

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL  
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

November 7, 2021

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

PRELUDE “*Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart*”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Blanket Sunday - \$110 so far, not too late

Budget Meeting next Sunday after worship

CALL TO WORSHIP

Grateful hearts need no special season to offer thanks to God.

**Life abundant is itself reason for praise.**

In the face of Love’s mysteries given such bountiful expression, what gifts of praise do we have?

**We have gifts enough for praise: our hands, our strength, our singing hearts.**

Let us worship God.

*(Chalice Worship)*

HYMN No. 16 “*We Praise Thee, O God, Our Redeemer*”

We praise Thee, O God, our Redeemer, Creator

In grateful devotion our tribute we bring:

We lay it before Thee, we kneel and adore Thee,

We bless Thy holy Name, glad praises we sing.

We worship Thee, God of our parents we bless Thee

Through life’s storm and tempest our Guide hast Thou been;

When perils o’ertake us, escape Thou wilt make us,

And with Thy help, O Lord, our battles we win.

With voices united our praises we offer

To Thee, great Jehovah, glad anthems we raise;

Thy strong arm will guide us, our God is beside us,

To Thee, our great Redeemer, forever be praise!

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (in unison) (inspired by Psalm 1)

**You, loving God, are the ground of our being and the river of life; you both steady our roots and draw them to seek the living waters. You are like the sunlight enticing us taller and like the breeze rustling our leaves. You are with us through hard seasons of summer heat, and in the nights when winter’s frost ice the landscape your love warms and sustains us. You are everything to us. O let our gratitude be great, let our praise be plentiful, let our worship be wonder-full! Through Christ Jesus your ever-living Son. Amen!**

*(Bruce Prewer, re:Worship)*

SCRIPTURE READING

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

### Psalm 1

Happy are those

    who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
    or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
but their delight is in the law of the LORD,  
    and on his law they meditate day and night.

They are like trees

    planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
    and their leaves do not wither.

In all that they do, they prosper.

The wicked are not so,

    but are like chaff that the wind drives away.  
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
    nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;  
for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,  
    but the way of the wicked will perish.

### SERMON

As the people we live near will tell you, Ben and I are out walking at least once a day, usually twice, and in all manner of appealing and unappealing weather. About the only condition that has stopped us is smoke, and even that, not until the warnings and ratings get really extreme. But what's a little rain? Or snow, ice and cold? That's what grippers and down mittens are for. Several days this past week, we were out with raincoats and rain pants on, hoods up, gloves and shoes getting wet as we made our way around the loop. While we walk, we're always watching the trees, and commenting on what's dead or dying. At the moment, there's a pileated woodpecker creating a pile of bark chips around the base of a couple of trees while it strips the trunks bare. And yes, there are the three pines laying on their sides, huge root balls upright in the back yard of one house. At least one of those came down in the wind storm in January, and left the largest tilted at such a precarious angle that we were unwilling to walk under it; we took the long way around until the ground firmed up and were not surprised when the next wind storm finally dropped the tree, raised the roots and closed the road. Contrast that with the maple that used to stand right outside the window where we sit and eat most of our meals. Severe snow a few Christmases ago split the trunk of that tree, but we're still chipping away at the roots. They're down and deep, and sprawling all over the yard, defying the faint of heart and any feeble efforts to move them out.

I don't know what kind of tree the psalmist had in mind in today's psalm, but it would appear that it was one that was hale and hearty, able to withstand hurricane force winds, record breaking droughts, water-saturated ground and the branch breaking accumulation of heavy wet snow. It actually reminds me of a tree that sits on the north shore of Lake Superior – very far north in Grand Portage, Minnesota. The Ojibwe call it the Spirit Little Cedar Tree, though it's popularly known as the Witch Tree; it sits on a rock outcropping at the edge of the water; perfectly positioned to get hit with all the savage weather Lake Superior is famous for. It's somewhere between 300 and 400 years old and has no visible means

of support. It has bonsai-like stunted branches, and appears to have gotten its start through a crack in the granite; these days it looks like it's growing out of the rock, with whatever roots there are hidden deep in the granite.

