Usually I defend my choice of Bible passage by saying, the lectionary made me do it; today, I'm pointing in the direction of the UCC's stewardship theme, and their choice of the first letter of John and the words that opened today's reading: Beloved, let us love one another. The hard work rolls in as we keep reading and hear the writer of this letter point to God's love, God's decision to send Jesus to live among us in order to give us step by step, day by day lessons in what it means to love. Jesus, whose love welcomed the outcast, embraced enemies and called them friends. Jesus who opened doors, tore down barriers and built bridges so all could be one. Jesus who forgave sinners, not just once and not just twice and not just seven times but as many times as it took before a person turned toward home and toward love. Jesus who spoke the truth regardless of what it cost him, who gave of himself so that others could live and could have life and could know love. The word that the writer of this letter uses is

agape, a Greek word that describes the kind of love that gives without expecting a return and without counting the cost; it's the way that Jesus loved and God loves, and how we are called by God to love.

Beloved, let us one another. As God loves, and as Jesus loved, so we are called to love. And in one of the starkest, most unsettling statements of all of scripture, the letter gets painfully clear when it says, "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen... Those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also." Nobody ever said it was going to be easy, but that doesn't mean it isn't precisely the work we've signed on for when we signed up as Jesus' followers and God's children. And so we pray, and we work, we take three steps forward and one step back, and we keep trying, keep learning, keep growing in love.

I want to share with you a story that I discovered recently, shared by Peter Marty. I see his words regularly in the magazine *The Christian Century*, where he serves as the Editor and Publisher; Marty is also a Lutheran pastor in Davenport, Iowa. He recently introduced readers of *The Christian Century* to Lucy Carlson, a 5-year-old in his congregation, who, as far as I can tell, is taking the lead in figuring out what it means to love her neighbor. Lucy is growing up in a home where there is regular dinner conversation about current events. Shortly after anger exploded in this country around the death of George Floyd, Lucy was coloring on her front porch one morning, when she looked up at her mother and said, "I think it's important to know our neighbors. I'm going to meet them all. If they need help, I want them to know where I live so they can come to me for help. I'm going to have them sign my paper so I know their name. But not in cursive."

The next day, Lucy and her mother struck out carrying an enormous piece of paper and a pouch of Crayola markers. When they arrived at the first house, the family was cleaning out the garage. Lucy stepped up confidently and introduced herself. "Hi. I'm Lucy, and this is my mom, Erin. We live across the street and I think it's important to know your neighbors. So, I want you to sign my paper. You can come to my house if you need help, and I'll help you." Obliging but with smiles, each family member wrote their name with a marker. Nobody at the second house answered the door, so Lucy wrote down the address so she'd remember to follow up later. At the third house, when the moms got to talking, Lucy grew impatient, so she pulled something like a phone out of her pocket and started typing. Before long, she said, "Mom, don't you think it's time to get going to the next house?" The neighbor asked what she was typing on. "It's my phone. But it's not a real phone. It's actually a fan remote that doesn't work." The women laughed and Lucy and her mother headed off to the next house.

Lucy spent a lot of summer days going house to house. She'd bring her poster sized paper and pouch of markers as well as her spiel. After introducing herself and telling the homeowner where she lived, she'd say, "I think it's important to know your neighbors, so I want you to sign this." As she handed them the paper decorated with rainbows and smiley faces, she made sure to point out her two glitter makers, but would also say, "You can pick whatever color you want."

Lucy's mother Erin spoke to Peter about being slightly embarrassed during these walks. She said, "We've lived in our house for seven years, and I didn't know the majority of people nearby. How many neighbors do you know? How well do you know even your closest neighbors beyond the obligatory wave?" Lucy, on the other hand, was hard at work meeting people. From those neighborhood journeys, she learned how to make jam. Multiple neighbors offered their teenagers for babysitting. A retired music teacher let Lucy strum the strings of his harp. Lucy showed off her yoga poses. She met a woman from China. And then, when Jacob Blake was shot, Lucy said, "Mom, I think we need to go meet some more neighbors." (October 21, 2020)

Beloved, let us love one another. There's no one example of what that looks like, no one model for how to put those words into action. But action is exactly what's called for. Not pretty words or soft sentiments, not something casual thrown over the shoulder or saved for the select handful of special people who have a reserved spot in our lives. The writer of the letter to John calls us to love one another with God's kind of love, following the example of Jesus' life and ministry, and yes, even his death and resurrection. A love that welcomes the outcast, embraces enemies and grows to call them friends. A love that opens doors, tears down barriers and builds bridges in order that all may be one. A love that forgives sinners, not just once but as many times as it takes before a person turns toward home and toward love. A love that rolls up the sleeves, gets down to business, and does everything it can to make Jesus' love visible and God's presence real.

