

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M. C. Ling, Pastor

June 12, 2022

Trinity Sunday

PRELUDE “*All Things Bright and Beautiful*”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP

I will light a light in the name of the Maker, who lit the world and breathed the breath of life for me.

I will light a light in the name of the Christ, who saved the world and stretched out a hand to me.

I will light a light in the name of the Spirit, who encompasses the world and blesses my soul with yearning.

We will light three lights for the trinity of love: God above us, God beside us, God beneath us; the beginning, the end, the everlasting one.

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

HYMN No. 267 “*Come, Thou Almighty King*”

Come, Thou Almighty King, Help us Thy name to sing,
Help us to praise: Father! All-glorious, O'er all victorious,
Come, and reign over us, Ancient of Days.

Come, Thou Incarnate Word, Gird on Thy mighty sword,
Our prayer attend! Come, and Thy people bless, And give Thy word success:
Spirit of holiness, On us descend.

Come, Holy Comforter, Thy sacred witness bear
In this glad hour! Thou, who almighty art, Now rule in every heart
And ne'er from us depart, Spirit of power.

OPENING PRAYER (in unison)

Gracious God, you gather us here this summer morning as we welcome a new season. Your presence is made known to us in the beauty that surrounds us with flowers, birds, rain and sunshine. Summer activities speak of life and joy in our community. And yet, as we look around and listen to the news, we recognize that all is not well with our world. We confess we sometimes wonder what it is we are called to do. Forgive our faltering faith and bless us, O God, with a spirit of discernment in our decisions, with compassion in our conversation, with love in our listening, with perseverance in our praying, and above all with hope that holds us in all seasons. Amen.

(Sue Henley, Before the Amen)

SCRIPTURE READING

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Does not wisdom call
and understanding raise her voice?
On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:

“To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all who live.

“The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.

Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth,
when he had not yet made earth and fields
or the world’s first bits of soil.

When he established the heavens, I was there;
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker,
and I was daily his delight,
playing before him always,
playing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.

Psalm 8

O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are humans that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

SERMON

You may have heard me say that one of the things that's waiting for me every morning when I get to my computer is a Daily Devotional from the United Church of Christ. For the most part, they're written by the same people who write the Advent and Lenten Devotionals, so if you're interested, let me know and I'll help you sign up – at no cost. On the 3rd of June, the waiting one was written by a seminary classmate, Talitha Arnold, who is the Senior Pastor of the United Church in Santa Fe. They all begin with a verse of scripture, and hers that morning was, "*May the glory of the Lord endure forever.*" from Psalm 104:31 (NRSV). And then Talitha wrote:

"Several years ago, I joined a 21-day do-it-yourself raft trip through the Grand Canyon. Every day everyone loaded the boats, rowed, set up camp, cooked, cleaned, and packed up the next morning. Most days we also hiked the side canyons.

"One person had more sense than the rest of us. In the middle of a hike or setting up her tent, she'd simply stop and look around. Sometimes she'd lie down, gazing in silence at the sky or the canyon walls. When someone asked if she was okay, she simply said, "I'm having a beauty attack."

"This reflection comes only days after the massacre of school children in Uvalde and two weeks after the slaughter of African Americans doing their Saturday grocery shopping in Buffalo. Perhaps as for you, the images of grief-stricken families and terrorized children are seared in my mind. Perhaps like you, I am angry beyond words that we continue to let such carnage happen in this country.

"I initially thought this reflection would focus on today's text from Galatians 6:7-10, where Paul proclaims, "God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow." His judgment of the Galatians could be titled "Letter to the Americans."

"But perhaps like you, I cannot live on anger alone. I am grateful that today's lectionary pairs Paul's prophetic words with Psalm 104's praise of God's creation and the reminder that God's intention is not carnage and suffering, but glory and even joy. Like the psalmist and my friend, I need to be open to God's "beauty attacks." Perhaps you do, too."

And then she closed with this prayer: "May your glory endure forever, O Lord. May we have the sense to see it and trust it, even in this time, especially in this time. Amen."

I probably don't need to tell you why this piece spoke to me. If you've tuned in to hear anything I've said in the past few weeks, you know that, like Talitha, the images of grief stricken families and terrorized children are seared in my mind. And I am angry beyond words that we continue to let such carnage happen in this country. But I also cannot, and do not want to, live on anger alone. I may not be quick to bask in beauty, or marvel over miracles, but the notion of beauty attacks has stuck with me. And I can't help wondering what difference it might make in my life if I let more of them interrupt my sputtering and fussing. We are surrounded by so much wonder that needs and deserves to be appreciated and adored, noticed and delighted in; beauty that comes straight out of the heart of God, created and given directly to us. Who am I to dismiss it, overlook it, or stomp all over it?

