

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

July 10, 2022

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

PRELUDE “Come, We that Love the Lord”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP

We are called to love the Lord our God

We are called to love with all our heart and soul

We are called to love the Lord our God

We are called to love with all our mind and strength

We are called to love the Lord our God

And we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Come, let us love our God and share God’s love in this time of worship!

(Rev. Mindi, <http://rev-o-lution.org/>)

HYMN No. 61 “Lavish Love, Abundant Beauty”

Lavish love, abundant beauty, Gracious gifts for heart and hand,
Life that fills the soul and senses – All burst forth at Your command.
Lord, our Lord, Eternal Father, Great Creator, God and Friend,
Boundless power gave full expression To Your love which knows no end.

I am Yours, Eternal Father, All my body, mind and heart.
Take and use me to Your glory, Form Yourself in every part.
Lord, Your love brings joy and gladness Flowing forth within my soul.
May my very breath and being Rise to You, their source and goal.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (in unison)

Holy God, we come together to worship, a people who would like to think that we love you with all our hearts and souls, with all our might, but there are so many other things in our lives that clamor for our attention that we often relegate you to Sundays and times when we want you to rescue us. Most of us really do want you to be the one in whom we live and move and have our being. We really do want to hear your voice above all of the other voices in our lives. But we get bogged down in the daily routine. We forget who we are. We forget who you are. We forget what the church is supposed to be. So here we are, coming before you today, with our human foibles and our short attention spans, asking that you would make yourself known to us, that you would help us to recognize the presence of the Holy, that you would continue to challenge us, inspire us, and make us into the people you want us to be. Amen.

(Katie Cook, in *Sacred Seasons, Pentecost/Ordinary Time 2000*. Posted on **Simple Living Works**.)

SCRIPTURE READING

Deuteronomy 30:9-14

... and the LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors, when you obey the LORD your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

“Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?’ No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

Luke 10:25-37

An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

SERMON

I don’t know what his context was, but I know what ours is. And I do believe that if I had an opening with Jesus, my question would be a variation on the lawyer’s. He asked what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, not necessarily because he was facing a moment of theological crisis, but because he was hoping he could trip Jesus up and knock him down a peg or two. Or at least get his followers to think twice about how far they were going to follow him. No, I’m not carrying any of that motivation, but I would be interested in hearing what he has to say about our best way to get to life – of any kind, eternal or just another decade – dare I press it and ask about the 22nd century? Teacher, what must we do to keep this ship afloat and underway into the next generation, without us killing ourselves or each other?

To borrow language from preaching professor Joy J. Moore, “It is the seventh month of the second year in the third decade of the 21st century after the reports of Jesus’ resurrection changed humanity’s understanding of the world.” (“Tell The Story Slant”, *Working Preacher* for July 10, 2022) I can’t help wondering what we’ve got to show for it. The miraculous glow of Jesus’ resurrection, his ability to beat death and transform suffering has pretty well worn off, and here we are, mired in death and destruction, a pandemic of Covid that refuses to give up and go away, an epidemic of gun violence that appears uninvited in small towns and large cities all across this country and takes out another handful of people every few days, an unprovoked war in Ukraine that’s threatening nuclear devastation and exacerbating the famine across Africa, political rhetoric that has given up debating issues and switched to screaming matches, and religious, cultural, social divides that have us at each other’s throats every chance we get. Teacher, what must we do to make it to the other side, so that our kids and grandkids have a chance at life?

Jesus was an exceptional teacher, and one of the traits of really good teachers is that, whenever they can, they answer questions with more questions. Don’t spoon feed the learner – let them find the answer themselves, do their own work of assembling the pieces of what they already know in order to

discover something new. All of which is to say that I wouldn't be surprised if Jesus responded to my question pretty much like he responded to the lawyer's question: so you want to know how to find life. What is written in the scriptures? What do you read there as the most important thing? Well, that's easy. Scripture says it all the time, and lately, I do too: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself. The lawyer had to go to both Deuteronomy and Leviticus to find the two teachings; all I have to do is read Jesus to find them irrevocably paired. And it's an answer Jesus really likes, so he said to the lawyer, and he probably would say to me: you get an A+ for that answer; do this and you will live!