The psalmist plants this image of stubbornly resilient and productive trees in the middle of Psalm 1, as an image for describing those faithful believers who orient their whole lives in the ways of God: who delight in the laws of God and who mediate on God's ways day and night. They're grounded and rooted, faithful and fruitful, and have God's love and teachings pulsing through every fiber of their being. Contrast that with the wicked who are so flighty and undependable that they're like chaff blown about by the wind. The Psalm declares happy or blessed are the ones grounded in God and rooted in love. They can withstand storms; they don't tuck tail and run when the going gets rough – they stand fast and do what needs to be done; they delight in the glory of God; they produce the fruits of God's loving ways; and bear God's light and love into the world through the living of their everyday lives.

This Psalm reminds me of my grandmother. She was a humble, hard-working woman who raised a family of 5 children. Her husband, my grandfather, died early and when their children were young – and my grandmother kept the farm going. She never wore pants, but she milked cows and made sure the hay was in, kept the house warm and her children cared for. Mid-life she moved into town, did people's laundry and made bread for them, tended a hen house and sold eggs. The day before her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, she learned that her missionary daughter had been murdered in Afghanistan. She grieved deeply – and privately – but she never lost her faith. She kept on, giving to others, offering care and extending kindness, crocheting and baking as long as she was able. She was rooted in love in profound and productive ways, passing along to those of us who came after her a rich and priceless legacy.

When it comes to being rooted in love, I also think of Colin Powell, who was laid to rest yesterday. He was a one-of-a-kind combination of soldier and family man, leader and servant, internationally acclaimed statesman yet willing to drop to one knee and sing all of "Mama Mia" to an amused foreign minister from Sweden. I loved the story Madeleine Albright told at his funeral, reporting that Powell said she almost gave him an aneurysm when she asked him, "What's the point of having this superb military you're always talking about if we can't use it?" They argued and argued, and the argument delayed the American intervention in Bosnia in the early 1990s. But over time they also became close friends, which became critical after the disputed 2000 election. When Mr. Powell was named her successor, she said, he drove over to her house in Georgetown and together they began planning a succession. They were members of opposite parties, but that fact didn't get in the way of doing what needed to be done, or of their friendship.

And finally, I think of friends of ours, whose lives were turned upside down and inside out a few years ago, when the woman discovered that her husband had sexually molested their two granddaughters. She was devastated and she was livid, yet as she pondered her next course of action, her faith and her son reminded her, Mom, we don't throw people away because of their sin; you taught me that, and now you need to remember.

The Psalm calls to those who would be God's people to immerse themselves in the ways and teachings of God. And the passage from Deuteronomy tells us how we can help that happen in our own lives and the lives of our children. After handing out the first and greatest commandment, to love God with all our heart, soul and might, we're told to keep these words in our hearts, recite them to our children, and talk about them at home and when we're on the road, when we lie down and when we rise. Weave them into our everyday lives, turn them into habits, make them so familiar and accessible that we don't remember not knowing them, we can't imagine living any other way. Episcopal rector Richard Simpson has written that: "...Torah is given as a gift in the wilderness to a people called to order their welfare around God's abundant gifts, gifts that make neighborhoods possible. It is given as *Instruction*

in order to shape a people after God's own heart. With Sabbath keeping as its fulcrum, Torah is summarized succinctly in both testaments: love God and love neighbor." (*Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 4, page 83*)

Living lives that are rooted in God's love means focusing our lives around God's abundant gifts to us: receiving those gifts with deep gratitude and then doing what we can to share them with others. Living lives that are rooted in God's love means living with open hands and open hearts, growing in trust and overcoming fear, putting our lives and our resources to work as an expression of our love of God and of our neighbors. Living lives rooted in God's love means letting the will and ways of God, the love and law of God so infiltrate our lives that God is seen in all that we do, all that we give and all that we are. May it be so. Amen.

#### PASTORAL PRAYER

Great and Glorious God, you formed us in love. One by one, you assigned our height, colored our hair, lavished us with gifts, and sent us forth into the world to explore and play, grow and learn, listen and love. You surrounded us with family and friends, a community of care and the wild diversity of hearts and minds, habits and habitats that comprise your creation and color it with wonder. Day by day, you ask us to love, to share what we have with others, to grow in patience, explore with courage, listen as eagerly as we speak, practice the grace of giving and receiving forgiveness, learn the art of compromise, walk in the strength of tenderness and serve with the power of gentleness. Root us in the beauty of your love and send it pulsing through our arms and legs, words and interactions, attitudes and assumptions.

