

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C Ling, Pastor

February 14, 2021

Transfiguration Sunday

PRELUDE *“Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise”*

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good morning, my friends! And Happy Valentine’s Day. In the midst of exchanging cards and candies, I celebrate this time to come together to worship the creator and designer of all love. To listen once again for the Word of God for us and for our lives, so that we can again be sent out to share God’s love with others, to be the people of love God created us to be and to walk in the way of love that Jesus has set before us. Welcome to worship; it’s good to be together.

CALL TO COMMUNITY

Gathering in this sacred place we anticipate new wonders each week.

Wherever two or three are gathered to worship, a holy spirit is present.

Open our eyes to witness the fantastic love and wondrous joy waiting to be revealed, even this day, even in this place.

We will want to linger and camp in our time together but when we leave today may our hearts be open to all the wonders of God’s beautiful world.

(Rev. Madison Shockley, UCC Worship Ways)

SONG *“Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken”*

Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God;
He whose word cannot be broken Formed thee for his own abode.
On the Rock of Ages founded, What can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation’s walls surrounded, Thou mayst smile at all thy foes.

See, the streams of living waters, Springing from eternal Love,
Well supply thy sons and daughters, And all fear of want remove.
Who can faint while such a river Ever flows their thirst to assuage?
Grace which, like the Lord, the Giver, Never fails from age to age!

Round each habitation hovering, See the cloud and fire appear
For a glory and a covering, Showing that the Lord is near!
Thus deriving from their banner Light by night and shade by day,
Safe they feed upon the manna Which he gives them when they pray.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (in unison)

O Holy One, on mountaintops and valley floors you reveal to us the light of your love. Our hearts desire is to bask in the amazing glory of the divine presence. With each encounter we are changed and transformed. Draw us nearer that we might receive a double portion of your Holy Spirit. Help us, O Holy One, to live our lives as a reflection of divine glory. May we walk among our siblings and friends as a blessing, bearing light into dark places, hope to displace despair, and love that casts out hate. Our world is hurting and we need the followers of Jesus to follow more closely. Maybe then we will hear your voice speaking to us and saying, ... “listen to my Son, the Beloved!” Amen.

(Rev. Madison Shockley, UCC Worship Ways)

SCRIPTURE READING Mark 9:2-9

Indy Behrendt

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

SERMON

Six days is a long time to stew about something. I don’t know what that might look like for you, or if you’re too level headed to stew about something you can’t do anything about or over questions you can’t possibly know the answer to. But some of us stew. Ask us to live with the unknown, and we’ll fill in the blanks every way imaginable and a few that aren’t. Get a call from the doctor that says they want us to come in so they can go over the results of last week’s scan, and we’ll have ourselves dead and buried before the doctor has a chance to tell us we’ll need some corrective surgery, but everything’s going to be fine. Have a tense conversation, say some things we wish we hadn’t, just before a loved one leaves on a trip, and we may not sleep a wink until they’re back and we can talk it through and set the record straight. Personally, my first and most frequent place to stew is in the middle of the night. Once I wear myself out from lack of sleep, I’m likely to move on to day time walks and imaginary conversations where I rehearse and rehash all of the possibilities, defend my concern, speak up on my behalf, walk back the things I never should have said in the first place, lay down the law more forcefully than I’ve ever managed to do in person, or spin out possible story lines about what’s going on for the absent one, the silent one, the angry one. There’s no limit to how carried away I can get in six days; the higher the stakes, the further I go.

I have no way of knowing if Peter is as neurotic as I am or not, but I’m pretty confident that he stewed up a storm in the six days leading up to today’s text. First he made a major break through that earned him all kinds of kudos and placed him at the head of the class when he confessed that he had discerned that Jesus is the Messiah. They all knew what that meant: it meant Jesus is the long-promised one they’ve been waiting for for generations. He’s come from God to set their people free, to peel Rome off their backs, show them the door and then seal it so Rome can never come back; no way no how. The disciples hadn’t even made it all the way around the circle with the high 5’s and fist bumps before Jesus pressed on and went back to teaching, beginning with the words that the Son of Man (i.e. Jesus) must undergo great suffering, be rejected by everybody who was anybody and be killed, and in three days be raised. Jesus didn’t quietly whisper these words to the disciples; he announced them to the crowds; but as soon as they were out of his mouth, Peter came up behind him, took him by the elbow and led him off to one side so he could correct him and his thinking. What Jesus just said was absolutely, for certain NOT going to happen. God wouldn’t let it, and even if God did, Peter and his companions would see that it didn’t. To which Jesus said, Get behind me, Satan! You are not thinking like God on this one, but like a human who only sees what he wants to see and believes what he wants to believe. And then he turned his back on Peter and went back to teaching the crowd all about suffering and death – for him and them; about crosses, about loosing their lives instead of saving them, and if they don’t do this right, the Son of Man (i.e. Jesus again) will be ashamed of them when he comes in the glory of God.