I think of the photo Alice posted on Facebook this week of their recent hike in Japan, and the breathtaking view of Mt Fuji on an exquisitely clear day. Creation doesn't get more glamorous than that, but before I got too far in my envy, wishing I could see Mt Fuji, I thought about all they're going through and how grateful I am that they were blessed with such beauty. And besides, I've got hummingbirds swooping around each other and dive-bombing me while they eagerly drink at the feeder in our back yard. I've spent an amazing amount of time this week staring at the potted sunflower we bought a couple of weeks ago; I marvel at how responsive it is to its environment, wilting when I let it dry out, dropping petals and succumbing to wind and rain, and yet also resilient and hopeful as it continues to send out buds and open them into each new day. Exactly the kinds of responsiveness and

resilience I see in the people of Ukraine. I could tell you about the Sunday morning we barely made it to church, because of the Mama deer who decided to nurse not one, but two babies in the middle of the road. There was the string of walks I took the first spring I was here, before both my eyes and my brain finally registered a multitude of purple balls in evergreen trees, sort of like origami creations but not the work of human hands, and attached to the end of branches. A little research and I figured out that they were pollen producing cones in ponderosa pine trees. And then there's my current fixation on owls. I don't think I've ever seen one loose in the wild, but every week, Kris Krocker displays photos of them that her viewers send in for Wildlife Wednesday. Lately I've been hearing their song around our yard, and thinking that one of these days – hold me to this now – I'm going to follow that sound and see if I can locate them in our trees. And all of this just scratches the surface of what's around me, just waiting to be appreciated. How much of this incredible world have I raced past, stepped on and slept through, while I fixated on the bad and the ugly? And what difference might it make in my outlook if I comprehended more beauty? If I can pry my eyes open and keep them on active duty, how might my sightings and observations lead me closer to the Creative Heart whose fingerprints are smeared all over everything?

I remember reading about the spiritual practice of paying attention. As I remember it, the author suggested that we spend 20 minutes a day not doing anything, just being, watching the world where we are. Not reading, not dozing, not weeding or planting, not looking with half a mind while the rest of it ponders the day's to do list or the leftovers from yesterday; but simply paying attention to what's around us. The grasshoppers and ants, hummingbirds and owls, sunflowers and leaves. I suspect that for most of us twenty minutes to be both still and attentive would be a very long time, so maybe we start with 10, or 5 if that's easier. Watch and explore, marvel and enjoy, and let all of that carry us home to the God whose generous hand and endless grace stands behind it all.

There's a lot that I'm drawn to in both of this morning's biblical passages, but one of the most significant pieces for me is the way they describe the hand and heart of God at work in imagining, establishing and sharing this marvelous gift of creation. The text from Proverbs presents Wisdom as a woman who was at God's right hand from before the creation of the earth. Our reading opens with the fascinating image of Lady Wisdom standing up and hollering an invitation to us to come to her. It then goes on to present her credentials and her constancy. God created her at the beginning of the work of creating: "when there were no depths, I was brought forth." The Hebrew word for "brought forth" can also be translated as "whirl, dance or writhe." Can you imagine Wisdom whirling, dancing, writhing as it came into being? The text seems to be saying that Wisdom has been around for a very long time and can be trusted. And then she goes on to say, I was daily God's delight, rejoicing before God always, rejoicing in the human race. When we say the word "wisdom", we may picture stern, tight-lipped, a gavel wielding judge in a black robe. The book of Proverbs gives us Wisdom as joyous laughter, dance and play. And best of all, Wisdom rejoices in us, in humanity. As one writer says, "...we do not worship a stingy God who grudgingly gives gifts and who grants forgiveness as a divine grump. Not at all. The Triune God is a joyous, dancing God who pours out overflowing gifts to humanity with gladness." (Jeff Paschal, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3*, page 31)

That sense of the overflowing generosity of God continues in Psalm 8 when we read about the glory of the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and stars that God has established, the majesty of mountains and canyons, alongside the fragility of flower petals and grasshopper eyes. Surrounded by all that breathtaking wonder, David asks how God could possibly be mindful of humanity. One writer said that when "David wrote Psalm 8, his eyes saw only .001 percent of the 100 billion stars in our Milky Way. Indeed, our understanding the heavens confronts us with two important thoughts: the incomprehensible greatness of our Creator and our own very small and inconsequential stature in the universe." (Bonnie L. Pattison, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 3*, page 32). What does it say about

God that God would choose to place God's image in the small, apparently inconsequential humanity of man and woman? When so much else that God created in the universe radiates God's power, glory, wisdom, and greatness, why would God choose us to bear God's image? And what in the world are we supposed to do with the gift?

It seems to me that how we answer that question depends totally on how we read the next few verses. The psalm says that God has made us just a little lower than God, and then it goes on to say that we've been given dominion over the works of God's hands, and that all things are under our feet. I don't know what you would say, but it seems to me that most things that attempt to live under our feet don't make out so well or have much of a life expectancy. So the challenge is ours: whether we focus on the dominion part and all the power and pride that goes with the privilege inherent in that, or we celebrate and savor the beauty that God has blessed us with, accept the gifts in humility and gratitude, a sense of service and responsibility, and a heartfelt attempt to bring honor to the one whose image we bear. If God has indeed made us just a little lower than God, perhaps the hope is that we will strive to be as much like God as possible; or as Jesus said, to be perfect, as God is perfect. I don't have any expectations that I'll ever accomplish anything close to that, but I'll come closer if I try than if I scoff at the whole idea and go back to trying to control all the beasts of the field, birds of the air and fish of the sea.

