

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

September 12, 2021

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

PRELUDE “O Jesus, I Have Promised”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP

Out of the fullness of the lives God has given us, we have come to worship and to praise.

With thanks we offer to God the creativity of our minds, the warmth of our hearts, and the joy of our spirits.

We love because God has first loved us, freeing us from the power of sin and death.

**With glad hearts let us join together in singing praise to God: Creator, Word, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.** *(Chalice Worship)*

HYMN No. 92 “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 bent to sinning, Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning, Set our hearts at liberty.

Come, almighty to deliver, Let us all Thy life receive;
Suddenly return, and never, Nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing, Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray and praise Thee without ceasing, Glory in Thy perfect love.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (in unison)

Holy Wisdom of God, you call to us from the depths of our hearts, where we long for connection with you and with one another. You call to us from busy streets and neighborhoods, where human pain and possibility are most urgent. You call to us from our sacred stories, where God, Christ, Spirit create, challenge, comfort. Guide us, we pray, on an adventure of hope, and help us see with your eyes the ways which lead to beloved community where Christ Jesus is at the center.

Amen. *(The Rev. Dr. Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi, UCC Worship Ways)*

SCRIPTURE READING Mark 8:27-38

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his

disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

SERMON

If your grandchild asks you the question, "Who is Jesus?" how will you answer? If you visit someone in the hospital or in prison, at the soup kitchen or in a shelter, and they want you to explain Jesus to them, what will you tell them? If someone walks up to you at the Elks or in the grocery store and says, I'm thinking about checking out church and Christianity; I didn't go to Sunday School as a child, I haven't been baptized; and I'm pretty confused by the variety of things I hear about Jesus, so could tell me about him, what will you say? Or if an obnoxious pastor-preacher walks up to you and says, I'm taking a survey, who do you think Jesus is?" what answer will you give?

Does something spring immediately to the tip of your tongue, or would you stumble around a bit before you found the words you want? Sure, you could probably pull up titles and names that you've heard other people use, some familiar church jargon, but what if the question takes a turn away from the word on the street, in other churches or out of your pastor's mouth, and zeroes in on your thoughts and beliefs. Do you know what you think about this man we talk about every Sunday and say we believe in? Who is Jesus for you?

I don't know how many of us would begin by saying he was a Middle Eastern Jew, or if we would focus instead on him being a good man and a wise teacher who lived a long time ago. How much further would you be inclined to go? That he was God's Son? That his mother was a virgin, and that from beginning to end his life was wrapped in mystery and miracle? That he was a human being who seemed to understand God more than his companions did, but he was just a human? That he was God in the flesh, a divine being who looked like humans for 33 years, but really was above all the petty everyday things we deal with like tiredness or crankiness, bad hair days or knowing how to balance a check book? Would you refer to him as your Lord and Savior? And if you did, could you explain what those words mean? Just who is Jesus, and what does he mean to you?

That was precisely the question Jesus asked his disciples in today's lesson. He started by asking about the scuttlebutt on the street. Who do others say that I am? And their answers ranged from John the Baptist, to Elijah, to one of the prophets - all of which were really saying Jesus was another one of the forerunners of the Promised One they were really waiting for. I don't know if they also told him that some folks thought he was a trouble maker, a fraud, a lunatic, Mary's illegitimate son; but I'm sure that was out there too. Before they could relax and get comfortable in their reporter-observer role, he turned the tables and asked them, But who do you say that I am? If ever there was a show stopper question, that would be it. I imagine a gaping silence while eyes scurried to look anywhere but in Jesus' direction. Maybe a sideways glance at one another, but mostly down at their feet and toward any flicker of movement they could call a distraction. Finally, Peter stepped up and into the gap and spoke the words, You are the Messiah. And while in the other gospel versions of this story, buzzers sounded, bells rang, the audience applauded and the game show host told him he'd just become a millionaire! Here, in Mark, Jesus quietly said, keep it to yourselves, folks.