We pray, Holy God, for all those who are sick, grieving, battling Covid, trying to stay safe, looking for work, searching for shelter, wrestling with addiction, overcome with hopelessness and despair, weary to the bone from trying to hold all the pieces together. For those who brace for severe weather or dig out from the destruction of fires and flooding, tornadoes and hurricanes. For families torn apart by old wounds and fresh trauma, broken promises and disappointed dreams.

We pray once again for the gift of your wisdom: for decision makers in Washington, Boise and across the country, for juries seated in murder trials and the Supreme Court as it hears arguments and makes decisions that will shape peoples' lives, for the United Nations Climate Change Conference that continues to meet in Glasgow and parents deciding whether their child will be vaccinated. Infuse all of them and each of us with your wisdom: a wisdom that follows the lead of love, that honors the vulnerable and voiceless, that dares to stand for what is right and step aside for the well-being of another, that recognizes the difference between self-interest and the common good. Show us, Holy God, how to walk together with you and with each other, discovering together the paths of peace and the way of love.

Hear our prayers, spoken and unspoken (*silence*). And hear us as we join together in the prayer that Jesus taught: Our Father...

#### PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

#### OFFERING

I hope that you received a letter or an email recently that invited you to consider what you will give to support the church's ministry in 2022. We encourage pledges, both so that the church has some sense of what it can count on in the coming year, and so that you can make an intentional decision ahead of time about what you want to give. A pledge is not a signed contract that the church would ever haunt you about fulfilling; it's a statement of good intentions that can aid the budgeting for the church as well as each of us at home. The decision of what or whether to pledge is yours; there's no right or wrong answer.

I did want to point you to a chart that's at the end of the PDF that came with this morning's email. I'd invite you to look at the chart and try to figure out where you fall in terms of the resources you have to work with: annual or monthly income (you decide if it's before or after taxes). From there, the chart can help you see what percentage of your income you are currently giving to the church. 1%? 10%? 20% Does it feel like the right amount? Does it reflect the priority this church and your faith hold in your life? Or do you wish it was more? How does your giving reflect on the love of God in your life? Of course, decisions about giving need to take into account other responsibilities and commitments you have, and maybe the giving you do to other institutions. This is just one tool offered to help you in your own prayer and discernment process. When you're ready, pledge cards can be placed in the offering plate or given to the Treasurer, as you do with any other gift.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (in unison)

**O God, you provide what we cannot purchase or possess, unlimited resources of forgiveness and freedom. These are your gifts of love to us, and it is through their wise use that our faith finds expression. As people forgiven and free, as people afforded an opportunity to serve, we respond with our offerings and with an abiding thanks. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

(Glen E. Rainsley, *Hear Our Prayer*)

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Hymn "Eat this bread" (twice)

Eat this bread, drink this cup, come to me and never be hungry.

Eat this bread, drink this cup, trust in me and you will not thirst.

Words of Invitation

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. You who come to me shall not hunger; you who believe in me shall never thirst.

**In company with all who hunger for spiritual food, we come to this table to know the risen Christ in the sharing of this life-giving bread.**

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.**

Yes, it is right to give you thanks and praise for the life you lived among us, speaking our language, learning our ways, sitting at our tables, listening to our complaints and never giving up on us, never giving up on us.

Yes, it is right to give you thanks and praise for never compromising the truth by which you lived, for refusing to be swayed by popular opinion, for identifying the seductions of power, for confronting institutionalized prejudice and never selling your soul, never selling you soul.

Yes, it is right to give you thanks and praise for loving the unlovable, touching the untouchable, forgiving the unforgivable, recognizing the gold beneath the dross, the potential beneath the pain, and never taking an easier path, never taking an easier path.

Yes, it is right to give you thanks and praise for, in the face of our small mindedness, you, Jesus, have shown us God and God's kingdom in fascinating beauty and converting power.

So we gladly celebrate your life as, in concert with the church in heaven and earth, we join the song of your unending praise.

**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!**

Oh, holy Jesus, it is not by virtue that we are here, but by your gracious invitation.

It is not to continue an ancient tradition but to be nourished by our living Lord.

It is not only to celebrate your presence among us but to catch a glimpse of heaven, because in this sacrament, you give us a foretaste of that heavenly banquet where we shall see you face to face and enjoy the freedom of eternity when the limitations of earth are no more.

God our Maker, as you gave your people water from a rock in the desert and fed them with bread in the wilderness, let you Holy Spirit fill this bread and this cup with the fullness of Jesus so that we, in stretching out our hands, receive, through faith, food for our souls.