Beloved, let us love one another. May it be so. Amen.

SOLO *"Spirit of the Living God, Fall Fresh on Me"*

Indy Behrendt

PRAYER REQUESTS

Dallas' brother Mike has been diagnosed with COVID

Christi's Aunt Ethel Hayman's sister Janet passed away on Thursday...prayers for comfort in her grieving.

Christi's cousin Clyde Horning: that healing may follow his liver transplant, and thanksgiving for the gift of organ donations that save lives.

Healing in our nation with a prospective new president...for safety to surround him and his family as anger and hatred flow through our divided nation.

For Joe and Kamala's safety, and that the nation might begin to heal.

Thanksgiving and gratitude for all of the many men and women who volunteered to count votes ...and are continuing to do so in a history making election for volume of votes.

PASTORAL PRAYER

O Holy God, you are the source of all love, and we rejoice at the lavish ways you pour out your love upon us. You give us the gift of life, abilities and skills, gifts and graces with which we can live and work, laugh and play in the world. Thank you for the gift of people with whom we share our lives, family and friends, partners and companions with whom we can undertake adventures and try out new recipes, borrow tools and recommend books, turn to for advice and seek out for comfort; for the precious ones who take the time to see the best in us amidst all the clutter of our lives, and encourage us to let it grow and let it shine.

We pray, O God, for our life together as families and friends, community and congregation, nation and world. Help us to be people of love and grace, modeling our care for one another on your care for us. We give thanks for the gift of healing: for people who offer parts of their bodies for transplants and promise for friends and strangers alike; for health care professionals who share their skills and time, and sometimes their safety, in order to provide treatment and care. As the numbers of COVID infections continue to spike and soar, we pray for the sick and suffering, for hospitals filled to overflowing; for families separated for safety and businesses struggling to outlast the restrictions; for teachers trying to teach while students struggle to learn. We give thanks for an ever-expanding list of essential workers, as grocery store clerks and bathroom cleaners, mail carriers and fire fighters, EMTs and police officers are joined by ballot counters and election officials; each of them giving of themselves to protect and serve, build up and honor our life together. Bless them for their generosity and open our eyes to recognize the ways they serve.

We pray especially for our nation, as we move beyond Election Day and begin once again to do the work of getting our feet under us. This day, help us to be mindful of those who will move into office as well as those now looking for alternative ways to serve, and keep us sensitive to the joys of a new day as well as the wounds of defeat and disappointment. Open our eyes to see the razor thin margins in our votes, and replace any temptation to gloat with a heart of compassion, any inclination to lash out with words of truth spoken in love. Open our ears to listen to one another and the hungers and hurts, longings and hopes behind our votes, in order that we might search together for common ground and the road ahead. We pray for President Trump and Vice-President Pence, for President-elect Biden and Vice-President-elect Harris, for senators and congress people; pour out your wisdom and strength, humility and compassion, patience and courage upon each of them and upon each of us. Lead us along the road between now and Inauguration Day and into the new year that approaches.

Hear our prayers, O God, 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

I expect that by now, most of you have received a mailing, either in your email or on paper and through the postal service. It's a mailing about the life of the church and our budget, how we will gather this year to discuss and consider the draft budget, and about the ways in which each of us will contribute to support our ministry. As I said earlier, the theme for this year's stewardship campaign is "Beloved, let us love one another," and I don't assume the connection is automatic between love for one another and how much money we give to the church, so I hope you'll spend some time thinking and praying about it. A stewardship invitation always presents us with an invitation to consider what part we will play in helping the church meet it's budget and live out its ministry, but it's more than that. I believe that for each of us, this theme provides an opportunity to think about the ways we use our resources to help express our love, to make God's presence visible in our life together as a congregation, to witness to our gratitude and faith through the ways we put our resources to work in our community and beyond. This moment is ripe with possibility for us to imagine new options for our ministry, to dream together about the ways in which God's love is leading us, and the ways we can join hands, hearts and resources to expand our ministry in this community.

