

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

January 17, 2021

Second Sunday after Epiphany

PRELUDE *“Lord, Speak to Me”*

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good morning, my friends! And welcome to worship with the United Church of Christ Congregational. It's good to come together under God's watchful eye and protective embrace, to listen together for God's clarion call to be about the work of God and the will of God, to pledge ourselves together to go forth from this time to love and serve, witness and share among God's people and in Christ's name. Welcome once again to worship.

CALL TO WORSHIP

God whispers to each of us: you are my beloved, created in love for love.

Our spirits answer: Here I am, Lord. Speak to me anew.

God breathes on us the Holy Spirit, knitting many members into one body, the body of Christ.

Together we answer: Here we are Lord. Come, Holy Spirit.

God has yet more vision for the people. Who will work for God to extend God's kingdom into our hurting world?

Here we are Lord. Empower us for your work.

God calls the small, and helps them do great things. God calls the weak, and reveals their hidden gifts. God calls the rejected, and opens their eyes to their worth.

Here we are Lord, humble and waiting.

And so we come, old and young, small and great, to dream God's dreams, receive God's power, and do God's deeds.

Here we are Lord. Shine the light of your love on us. Kindle your Spirit within us. Work your redeeming will in us, that all the world may be one through the power of your love. Amen.

(David Inglis, <http://www.henriettaucc.org/PastorsPage/CallsToWorship.shtml>)

SONG *“Open My Eyes, That I May See”*

Open my eyes, that I may see Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hand the wonderful key, That shall unlock and set me free.
Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my ears, that I may hear Voices of truth Thou sendest clear;
And while the wavenotes fall on my ear, Everything false will disappear.
Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my mouth, and let it bear Gladly the warm truth everywhere;
Open my heart, and let it prepare Love with Thy children thus to share.
Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!

PRAYER OF CONFESSION(in unison)

Patient God, repeatedly – day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute – you call us to serve you. But increasingly your voice is drowned out by the noise we have created to isolate ourselves from you and those around us – the noise of our TVs, Facebook and Twitter, 24-hour news broadcasts; the noise of political pundits, marketing gurus, and even our own voices. Forgive us. Quiet us, God, and teach us to listen for your voice, that we may know ourselves in you, and know what you have have us be and do to your glory. Amen. (Jeffrey S. Nelson, *Before the Amen*)

ASSURANCE OF GRACE

Come to the quiet. There, God speaks to us, discerning our thoughts with love and compassion. Know that you are wonderfully made, and that God loves and forgives you. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING 1 Samuel 3:1-20

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. The LORD called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” Then the LORD said to Samuel, “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever.”

Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son.” He said, “Here I am.” Eli said, “What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you.” So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, “It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him.”

As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD.

SERMON

The further we got into December, the more talk I heard about how ready people were to bid 2020 a fond farewell. Or more honestly, kick it to the curb and slam the door shut, then put up a protective barrier of some sort so that none of its slime and filth, contagion and unrest could get to us ever again. I know of people who stayed up until midnight precisely so they could open the door to let 2020 out,

while ushering in and offering an extravagant welcome to 2021. I don't know what you're thinking, but it seems pretty clear to me that who ever was in charge of flipping the switch from Most Toxic Year Ever to Fresh New, Beautiful Start was missing in action when the magic moment arrived. Because this year's not starting out all that well. Maybe the fine print reveals a 30-day no questions asked return policy, but mostly I think we're screwed. Or more likely and much more honestly, I think it's time to roll up our sleeves and get busy, because we have some very serious work to do.