In the intimacy of this sacrament, as heaven and earth become one, enable us to know you more deeply and resolve to love, honor and serve you more faithfully in this world, until your kingdom comes. **Amen.**

### Breaking the Bread and Pouring the Cup

Among friends, gathered around a table, Jesus took bread, and when he had blessed it, he broke it and said, "Take this and eat it. It is my body. It is given for you. Do this to remember me."

Then later, during the meal, he took a cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he said, "In this cup is the new relationship with God made possible because of my death. Take this, all of you, to remember me."

All you who hunger and thirst for a better life, for a deeper faith, for a better world, here is the bread of life: feed on it with gratitude; here is the cup of salvation: drink from it and believe. The gifts of God for the people of God. *(A Wee Worship Book, Fifth Incarnation, Wild Goose Worship Group)*

### Sharing the Elements

Take and eat: the body of Christ, broken for you.

Take and drink: the cup of salvation poured out for you.

### Prayer of Thanksgiving (in unison)

**Generous and faithful God, you have fed us at your table. May the nourishment we have received enable us to enrich the lives of other wherever we may go from here. Whether the future be dark or bright, the road be smooth or rough, whether our cares be light or heavy, our song be strong or weak, keep our hearts warm and our hands open, our lives ever embracing and ever embraced by your love. Amen.**

*(Iona Abbey Worship Book, The Iona Community)*

HYMN No. 1 "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" (verses 1, 3, 4)

Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of love;  
Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee, Opening to the sun above.  
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, Drive the dark of doubt away;  
Giver of immortal gladness, Fill us with the light of day.

Thou art giving and forgiving, Ever blessing, ever blest,  
Well-spring of the joy of living, Ocean depth of happy rest!  
Thou our Father Christ, our Brother – All who live in love are Thine;  
Teach us how to love each other, Lift us to the joy divine.

Mortals, join the happy chorus Which the morning stars began;  
God's own love is reigning o'er us, Jesus' love binds us as one.  
Ever singing, march we onward, Loving in the midst of strife,  
Joyful music leads us sunward In the triumph song of life.

BENEDICTION

May God bless you and keep you, and may God bless you and give you away to others.

May God's face shine on you, and your face reflect an irresistible good news.

May God lift up everything that is fallen in you, and give you more pieces of peace that you alone can hold. Amen.

(Maren C. Tirabassi, *Touch Holiness*)



# In Awe of Grace

by Rev. Dr. Jennifer Yocum

**W**hen I joined the UCC back in 2003, I had every reason not to pledge. I was in deep debt from graduate school. I was primarily self-employed and had dramatically uneven income. Some months, I couldn't even make my part of the mortgage payment. Even deeper though, I'd been deeply hurt by churches in the past, thrown out by one and blown out by another. (Both stories best shared over a beer.) For ten years, I'd been spiritually homeless and I wasn't too sure of the ragtag little church I'd joined, made up of misfits and refugees just like me.

But I was downright ensorcelled by this promise, "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here." If there was even a chance that this might turn out to be true, I knew I

had "put down roots" to make it happen. Even if it was a measly \$5 a month/5 hours a month, I knew I needed to make a bet on my faithfulness to the dream of a church that would take me in. In the 18 years since then, I've challenged myself to increase my pledge every year. Not because of the terrific programming my church does, or because of mission giving, or because of a sense of duty, I give because I'm still in awe of the grace extended by that "No matter who you are..." promise. I hope you'll join me in growing that promise in your churches.

## CONSIDER YOUR PLEDGE AS A PERCENT OF YOUR MONTHLY INCOME.

Annual Income	Monthly Income	2%	3%	4%	5%	10%
16,000	1,333	27	40	53	67	133
20,000	1,667	33	50	67	83	167
25,000	2,083	42	62	83	104	208
30,000	2,500	50	75	100	125	250
35,000	2,917	58	88	117	146	292
40,000	3,333	67	100	133	167	333
45,000	3,750	75	113	150	188	375
50,000	4,167	83	125	167	208	417
60,000	5,000	100	150	200	250	500
75,000	6,250	125	188	250	313	625
100,000	8,333	167	250	333	417	833
125,000	10,417	208	313	417	521	1042

On average, Americans give 2% of their income to charity. Giving even 1% more of annual income to charity would be transformative for our congregation and other organizations doing good in our community.