Peter was right, Jesus was the Messiah; Jesus never denied that title. The problem was that Peter thought he knew what it meant; he assumed it meant an invincible army with Jesus in the lead was

about to put on such a display of power and might that the scoundrels from Rome wouldn't know what hit them. And then there'd be a coronation of the new and righteous king. Everything would come together, everyone would live in freedom and peace, and they'd all live happily ever after. The truth was that Peter was a lot like the man Jesus had just healed in the verses immediately before our story: Jesus had opened his eyes, but people looked like trees – he couldn't make out the details and specifics, just the general outline. The whole reason Jesus didn't want the disciples to go out and spread the word that he was the Messiah was because, while they had the answer right, they didn't have a clue what it meant.

Except that Jesus didn't quietly or calmly suggest to the disciples that they keep this little insight between them. I was totally caught off guard by the scholar (Clifton Black Working Preacher, Sept 12, 2021) who observed that this text is the most verbally abusive of all of the passages in all four of the Gospels. According to the Greek word used, Jesus told the disciples to shut up about this title Peter had just laid on him. When Jesus began to explain to them that what lie ahead for him was great suffering; he'd be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes - and no, he wouldn't get snatched from the jaws of death at the last second - he'd be killed; and after three days, he'd rise again; then Peter, riding high on the confidence of his insightful confession, took Jesus aside and told him to shut up. Peter thought he knew how things were going to work, and that Jesus actually had the end of the story wrong. But Jesus wasn't about to be patronized by the likes of Peter, so he spoke sharply to Peter and said, Get behind me Satan. Our translation says that Peter and Jesus rebuked each other, which is the same thing Jesus did earlier in the gospel when he pulled a demon out of a man and when he calmed the raging sea. It's very strong language, used here because the stakes are very high. To look to Jesus for power and might, victorious armies and a conquering hero is to totally misunderstand and distort the whole point of his life and what God's doing through him. That simply is not the way Jesus or God intend to save the world, so get on board or get out of the way.

As much as I'd like to dismiss Peter as clueless and only listening to Jesus with a microscopic fraction of his brain, I think we need to consider our own view of the world. One commentator has written, "... we have to admit that Peter's definition of "messiah" is usually the one we prefer as well. Peter, we, and just about everyone we'll ever know want a strong God, a God who heals our illnesses, provides ample prosperity, guarantees our security, urges our military and sports teams onto victory, and generally keeps us happy, healthy, and wise.

"But that's not what Jesus offers. Instead, Jesus points to a God who meets us in vulnerability, suffering, and loss. A God who meets us, that is, in those moments when we really need God, when all we had worked for, hoped for, and striven for fall apart and we realize that we are, quite simply, mortal, incapable of saving ourselves and desperately in need of a God who meets us where we are. Jesus' identity proves elusive precisely because God shows up just where we least expect God to be. Which means that we don't get the God we want, but instead the God we need." (David Lose, *in the meantime*, September 7, 2015)

From there, Jesus went on to talk with the crowd about just what discipleship means: if any of you want to become my followers, you need to be prepared to deny yourselves, take up your cross and follow me. Which may or may not mean a cross at all, but may mean reaching beyond what's comfortable or popular or pretty - for the sake of living the kind of love with which Jesus loved. He taught them that if their goal and priority in life was to protect their own life or their way of life or their position in life, they'd end up losing it all. If on the other hand, their focus was on the gospel and following in faith, they'd find more life than they knew what to do with. For a follower of Jesus, life is not a possession to be clutched or hoarded, but a gift to be shared in openness and faith. That same commentator writes that, "... we tend to think that life is something you go out and get, or earn, or buy, or win. But it turns out that life is like love, it can't be won or earned or bought, only given away. And the more you give it

away, the more you have. In fact...only when you love others do you most understand what love really is. Likewise, only when you give away your life for the sake of others do you discover it.”

I think of stories we’ve heard this past week as we’ve remembered 9/11, stories of folks who acted with love in the midst of unthinkable acts of terror, even when it meant putting themselves in great danger. For some of them, it meant letting go of this life in order to reach for and protect others; but not everyone. I think of the pilots I heard interviewed who headed out on a suicide mission, prepared to take down the plane that appeared headed for the White House. Fortunately for them, it crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania before they were in position to do what they were prepared to do. I think of the stories from the Gulf Coast as Hurricane Ida approached: as a hospital scrambled to evacuate patients, an individual moved scores of folks to safety, one bed at a time, those with Covid and those without, those breathing infectious particles and those not. I don’t know if any of us will ever be confronted with such life and death choices, but the invitation is still there: to follow in faith and live with love, anything from caring for an ailing child or friend, speaking up when jokes are offensive or attitudes are racist, standing beside someone whom everyone else has turned away from.