It's true that this year is not starting out the way we would have chosen, but it's also true that a good share of what's rattling us so deeply is not a surprise. Far from it. We knew COVID wasn't going away at the stroke of midnight, but that doesn't make it easy or pleasant to stare down the daily record setting numbers of infections, hospitalizations and deaths. While we would have hoped the vaccines would meet up with people's arms faster and more smoothly, it is a monumental and unprecedented effort; I guess there were bound to be glitches. Political tensions don't evaporate overnight, but who saw the breach of the capitol coming? Or a fire-breathing angry mob come to destroy property, stop a constitutional process and claim lives. The threats and warnings that have got barbed wire going up around governmental buildings all over DC and across the country are mind-blowing and chilling to the core. And getting up Saturday morning to an email from our Conference Minister about what appears to be credible threats of violence to mainline churches... It's a lot. And processing all of that while our generator purrs away, keeping the lights on and us warm until the electricity is back is a fitting backdrop for all of it. It's been quite the week. After a string of how many weeks? We're tired. We're frightened. We're battle scarred and world weary. We feel overwhelmed and powerless, and quite honestly, just want it to all go away. Enough already!

Interesting, with all of the events of the country swirling in and around us, to have this morning's passage from 1 Samuel sitting on the table in front of me. I've loved this text for a long time. Most of the time, I'm drawn to what is almost a slap-stick comedy routine as Samuel hears a voice interrupt his sleep, he runs up and down the hall to interrupt his teacher Eli's sleep, (You called, teacher?) only to have Eli say, not me – go back to bed. Up and down, back and forth, call and response, until finally Eli suggests to the boy that he just stay put. Don't move. If the voice comes again, try saying: Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. It's a wonderful story of hearing and finally receiving God's call.

This year the story sounds different to me, and not just because I'm not exactly in a slap-stick mood (I'm rarely in a slap-stick mood). This year, my attention was grabbed by the opening words: The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not wide spread. I recognize that. Can't pretend that the attention grabbing headlines I register come from God. And then it says that the priest Eli's vision had begun to grow dim; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, but perhaps that was growing dim too. I recognize and connect with all of that. As I read the story, it's not that God has abandoned or given up on the people; rather, Eli appears to have given up on God, or stopped hearing God because he just doesn't like what God is saying, and doesn't have the energy, courage or will to do what God wants. Eli's sons are also priests, but they're priests who got lost somewhere along the way. Priests who have made a habit of dishonoring God through extortion, greed and sexual sin. God and Eli have talked about this, but Eli won't act, won't speak, won't take his sons on. The one challenge Eli does appear to meet in this story is perceiving what's happening for Samuel: God must be trying to get Samuel's attention so he sends him back to wait and listen and invite God to say whatever God wants to say. Which Eli has to know is going to be a word of condemnation for him and his family. When God called Samuel the fourth time that night, Samuel said, Speak, for your servant is listening. And speak God did! Beginning with the words, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears it tingle.

When was the last time your ears tingled? And was that a good thing? Or a frightening, fearful thing? I suspect it was something of that question that Samuel spent the night agonizing over as he laid frozen in place in his bed. How wonderful to be chosen by God! How awful that God has just laid out plans to bring Eli and his family down and drive them out forever. And Samuel knows who is going to be waiting on the other side of the door, the moment he sticks his nose out in the morning. He put it off as long as he could, but a boy can only stay locked in his room so long. When he finally emerged, Eli called to him and asked for a full report. Samuel told his teacher all that God had in store for him and his sinful sons, and Eli nodded yes. That's God all right; don't get in the way, let God do all that seems right to God.

The core truth of this text that hits me hard this year is the hard word that Samuel was handed and asked to hold; and Eli's failure was precisely his refusal to do the heavy lifting of that hard word. I think that's a place where we find ourselves and struggle because we simply don't like the choices. We cheered and hollered when we got to kick 2020 to the curb, but that didn't make our lives any easier – and I don't think they're going to be any easier until we decide to do the hard work these days call for. To actively talk about the relationship between public health, and both personal and business restrictions, so that we can search together for a way that protects life and promotes financial health, rather than pitting one against the other. To name the racism and nationalism, terrorism and violence for what they are rather than staying quiet so my neighbors and friends won't know how differently we think and we won't have to talk about where we disagree. To explore when and why free speech and peaceful protest slip into rioting and violence, looting and incitement to violence, to identify and respect the difference between the two. To hold people accountable for their actions without becoming mean or vengeful. To speak the truth in love, but without cutting people down or seeking to return one hateful act with three more. To begin to live into the world we long for, even when it seems risky, unpopular or inconvenient.