At the end of the PDF that came with the link to this worship, there is a bulletin insert that I offer in the hope that it will help inform your thinking and decision making about the ways you will contribute to our life together in the coming year.

SONG *"They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love"*

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
And we pray that all unity may one day be restored:
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land...

We will work with each other, we will work side by side,
We will work with each other, we will work side by side,
And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride...

BENEDICTION

The world now is too dangerous and too beautiful for anything but love.

May your eyes be so blessed you see God in everyone.

Your ears, so you hear the cry of the poor.

May your hands be so blessed that everything you touch is a sacrament.

Your lips, so you speak nothing but the truth with love.

May your feet be so blessed you run to those who need you.

And may your heart be so opened, so set on fire,
that your love, *your* love, changes everything.

And may the blessing of the God who created you, loves you,
and sustains you, be with you now and always. Amen.

(Black Rock Prayer Book)



Beloved,

LOVE

Beloved,
let us love one another,
because love is from God;
everyone who loves
is born of God
and knows God. 1 John 4:7

Beloved, Love your Neighbor.

*“Never believe that a few caring people can’t change the world.
For, indeed, that’s all who ever have.” - Margaret Mead*

Woven throughout the entire Bible, there are stories that compel us over and over to Love our Neighbor. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that the greatest commandment of all is “Love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” To this, Jesus added a second, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-38)

Founded in 1976, San Lucas United Church of Christ, located in the Humboldt Park community of Chicago, is a small church with a big heart. Representing a multi-lingual, multi-cultural and intergenerational community, the congregation embodies “Loving their Neighbor.” Under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Marilyn Pagan-Banks, members and volunteers have created a committed team. Amid hunger, homelessness, violence, and economic challenges, exacerbated by gentrification, this team offers a presence of hope. San Lucas UCC’s community meal is an excellent example of one of the offerings presented to the community. Every Tuesday, volunteers from Chicago neighborhoods and suburbs, serve over 100 hot meals to



to those in need. No one is turned away. Carmen Flores-Rance, lay leader and longtime member, stated, “We do Church here every day, we serve the people of the community here every day – not just on Sunday. That’s what makes San Lucas such a special place.” This humble, Humboldt Park church, boldly and fearlessly, lives into God’s commandment to Love thy neighbor. Philanthropist Charlotte Lunsford Berry reminds us, “We won’t always know whose lives we touched and made better for our having cared, because actions can sometimes have unforeseen ramifications. What’s important is that you do care and you act.” So, let us act so that “They’ll know we are Christians by our love” as the hymn goes, and may we be known by our acts in love of neighbor.

As you reflect on the stewardship of resources and sharing provisions to create a just world for all, I invite you to consider how you Love your neighbor through your church community. Who is your neighbor? A single parent, refugee, or elder? Someone across the street or town, or in the pew next to you? Beloved, Love your neighbor.

WEEKLY GIVING IF THE PERCENTAGE IS

(Rounded to the nearest dollar)

Annual Income	Monthly Income	Weekly Income	2%	4%	6%	8%	10%	15%
16,000	1,333	308	6.00	12.00	18.00	25.00	31.00	46.00
20,000	1,667	385	8.00	15.00	23.00	31.00	39.00	58.00
25,000	2,083	481	10.00	19.00	29.00	38.00	48.00	72.00
30,000	2,500	577	12.00	23.00	35.00	46.00	58.00	87.00
35,000	2,917	673	13.00	27.00	40.00	54.00	67.00	101
40,000	3,333	769	15.00	31.00	46.00	62.00	77.00	115
45,000	3,750	865	17.00	35.00	52.00	69.00	87.00	130
50,000	4,167	962	19.00	38.00	58.00	77.00	96.00	144
60,000	5,000	1,154	23.00	46.00	69.00	92.00	115	173
75,000	6,250	1,442	29.00	58.00	87.00	115	144	216
100,000	8,333	1,923	38.00	77.00	115	154	192	288
125,000	10,417	2,404	48.00	96.00	144	192	240	361

