

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

July 31, 2022

PRELUDE “Lead Me, Lord”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP

We have been called to walk the faithful road and to choose the way of God’s justice.

We are here because we believe strongly that our God is good, and that we live in that goodness.

We are here to proclaim our faith and to seek direction along this faith journey.

Come together, then, to be God’s people. Follow Christ and listen for the good things that God has done. Rise up in praise and thanksgiving!

We will share with others the goodness that we have found in God. May our lives be an expression of that goodness.

(Sandra E. Graham, *Touch Holiness*)

HYMN No. 51 “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah”

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty; Hold me with Thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven, Feed me till I want no more,
Feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain, Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar Lead me all my journey through;
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer, Be Thou still my strength and shield,
Be Thou still my strength and shield.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (in unison)

Merciful God, Just God, Faithful God, God of blessing and God of our most difficult times, we come to you for a moment of quiet in our self-made busyness. We come to you for energy in our weariness. We come to you for challenge when we are willing to settled for our own small plans and dreams. We long for the peace of your presence, even as we are afraid of the urgency of your call. Enter, Spirit of God, into each of our lives and enliven us; enter, Spirit of God, into our community and enable us to love and serve you and all your children. Amen.

(Maren C. Tirabassi, *Touch Holiness*)

SCRIPTURE READING Deuteronomy 31:1-8

When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, he said to them, “I am now one hundred twenty years old. I am no longer able to get about, and the LORD has told me, ‘You shall not cross over this Jordan.’ The LORD your God himself will cross over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua also will cross over before you, as the LORD promised. The LORD will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. The LORD will give them over to you, and you shall deal with them in full accord with the command that I have given to you. Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.”

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their ancestors to give them, and you will put them in possession of it. It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

SERMON

Moses had never wanted the job. He thought his criminal record would disqualify him. Or his inability to explain who was sending him and what he was called to do. Or his complete and utter lack of skills to do the job that he was being recruited for. Or that tendency he had of always stumbling around, stuttering for the right words to say. Nobody ever, not even once, had referred to him as eloquent or having a way with words. He protested: surely you can find a better spokesperson than me. But God had an answer for everything, and before he knew what had hit him, he was handing his father-in-law his resignation and heading back to Egypt to spring his people out of slavery. There was to be no flying under the radar this time. Moses was headed straight into an audience with Pharaoh, with assurances that God would set him up with all the special powers and impressive abilities he'd need. Be forewarned that Pharaoh isn't going to go down easy, but you'll have what you need to get the job done and before you know it, the whole kit and caboodle of you will be on your way to the Promised Land.

Fast forward more than forty years, and they finally stood on the threshold of that wondrous new land, flowing with milk and honey, that had been dangling like a carrot on a stick in front of their noses every blasted day of their journey. To say that the people of Israel had been an adoring crowd of Moses worshippers ever since they left Egypt would be wildly misleading, but they'd eventually come to an understanding and had settled into a rhythm that made their days together bearable. No, they didn't like picking their food off shrubs, and having the same blasted thing to eat every day, and never having even a morsel in reserve. And depending on rocks to provide their drinking water was ridiculous. But when all was said and done, they'd had food and water enough. And they'd made it through the wilderness. And even if Moses did sometimes disappear for days on end, he'd always come back, and even though they'd never understand why in the world it had taken them forty years to get here, they had gotten here. Clearly, they had some things to be grateful for; and the Moses-God duo really had come through for them in the end.

But now word was beginning to circulate that Moses was bailing. He wouldn't be crossing over into the Promised Land with them. He used the excuse of his age, saying that he was 120 and couldn't get around the way he used to; I wonder whether the rumor mill had gotten hold of the fact that God was mad at Moses for his lack of trust, and that because of that, God had closed the door on the Promised Land for Moses. I don't even know how important it is that they understand the reasons behind it all; the important part is that they finally reach the moment and the place they've been dreaming about for forty eternal years, only to be told there will be a change in leadership. The one they've counted on and depended on is outta here. They're moving into a new place with an abundance of new challenges and new obstacles, and without the comforting assurance of the trusted leader they've learned they can trust.

Before they got too wound up with their whining and complaining, Moses stepped forward and did his very best to settle the masses and assure them of what they already knew. It's true that I am not going to cross the Jordan River with you, but God will. God will go before you into this new land; God will establish your security, see to your well-being, promote your peace and give you everything you need to live and multiply and flourish in this land. Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread; it is the Lord your God who goes with you; God will not fail you or forsake you. The very same God who brought you safely through the wilderness (and you know as well as I do that it was God, not me) will be with you in this new land. Have no fear; be strong and bold, for God will be with you. It's a promise you can take to the bank, or anywhere else you are going. Trust me on this. Trust God with everything.