Monday is Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, and one of the things I celebrate most about his life and his work is the clarity with which he handled those questions. Unlike Eli, he didn't shrink from the hard and unpleasant task of naming behaviors for what they were; he called people out in order to help others stand tall and free; he was willing to rock the boat and disturb the peace in order to bring about the vision of the world scripture had shown him. He grew weary of the resistance and struggle but he didn't sit back in silence – even when it required him to pay enormous costs. He spoke, he confronted, he held fast to what he believed in his very core to be good and right and true. He set love as the compass of his actions and choices, rejecting hate and refusing violence. That was a line he never crossed, a price he refused to pay.

In the midst of all of it, King held fast to a dream, a vision of what the world could look like, and what King believed God longed for the world to look like. A world of equality between the races, a world of love and light – not hatred and fear, in a country of freedom and peace. King's ears tingled with the hope and promise of God's vision, and he worked tirelessly to bring that world to reality. Never have we needed his witness more, his commitment to love and light, truth and peace as much as we do this year.

At the end of the service, after the Benediction, we're going to play a video for you that expresses part of King's dream for life in his day, and I believe, for life in our day. As we move further into 2021, let's listen like Samuel, inviting God to speak because we are indeed listening with ears wide open to receive the work and word of God, tingling with the hope of all God is doing in our midst; and let us walk with King, holding fast to his dream of the new day that's dawning even now. Amen.

PRAYER REQUESTS

- Prayers for those without power, heat or experiencing damaged homes.
- I am thankful that we have a fireplace and we were warm enough and had food to eat when there was no power.

(I'm aware that some of you were without power for a day and a half, more than long enough to get very cold and to be challenged to prepare food; some miners from the Galena climbed out, while about 40 were stuck underground for 24 hours; Dena and Rick watched as their 258 year old Ponderosa pine crashed into and destroyed the house across the street, and even as we record this service, Ben and I are continuing to cling to our generator, but our most serious problem is where to plug in the coffee pot; it was a wind storm that has touch all of us in significant ways, so let's pray for all affected, and for those who continue to suffer)

- Please pray for President Elect Biden that there is no more violence and the inauguration is peaceful.
- Geri Bair's granddaughter (Breilynn) had her Great-granddaughter on 01-07-2021. Her name is Paisley Mae. She is now 1 week old and Mother and daughter are doing great.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Speak, God, for your servants are listening. Tell us where you are concerned, how you would have us live differently, who you would shelter and protect, who you would bring down and silence. In these days of unrest and anger, violence and threat, plant your dream deep within our hearts, and call us to action – that by your love and your light, we might follow in your ways, walk by your truth, and live in your hope. We give you thanks for all those whose ears tingle with your promise and challenge, going out of their way to serve and protect, to heal and feed, to pay kindness forward and clean up others trash, to encourage gentleness and extend hospitality.

We pray for all those affected by the wind storm, especially for those who are still cold and in the dark, whose homes have been damaged, loved ones whose lives were lost. We pray for the work of recovery and clean up, and give thanks for all who have come safely through. We continue to pray for a medical system stretched to the breaking point, and ask you to strengthen and support doctors and nurses, first responders and essential workers. Keep them safe, give them rest, carry them through, help them to know how profoundly grateful we are. We pray for all who look for work, fear the loss of their homes, wait in line for a box of food and a dose of the vaccine. Show us the path through these dark and challenging days, and give us the courage and patience, strength and compassion, resourcefulness and resistance to do what needs to be done, say what needs to be said, imagine what you believe is possible.

As the inauguration of President Biden and Vice-President Harris takes place on Wednesday, we pray for their safety and for the safety of all in our country. Guide investigators and law enforcement as they listen for threats and dangers, seek to untangle plots and dismantle conspiracies. Pour out your wisdom and strength on leaders and followers alike, that together, we the people might build up our life together, protect the common good, and move toward your dream of who we can be and how we can live together in love and in peace, in joy and in light.