Peter was right. Jesus is the one who has come to us from God to show us how to live and love and serve. Jesus is the one who meets us in the struggle and pain and unknowns of life and leads us through to a higher joy and a deeper hope. Jesus is the one who calls us to come and follow him, rarely able to know in advance what that may mean, yet willing to listen and learn in order to follow and love. By the grace of God, may we dare to say yes. Amen.

HYMN *“Before Your Cross, O Jesus”*

Before your cross, O Jesus, our lives are judged today;
the meaning of our eager strife is tested by your way.
Across our restless living the light streams from your cross,
and by its clear, revealing beams we measure gain and loss.

The hopes that lead us onward, the fears that hold us back,
our will to dare great things for God, the courage that we lack,
The faith we keep in goodness, our love, as low or pure,
On all, the judgment of the cross falls steady, clear, and sure.

Yet humbly, in our striving, we rise to face its test.
We crave the power to do your will as once you did it best.
On us let now the healing of your great Spirit fall,
And make us brave and full of joy to answer to your call.

PRAYER REQUESTS

-Dorothy Thielman is battling diverticulitis in addition to a Urinary Tract Infection. Prayers for healing.
-Dorothy and John Thielman welcomed a new great granddaughter Sept 10th...their granddaughter Brandi was blessed with Maggie Lynn Allred. She was 3 weeks early but looking very strong and healthy. Brandi is John & Johnnie's daughter that lives in Logan , Utah.
-Ben, a minor cardiac event yesterday

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, as we come together on September 12, we feel deeply the weight of yesterday’s remembrance: twenty years since acts of terror shattered a beautiful day and our sense of security; claimed thousands of lives and created holes in homes and hearts; brought out the heroism in ordinary folks and branded many with PTSD, trauma and illness; launched a war with an intent to seek revenge and root out evil while also creating wounded warriors who walk with prosthetics and spend nights hugging nightmares. We do indeed remember the victims and families, first responders and helpers. On

this day, help us too to remember the ways in which a day of horror inspired us to reach for each other in the dark, to turn toward each other for comfort and hope, to walk together in courage and compassion, and to offer our best to each other as companions and supports. Teach us to nurture those gifts and that coming together, that by your grace we might heal and transform, bless and embrace all of your wounded people and broken world.

Our hearts and souls are heavy with the weight of this fractured world. Unity seems elusive, out of reach in this divisive time. People are suffering as storms batter, as fires rage, as wars inflict violence, as rights and dignity are being assaulted. People are dying, lost, confused, and so very alone. It is hard to tell truth from lies, difficult to figure out a response to the deep hurts, to even hear your voice in the cacophony of the day. Where is safe haven in such a time as ours? Yet you are God, the Holy One who loves us and is with us now and always. May we learn the art of listening beyond the words and the noise so that relationships are healed, the grace of seeing each and every person as your beloved creation, and the gift of your hope wrapping around our weary hearts.

Knowing that our words are never enough, we pray for the world, for your peace that passes all understanding, for your grace that heals and makes whole, for your hope that carries us through turmoil and chaos. Hear our hearts as we come to you..... *(time of silent prayer)*.

Thank you, God of all creation, God of this world, God of our fragile hearts, for when we come to you in prayer we catch a glimpse of what can be. We feel our faith finding root in our hearts and your love holding us. Help us to breathe this time of prayer deep into our souls so that we might go out and live as your own, as people who love extravagantly, as people who welcome generously, as people transformed by you. By your grace we pray, using the words that Jesus taught his friends: Our Father...
(Melodie Long, revgalblogpals.org, edited)

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

OFFERING

As we usually do on the second Sunday of the month, the envelopes in the bulletins invite our contributions in support of the Emergency Aid Fund. Money that you contribute to this fund allows us as a congregation to respond to needs and requests that come to us from people in our community and folks passing through Wallace on the way to somewhere else. It's a valuable way to express the love of God and the care of Christ's church, and to soften the vulnerability and isolation, fear and anxiety that too many experience in tough times. Thank you for your support of this fund, as well as your support of our church's ministry. We are blessed to be sharing this road together.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (in unison)