At which point, Mark tells us they took a 6 day break from each other. I have no idea what Jesus was doing during those days, but like I said before, I’m pretty sure Peter was stewing. One cup of

frustration because Jesus refused to listen to the obvious, a half cup of regret for coming on too strong and not choosing his words more carefully, and three cups of trying to untangle the crazy mess of things Jesus said; there simply was no way to make Messiah, rejection, suffering, murder and resurrection fit all in one game plan. No matter how many nights he spent tossing and turning, how many angles he looked at it from, how many different ways he tried to line up the pieces, how many attempts he made to rewrite the conversation and come at it fresh, he simply couldn't make it all fit together.

Six days later, Jesus decided it was time for a hike: who knows if that was because Peter had stewed long enough and he appeared to need some fresh air and to work off some nervous energy or because Jesus figured Peter was ready for the next lesson. Ready or not, that's what he got. They reached the summit and had barely had time to catch their breath, their clothes still dripping sweat, when Jesus was transfigured before their very eyes: instantly his clothes became a dazzling white that would have been shocking even if they hadn't just climbed a high mountain. Before they could begin to make sense of his appearance, they realized he was in the middle of a summit with Moses and Elijah, pillars of the faith long dead but standing together right in front of their eyes, talking up a storm like they'd been best buds since first grade. A man after my own heart, Peter had no idea what to say – so he started talking, suggesting they build three dwellings, one for each of the men: maybe trying to make the moment last, or as one writer suggests, trying to turn it into a photo op (Beverly Gaventa, *Texts for Preaching, Year B*). Let's capture it, so we have something to take home with us and post on Facebook. Those words were barely out of his mouth when the cloud swept in and wrapped them up, and a voice began to speak: This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him! And the next thing they knew, the voice was silent, the cloud was gone, and so were Moses and Elijah. Just Jesus, Peter, James and John, and at least three of them shaken to their core. As they made their way back down off the mountain to their every day world, Jesus said, let's keep this between us until I've risen from the dead; I doubt that last part made any sense to them, but I also suspect even Peter wouldn't have had the faintest idea where to begin trying to describe what they'd just seen and heard. Ponder it, probably. Stew on it and try to make sense of it, without a doubt. But probably not talk about it or try to explain it; if ever there was a you-had-to-be-there moment, this was it.

If Peter couldn't comprehend or wrap his head or heart around Messiah, rejection, suffering, murder and resurrection all in one breath, what do you think adding the notion of glory would do for him – or to him? It's a lot, and they're a collection of ideas that don't fit naturally together, and certainly not comfortably. So why not abbreviate the string, make a Readers' Digest sort of edition and pick out the pieces he liked best. Messiah appealed a lot; resurrection wasn't a brand new concept for Jews, but I don't know how much sense he (or we) could really make of it; glory was clearly more than a little overwhelming, but he'd work on it; but rejection, suffering and murder would just have to go. They just don't belong. Maybe it's that kind of rationalizing and sorting that led the voice from heaven to tell Peter to stop talking and just listen: This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him. He speaks my truth; he knows what he's talking about, so keep some silence and listen.

I think it's also why Jesus told them to keep the experience to themselves until after he had been raised. Throw around words like Messiah and Glory and folks think they know what you're up to, but there's a whole big chunk of this story they aren't going to understand until they make a choice to do the right thing, and discover it comes with a price; or they dare to speak a word of truth and find themselves rejected for it; they try to take a shortcut to get where they want to go, and find out they haven't developed the muscles or the skills necessary to make the journey. Jesus was clear that the path he had to take and that awaits his disciples includes all of it; there are no shortcuts. So watch and listen, let the story unfold as it's going to, and until it has, let's keep it between us. You can talk about it all you want later. In fact, I hope you will.

I wonder how much progress we've made since Peter's first struggle to hold all those pieces together. If there's an easier way, we'll take it. But as Presbyterian pastor Leanne Pearce Reed has written, "The life of faith means taking the longer route – an often arduous journey, full of grueling climbs and treacherous valleys and sometimes stunning vistas, a journey traveled in the hope of encountering God's glory. Along the way, there are times when we would give anything for a shorter route, to be able to take the bus around the weariness of grief, or the radiation treatments, or the couples counseling, or the 12-step meetings, or the unemployment line. We just wish there were a way to skip ahead, to show up at the ending an easier way." (*Feasting on the Gospels: Mark*, page 259)

Whether we're slogging our way through a pandemic that has claimed more lives and caused more suffering and cost more mental health than we can even begin to calculate; or trying to heal the political hostility that's tearing at the very fabric of our nation while binding up the wounds of racism and bringing an end of senseless acts of violence, there are no shortcuts or easy-peasy work arounds. What there is is a God who promises to go with us, to show us where to step, who to love, what to say, when to just listen. A God who offers glimpses of glory to lighten the dark, show us the way and carry us through. Thanks be to God.