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

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

OFFERING

We received a thank you note this week from the Wallace Food Bank, I'm sure at least in part prompted by your generous gift of \$900 at Christmas time. That truly was an exceptionally generous gift, and I join them in thanking you for each and every gift that contributed to that total. You can find the entire note at the end of the PDF of this worship service, but let me highlight part of what they said. Because

of the support and need of our communities, they have expanded their ministry to three sites: Wallace, Osburn and Mullan, each open once a month. In 2020, they handed out more than 1,000 food packages, which provided food for more than 2,000 family members. They also were able to distribute an estimated \$15,000 in vouchers this year. All of that has been possible because of the support of individuals and churches, schools and corporations, clubs and foundations. And our ongoing support in the coming year will be as important as it was in the past one. Financial gifts can be made anytime, either directly to the Food Bank or through the church (just mark your gift clearly for the Food Bank); or through the purchase of grocery bags at either Harvest Foods or Steins. No gift is too small to make a difference, and none large enough to be considered excessive. Each and every gift is well used to address both the physical and emotional hunger of those who coming seeking help. Thank you for the ways you share.

As I said earlier, after the Benediction, there will be a brief video entitled, "I Have a Dream". We share it because we believe it captures powerfully the dream that informed Dr. King's ministry and witness, and that God holds out for us even today for our life together in this country. But first, join with me in singing, "Let There Be Peace on Earth"

SONG *"Let There Be Peace on Earth"*

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.

With God, our Creator, family are we; let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me, let this be the moment now

With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow:

To take each moment, and live each moment in peace eternally

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

BENEDICTION

There is a people sent from God whose name is Hope. And the people named Hope shall bear witness to the light; despair shall not overcome us.

There is a people sent from God whose name is Love. And the people named Love shall bear witness to the light; hatred shall not overwhelm us.

There is a people sent from God whose name is Life. And the people named Life shall bear witness to the light; death shall not overpower us.

UCC Members

Merry Christmas

Happy & New Year

Our Community Food Bank would like to wish you a blessed Christmas!!

This has been a tough year for all of us but thanks to the generosity of many we have continued to serve and to do so in greater ways than ever before. We have expanded to 3 sites: Osburn (214 2nd St. 1st Thursday), Mullan (124 Terrill Loop 2nd Thursday), and Wallace (215 4th St. 3rd Thursday). We handed out more than 1000 food packages in 2020 from these three sites. Those food packages provided help to more than 2000 family members. In addition, we distributed an estimated \$15,000.00 in vouchers this year.

Thank you for participating with us in making this happen for our community. Many folks and organizations have stepped up this year in a big way. From food drives by churches and schools, financial gifts from corporations, clubs and foundations, to many gifts both in food and dollars from individuals, the generosity of our community has been put on full display this year. **THANK YOU!!!**

We would like to say a special thank you to Stein's IGA in Osburn and Harvest Foods in Wallace for their willingness to work with us in the Grocery bag program.

The Osburn, Wallace, Mullan Community Food Bank is not an overtly religious organization, but we are a faith-based service to this community. We pray for and with our clients, we work diligently at honoring those we serve, at being compassionate and caring in the way we serve. This has been tested this year, especially with the need to do curbside distributions but **thanks to our many volunteers**, we feel we have succeeded most of the time.

Today, we offer a **blessing** on you and your family in this season:

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."

Remember God loves you and this is His commitment to all who trust in Him.

Thank You so very much for your generous support and donation to the Wallace Food Bank. We have applied the 308.55 balance to the voucher fund. We greatly appreciate the generous ~~the~~ additional donation! Volunteers Wallace Food Bank

God Bless!!!

Contributions should be made out to

The Wallace Food Bank

215 4th St. Wallace, ID 83873

[More info: 208.449.8858 or 208.755.0334]