At this point, I'm no better than the lawyer. That answer is all well and good, inspirational and lofty, but it's also more than a little bit overwhelming. Can we narrow things a bit with some definition of precisely who is my neighbor, which of course asks, without actually having to say it, who is not my neighbor. Where can I draw the line, so I know where to concentrate and who I can turn away from?

To which, beyond the shadow of a doubt, Jesus pulls out that dusty old story that we've all already heard a gazillion times: A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, a seventeen mile stretch of road that drops more than a half mile in elevation and was notorious as a high-crime district. People were warned to travel that road at their own risk, but this man either hadn't read the signs or thought he walked in a protective bubble. On this particular day, the road lived down to its reputation, and the traveler was robbed, beaten, stripped and left for dead. We don't know how long he lay in the ditch before a priest walked by, crossed to the other side and kept going. A bit later, he was followed by a Levite who did the same. Jesus didn't answer the riddle about why the priest and the Levite crossed the road, but maybe the best way for us to understand their actions is to consider why we cross the road, look the other way, and keep on going rather than stop to help. Maybe they were concerned this was a trap, and someone else was hiding in the bushes, waiting to pounce on them if they stopped. Maybe they were concerned about contamination and the likelihood of infection. Maybe they were preoccupied with the meeting they'd just left or the presentation they were about to make. Maybe they honestly didn't think they could do anything to help, or at least not as much as they could do for the person waiting for them at home. For whatever reason, they walked on. But a Samaritan, who also happened to be traveling the road, saw the traveler in the ditch and was moved with pity. He stopped and bandaged the man's wounds, poured oil to cleanse the wounds and wine to dull the pain. And then he loaded him onto his animal, carried him to an inn and took care of him. In the morning, when he needed to be on his way, he handed the innkeeper money to care for him further, as well as the promise that he'd return and pay whatever more was spent.

I don't know whether or not the lawyer was still listening when Jesus got to the end of the story, or if he shut down in outrage when he realized the Samaritan was the hero. We don't have as much trouble sticking with it, but that's because we don't live with Samaritans and don't appreciate the animosity between them and Jews. But hear Jesus bring that story into the 21st century and substitute "Samaritan" for whoever we would label most despicable, and we would almost certainly be just as offended. Debie Thomas suggests we "... think about it this way: Who is the last person on earth you'd ever want to deem "the good guy?" The last person you'd ever want to ask for a favor — much less owe your life? Whom do you secretly hope to convert, fix, impress, control, or save — but never, ever need? May I throw out some possibilities? A progressive Democrat is robbed, and a far-right Republican saves her life. A racist white cop is robbed, and an African-American teenager saves his life. A transgender woman is robbed, and an anti-LGBTQ activist saves her life. An outspoken atheist is robbed, and a Bible-thumping fundamentalist saves his life. A border patrol agent is robbed, and an undocumented immigrant saves his life." ("Afflicting the Comfortable", *Journey with Jesus*, posted 07 July 2019)

Jesus means to jar us, just as much as he intended to jar the lawyer. But he still won't directly answer our question about who is our neighbor. Instead, he tweaks the question just enough to ask one of his

own – again. Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? The answer was obvious, but I think the lawyer took a second to figure out how to avoid naming the Samaritan directly. Instead he said, the one who showed him mercy. Being a neighbor is about mercy, and being a neighbor is about doing. Not about debating categories and principles, not about commiserating on the dreadful state of the world, but about doing. In fact, it's interesting to look at the verbs in this story. The victim of the mugging, the robbers, the priest, levite and the innkeeper each get two, three or four verbs. The Samaritan on the other hand, gets fifteen: he saw, was moved with pity, went to the man, bandaged wounds, put him on his animal, brought him to an inn, took care of him. Being a neighbor is about doing, about acting, about stepping up, showing mercy and making a difference.