God of faithfulness, in every age you call men and women to make known your love. May we who celebrate this holy meal today be so strengthened in the ministries to which we are called, that we may always witness to your holy name. This we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Words of Invitation

This table is open to all who love Jesus and wish to know him better. So come to this sacred table, not because you must but because you may. Come not because you are fulfilled, but because in your emptiness you 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. Come to this table, then, sisters and brothers, as you are. Partake and share. It is spread for you and me, that we might again know that God has come to us, shared our common lot, and invited us to join the people of God's new age.

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 indeed right, for you made us, and before us, you made the world we inhabit, and before the world, you made the eternal home in which, through Christ, we have a place. All that is spectacular, all that is plain have their origin in you; all that is lovely, all who are loving point to you as their fulfillment.

And grateful as we are for the world we know and the universe beyond our knowing, we particularly praise you, whom eternity cannot contain, for coming to earth and entering time in Jesus. For his life which informs our living, for his compassion which changes our hearts, for his clear speaking which contradicts our harmless generalities, for his disturbing presence, his innocent suffering, his fearless dying, his rising to life breathing forgiveness, we praise you and worship him.

Here too our gratitude rises for the promise of the Holy Spirit, who even yet, even now, confronts us with your claims and attracts us to your goodness.

Therefore we gladly join our voices to the song of the Church on earth and in heaven:

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 our God! Hosanna in the highest!

And now, lest we believe that our praise alone fulfills your purpose, we fall silent and remember him who came because words weren't enough.

Setting our wisdom, our will, our words aside, emptying our hearts, and bringing nothing in our hands, we yearn for the healing, the holding, the accepting, the forgiving which Christ alone can offer.

(Silence)

Merciful God, send now, in kindness, your Holy Spirit to settle on this bread and cup and fill them with the fullness of Jesus.

And let that same Spirit rest on us, converting us from the patterns of this passing world, until we conform to the shape of him whose food we now share. **Amen.**

Breaking the Bread, Pouring the Cup

On the night of his betrayal and arrest, while he was gathered with friends around a table, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them, saying: "This is my body – broken for you. Do this to remember me."

Later, after they had eaten, he took a cup of wine; lifting it first in thanksgiving, he gave it to his friends, saying: "This is the new relationship with God made possible because of my death. Drink this, all of you, to remember me."

He whom the universe could not contain, is present to us in this bread. He who redeemed us and called us by name now meets us in this cup. So take this bread and this cup. In them God comes to us so that we may come to God.

Sharing the Elements

Take and eat: the body of Christ, the bread of heaven.

Take and drink: the blood of Christ, the cup of salvation.

Prayer of Thanksgiving (in unison)

In gratitude, in deep gratitude for this moment, this meal, these people, we give ourselves to you. Take us out to live as changed people because we have shared the Living Bread and cannot remain the same. Ask much of us, expect much from us, enable much by us, encourage many through us. So, Lord, may we live to your glory, both as inhabitants of earth and citizens of the commonwealth of heaven. Amen.

(A Wee Worship Book, Fourth Incarnation, Wild Goose Worship Group)

HYMN No. 292 “*God of Grace and God of Glory*”

God of grace and God of glory, On Thy people pour Thy power;
Crown Thine ancient Church’s story, Bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage, For the facing of this hour, For the facing of this hour.

Lo! the hosts of evil round us Scorn Thy Christ, assail His ways!
From the fears that long have bound us, Free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage, For the living of these days, For the living of these days.

Cure Thy children’s warring madness; Bend our pride to Thy control;
Shame our wanton, selfish gladness, Rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage, Lest we miss Thy kingdom’s goal, Lest we miss Thy kingdom’s goal.

Set our feet on lofty places, Gird our lives that they may be
Armored with all Christ-like graces In the fight to set all free.
Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage, That we fail not man nor Thee, That we fail not man nor Thee.

BENEDICTION

May the God who shakes heaven and earth, whom death could not contain, who lives to disturb and heal us, bless you with power to go forth and proclaim the gospel. Amen