SOLO *"There's a Sweet, Sweet Spirit"*

Cathy Barker

PRAYER REQUESTS

I exchanged emails with Bruce this past week and he asked me to let you know that he and his wife are well, grateful for their first vaccine shot and enjoying their young Scottie Terrier, Arlo. When he wrote, he said they would be covering their outside plants because they're not strong enough to handle this weekend's weather. He also expressed his gratitude for what he called our extended worship, which he can participate in from San Antonio.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Will you pray with me?

Holy and dearly beloved God, we gather our hearts and minds together and come before you once again in prayer. On this day of valentines and candy hearts, chocolate and roses, we come to you, the source and giver of all love. We give you thanks for the people and pets who teach us what it means to love, those who give generously of themselves and their gifts in order to bring joy and compassion to others. For those who greet us in the dawning of a new day or join us for the morning's coffee, for sloppy kisses and warm embraces, a companion to walk with and share a yoga stretch beside, for perspectives that challenge our thinking and kindnesses that renew our hope. For the gift of welcome and the undeserved fullness of forgiveness, for the ability to speak the truth in a way that builds up instead of cutting down and the patience to walk beside us as we learn your more perfect way. We thank you especially for Jesus' example of how you would have us live and move in love: a love that gives and forgives, doesn't count the cost but reaches beyond itself to welcome and embrace, serve and heal, liberate and restore. A love that breaks down barriers and builds bridges, that accompanies and comforts, that cradles and protects.

We bring before you our prayers for all those we love: those who stand in need of your healing touch, your comforting presence, your sustaining spirit; the guidance of your hand to lead them into uncharted waters, the peace of knowing that they rest secure in you. We pray for those whose days are cloaked in darkness, who struggle to find the path ahead and who hover on the brink of despair. Give them comfort and peace, the unending light of your love and the quiet confidence that they are never alone; and use us as carriers of your love, expressions of your hope. Hear us also as we lift up before you all those who are loved by you, but perhaps not by us. Those whose stories barely register in our minds,

whose cries we tune out, whose faces we turn away from. The people of Myanmar, suffering under martial law; the civil war in Yemen and the starving in Madagascar; refugees who wait in camps in Kenya, Greece, and Mexico; for those battling COVID in developing countries for whom the vaccine is not on the horizon. We pray for the hungry and homeless, the cold and wind blown, those whose lives have been shattered by wildfires and hurricanes, mud slides and drought, and who continue to struggle after the headlines have turned elsewhere.

Our prayers continue for our country, as we seek to find the way through our divisions and hostilities, economic devastation and public health disaster. Guide, bless and direct the distribution of the vaccine; sustain and support medical personnel, lead decision makers who seek the safe road back to school; and help us to care for one another in these days of food insecurity, massive unemployment, limited days of eviction protection and the ongoing risks of exposure to the COVID virus. We pray especially for President Biden, Vice-President Harris and members of congress on both sides of the aisle. Give them the wisdom and courage to lead, to put the health and wholeness of this country ahead of partisan politics, personal gain or long-standing animosities. Guide all of us as we seek the path of love and mercy, cooperation and collaboration, open listening and honest speaking.

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

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

OFFERING

There's been talk around the church for the past few months about the need to replace the boiler that heats our building. This past week, members received a letter that provides the details of the proposal the Trustees and Executive Committee are working with, and asks both for approval of the plan and permission to use up to \$10,000 from the Trust Fund, as necessary to meet the expense. In the midst of all of this, members of the church have already given \$3,800 toward the project; additional gifts will be more than welcome and help to reduce our need to draw on the Trust Fund.

Our building, like every church building, should never become the focus or priority of our life together; rather, it's a vital tool that enables and assists in our ministry and outreach. Our building is a precious gift to us as a place to gather, and we look forward to returning there as the virus risk recedes. It is also a valuable gathering place for our whole community, as a voting precinct, a home for the Christmas Dinner, a site for Community Concerts, an accessible and welcoming place for all manner of community events. As we consider the question of making this investment in a 64 year old building, I encourage us to think of it as one of our greatest assets and tools for ministry. How can we best share this resource with the community? What does it mean to be faithful in its maintenance? And how can we individually contribute to this effort to keep it warm and available in the days to come?

SONG *"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"*

Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heaven, to earth come down;
Fix in us thy humble dwelling, All thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion, Pure, unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation, Enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit into every troubled breast!
Let us all in thee inherit, Let us find that promised rest.
Take away our love of sinning, Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning, Set our hearts at liberty.

Finish then thy new creation, Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation Perfectly restored in thee:
Changed from glory into glory, Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee, Lost in wonder, love and praise!

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.