It's so easy at this point to be overwhelmed, throw up our hands in despair and stomp off. We can't do it! We certainly can't do it all, and honestly, we're not sure we want to do it, if being neighbors means either extending mercy to or receiving it from the likes of the people Jesus is lifting up. But we don't have to do it all. We can start by acting where we are, listening to the person beside us who needs someone to believe in them, offering an arm to the stranger we see stumbling on the sidewalk, hanging in there with the person who can't make up their minds which way to go, buying some gas for the couple that's stranded on the side of the road, offering a glass of water or a piece of banana bread to someone in need. I was really struck by two of the stories I heard this past week, coming out of the Highland Park shooting. One was of a man who escaped the bullets and got himself to safety and then went back; he's a surgeon who didn't think twice about doing what he could to help. And then there was the couple who spotted a two year wandering on the sidewalk, covered in blood. They picked him up and took him home, and cared for him until he was united with his grandparents. I don't know when they learned that both of his parents had been killed, but every time they asked the little boy if he knew his name, he said, Mommy come for me in the car, Mommy will come. They took him in, kept him safe and sheltered him from more harm. They didn't plan that, but they acted when the moment came. They showed up, they extended mercy, and they did what they could. Surely, they were neighbors to and for each other, as Jesus asks us all to be.

I don't know what the answers for our world are, or how long we have to right the ship before all is lost – a decade? the rest of this century? three more millenia? What I do know is that my role in any of it begins with love – growing more deeply in love with God until that love fills all my heart, all my mind, all my soul and all my strength, and growing to love my neighbors – all of my neighbors, as I love myself. I appreciated Joy Moore's suggestion, that "More than bumper-stickers regarding who to vote for in November, (we) become a trusted neighbor who enables even those who disagree with you to lean in and say, *I think I want more of the kind of person I see in you.*"

My friends, let us walk in love, explore the multitude of ways we can put our love for God and our neighbor to work. Let us practice showing mercy, extending welcome, providing rescue, living kindness and embodying love, so that others lean in and look at us, and say, I want more of the kind of person I see in you. How can I help? Amen.

PRAYER REQUESTS

PASTORAL PRAYER

Teach us Your ways, Lord, that we may come down from our heights and be open to the same Spirit who moved over the face of the waters in the first day of creation and moves also over the chaos of this time to fashion a day like this, a world like ours, a life like ours, a kingdom acting as leaven in the bread of earth.

And make us aware of the miracles of life, of warm and cold, of starkness and order, of screaming wind and impenetrable silences, and of the unfathomable mystery of amazing grace in which we are kept.

Teach us Your ways, Lord, that we may praise You for all the surprising, ingenious ways You bless us, and for all the wondrous gifts You give us, along with all the pain and joy we experience.

Teach us Your ways, Lord, that we may accept our own talents openly, nurture them hopefully, develop them faithfully, and give them freely.

Teach us Your ways, Lord, that we may love Your kindness and practice it toward the hungry of the world, the poor and sick, and oppressed, that we may learn the healing humility that comes from You.

Teach us Your ways, Lord, so that our hearts are flooded with Your mercy— emptying them of what makes them opposed to Your ways, so that they beat more in rhythm with You and pound greatly for Your kingdom. (modified from “Teach Me Your Ways” by Ted Loder (*Guerillas of Grace*)).