We all know there is more than a little reason for us to be angry these days, but it seems abundantly clear to me that none of us can live on anger alone; and honestly, hearts that feast on anger day after day aren't exactly what we need more of right about now. There is an abundance of beauty all around us, beauty that flows freely from the heart of God, and every day is being poured out on us with abandon. Let us live with eyes, mind and heart wide open and fully alert to the creative abundance that flows from the hand of God. May our appreciation and celebration of these gifts lead us home to the Creative Heart whose fingerprints are splattered all over everything, and who calls us to a position only a little lower than God, that we may join in the work of caring for all creation, of living from God's love, forgiving with Christ's grace, dancing for joy in the abundance of creation and the beauty of God's new day. Amen.

SONG *“Hosho Video”*

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, we marvel at the wonder of it all; that you who created everything from Mount Fuji and the coral reefs to the aurora borealis and reproductive wonders of ponderosa pines, have also created each of us and smeared your fingerprints all over our lives. You know the hurts and haunts that keep us awake at night, and the hopes and hungers, commitments and companions that fuel our days. You know our birth marks and scars, the victories we wear with pride and the mistakes we made when we hoped no one was looking. You know it all, you've seen it all, and still you believe in us, still you love us. You know how we've wandered and struggled, stumbled and resisted, and rather than letting us sleep in the bed we've made for ourselves, you came close to us in Jesus. Sending him to seek us out and guide us home, accompany and advise us, teach and mentor us, heal and hold us, show us the path of love and plant in us the seeds of peace. He put skin on your love and walked among us, demonstrating how very far and wide you reach, without limit, overflowing with grace. He drew us together, out of our solitary channels and lonely corners, and wove us together as one. One people, one community, one Body, one Love. And still, you send your Spirit to breathe and pulse, instigate and encourage, within and among us, that even now we might walk in your ways, trust in your Spirit, hold fast to hope, and live by your love.

O Holy One, we bring before you the world we live in, our wounded and warring, hungry and hurting world. We are so very weary of a pandemic that will not end, but instead keeps cycling around,

mutating, surging and simply lingering; yet we are also deeply grateful for vaccines and restored freedoms, for travel and time with those we love. We are staggered by the epidemic of violence raging throughout our country, as shots are fired and lives destroyed in houses of worship and grocery stores, city streets and schools for all ages, while families are eating and headed home at the end of the day. Speak to us, Beloved God, and lead us, that we might understand the source of the rage and forge the road that lies ahead. Help us to comfort the grieving, shelter the frightened, confront the aggressors, prioritize the vulnerable, say no to violence and yes to life. Show us what it means to live in this world as your children, to walk in your love, work for your peace and trust in your hope.

We give thanks for the miracle of new life, the gift of healing, the wonder of each day, and the promise of tomorrow. Hear our prayers, receive our hearts, and listen as we join our voices in the prayer that Jesus taught, saying: Our Father...

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (depts)

OFFERING

There are a multitude of ways that we are able to express our gratitude and love for God. When we help a neighbor, open a door for a stranger, extend our kindness to someone in line ahead of us, provide a meal for the hungry, we are passing along to others a portion of the abundance that God has poured out upon us. When we give a portion of our money to support the church's ministry, we encourage our life together and strengthen our witness in this community. Your gifts to the Emergency Aid Fund enable us to respond to needs that arise within our fellowship and throughout our community, offering those in need a place to sleep for a night or two, a warm meal, assistance with utility or medical bills, money for a tank of gas. When we offer that support, we also communicate that this is a community of people who cares, and we make real the love of God for all God's people. Thank you for all that you give and all that you are. You have no idea how much of a difference it makes in the lives of those around us.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (in unison)

With gratitude and praise we offer ourselves, with our talents and treasure, to God who has given us life. We offer ourselves to be God's messengers; to let people know that God is with them; to save them from despair and to give them hope; to save them from fear and give them confidence; to save them from death and to give them life, in the name of Jesus Christ our living, reigning Lord. Amen.
(Chalice Worship)

HYMN No. 354 "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms"

What a fellowship, what a joy divine, Leaning on the everlasting arms;
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine, Leaning on the everlasting arms.
Leaning, leaning, Safe and secure from all alarms;
Leaning, leaning, Leaning on the everlasting arms.

O how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way, Leaning on the everlasting arms;
O, how bright the path grows from day to day, Leaning on the everlasting arms.
Leaning, leaning, Safe and secure from all alarms;
Leaning, leaning, Leaning on the everlasting arms.

BENEDICTION

You are God's servants gifted with dreams and vision.
Upon you rests the grace of God like flames of fire.
Love and serve the Lord in the strength of the Spirit.
May the deep peace of Christ be with you,
the strong arms of God sustain you, and
the power of the Holy Spirit strengthen you in every way. Amen.

(Chalice Worship)