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

OFFERING

The possibilities for how we can put our love for God and our neighbor to work are endless, as we seek to show mercy, extend welcome, provide rescue, live kindness and embody love. One of the ways we can begin to do that work is through the sharing of our resources, and this Sunday, I specifically invite us to think about our support of the Emergency Aid Fund. Our gifts to this fund allow us to respond to requests for a night or two of shelter, a few groceries, a healthy meal, assistance with a medical or utility bill, or other specific requests that we receive from the people around us. I would also encourage our ongoing support of the Food Pantry. When I spoke recently with Art Fleming, he said that the need is definitely up; because of the generosity of this community they are able to meet that need, but ongoing gifts are essential. While donations of food and money are always welcome, the best way for us to support the Food Pantry is through the purchase of the food bags at Harvest Foods and Steins Market. When the food bank runs low on specific items, they tell the stores to put more of those in the bags. When we purchase the bags, we furnish the Food Bank with the tools they need for providing food to those in our communities who otherwise struggle to have enough to eat. When we give, everybody benefits. Thank you for all you do and for all you give.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (in unison)

Money, bread, and cup: these we offer you, O God. By your Spirit, transform them into a life-giving cup, life-giving bread, life-giving money, that you may restore your people to life. Amen.

(Chalice Worship)

HYMN No. 323 *“Let Us Break Bread Together”*

Let us break bread together on our knees;
Let us break bread together on our knees;
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.

Let us drink the cup together on our knees;
Let us drink the cup together on our knees;
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Words of Invitation

This table does not belong to any denomination, church or community. It belongs to Jesus. It was at table that he met people, heard their stories and shared his. It was at table that he deepened his friendship with poor folk and prostitutes, the business class and puzzled bystanders. It was at table that he shared profound insights into who God is and what God wants.

It was at table, with bread and wine, that he initiated the sacrament we now celebrate.

So come to this table. Leave behind any baggage of arrogance or unworthiness. Do not think, 'This is not for me.' Think rather of Jesus saying, 'I am for you,' and accept his invitation to be the friend he cherishes and longs to feed.

The story

Long before this building was erected, in open spaces and hard places, people heard of how on the night of his arrest, and aware of what lay ahead of him, Jesus sat at supper with his friends.

During the meal, he took a piece of bread, blessed and broke it and said to his disciples, 'This is my body, given for you.'

Later in the meal he took a cup of wine, saying, 'In this cup is the new relationship with God made possible because of my death. Drink it, all of you.'

I will not drink wine again until I do so in the coming realm of God.

So we take this bread and this cup, offering them to God for blessing, so that through them the goodness of God may bless, enrich and enlighten us.

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.

For you, Creator God, the valleys laugh and sing, and the trees of the field clap their hands. Your earth summons us to break silence and be one with the song of creation.

We give you thanks and praise.

For you, God of all, the church in its myriad forms and countless languages honors its Savior. Millions upon millions invite us to be one with them in the drama of worship.

We give you thanks and praise.

In heaven, beyond our seeing, the angels and saints are caught up in song. And those we have loved and lost are part of that great company. They call us to be one with the harmony of heaven.

We give you thanks and praise.

So, gladly, we join our voices to those of earth, sea and sky, in the universal hymn of praise which echoes through time and eternity.

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!

Come now, O Christ, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, forever bound to us in promise and mystery; breathe your Spirit on us and on this bread and cup. Let them become, for us, the seal and sign of your love, healing, redeeming, making us whole.

And through them let us together become, for you, your body, loving the world as God loves, serving its people as God wills and always being transformed until we and all humanity resemble the One whose food we now share. **Amen.**

As Jesus broke bread, we break this bread. (*bread is broken*)

As Jesus shared wine, we share this cup. (*cup is poured*)

As those who have been invited to his table, feed on this holy food through which God comes to us so that we can come to God.

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)

O Brother Jesus, we have been guests at your table; come with us wherever we go and be present in all we share. Summon out in us, whom you have fed, generosity of spirit to ensure that all the hungry are nourished and earth's barren places are fertile with food, faith, hope and love. Amen.

(Iona Abbey Worship Book, The Iona Community)

HYMN No. 1 *“Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”*

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,
Wellspring 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.

BENEDICTION

Life is short. And we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel the way with us. So: be swift to love, and make haste to be kind. And may the blessing of God the source, Jesus the reconciler, and the Spirit who animates life be among us all. Amen.