I remember vividly the weekend of my ordination. It was in northern Vermont, and I remember the joy and excitement of welcoming family and friends from every part of my life and every part of the country. My father's cousins from New York came, and my mother's family from around Vermont. My college roommate from Pennsylvania, my seminary roommate from Oregon; seminary friends and

faculty from Connecticut, New York, North Carolina, New Jersey. We all gathered to celebrate and sing, laugh and cry, reminisce and dream; and what a wonderful time we had. I also remember the pit in my stomach that hovered at the back of everything, acutely aware that as soon as the party was over and my friends headed home, I was headed to northern Maine, land of potatoes and logging trucks, a state where I knew no one, to do what I had never done before: serve not just one, but two small churches. A week after my ordination was the first of who knows how many weeks when I would have to have something to say, whether I had anything to say or not. To say that I was scared would be a wild understatement.

The service itself was everything I hoped it would be and more. One of the pieces I remember most vividly was the moment for the laying on of hands. I'd taken my vows, made my promises to God and the church, and stepped over to the kneeler. As I got ready to drop to my knees, the pastor of my home church – who also happened to be one of my closest friends and most important mentors – stepped over and taped a small piece of paper to the kneeler. It said, I love you, YHWH (a Hebrew name for God). In his own way and with life-defining clarity, he was telling me exactly what Moses had told the people of Israel: it is God who goes with you. Do not fear; be bold and brave; God will not fail you or forsake you – ever. The God who brought you to it will surely bring you through it. Go in confidence. Go in joy. Go in love.

As we gather here today, the message is still the same as it was when Moses and the people of Israel gathered on the banks of the Jordan River, and the same as it was when I was ordained almost 42 years ago in northern Vermont. It is God who goes with you. With you and with me, even as we go our separate ways. God will not fail us or forsake us. It's a promise that has held true for me all these years. There have been people and institutions that have failed me, and who knows how many I have failed. But God has always been there, steady and sure, trustworthy and true. We may not know where we're going or what its going to be like, what the road will ask of us or where we'll end up, but one thing we can know, beyond the shadow of a doubt, is that God is going ahead of us. This is not a time for fear, but for boldness and for faith. For active listening and attentive watching. God may speak to us through spokespersons and leaders like Moses, through a piece of paper taped six inches from our noses, through the other people we sit beside in the pews on a Sunday morning, through a nudge that pokes us in the ribs and won't let us go until we act on it. We may catch a glimpse of new life, a spark of hope burning against the night, seeds of peace taking root among us, the whiff of hope hovering about the most hopeless of situations. God may ask us to jump into action and take on bold new adventures, or quietly encourage us to take one more step and then wait and see where we step after that. God may call us to speak to a congregation or care for a refugee or hand out food to the hungry or open our door to our neighbor. I don't know the details. What I do know is that God will be with us as the days unfold. It's a promise we can trust, a presence we need to watch for, a voice we must listen for, a love we can build our lives on. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

O Holy and Beloved God, how do we even begin to thank you for the privilege and the joy of journeying together as pastor and people these past eight years? When we have gathered for worship, around the fellowship table and over the coffee pot, you have been among us. When we have served up bowls of chili, carried food to the food bank and welcomed our neighbors in, you have blessed our outreach. When we have celebrated baptisms and laughed at the antics of children, gathered around your table and shared the broken bread and poured out cup, wept at the death of those we loved and come together to remember their lives, you have multiplied our joy and held us in our sorrow. When Covid precautions kept us apart, you knit us together through video worship, shared bread, and Zoom fellowship. You have been present with us beside hospital beds and in surgical waiting rooms, when we've visited in homes and broken bread in restaurants. Every step of the way, through Lenten studies,

rummage sales, Advent candle lighting, Maundy Thursday darkness, clean up days, Winter Walks, nursing home worship, and so much more, you have led us and blessed us, nourished us and encouraged us, and we are deeply grateful.

Now, as we go our separate ways, we seek your continued blessing. Lead us in the ways you would have us go. Awaken our imaginations, that we might dare to envision the new things you are doing in our midst even now. Open our eyes to recognize the role that each of us can play in the days that lie ahead, and set our ears to tingling with the sound of your voice calling our names. Help us to trust you to provide for our needs and to show us the path forward. Hold your light before us that we might see just enough to take the next step and follow you in faith.

Holy One, we bring before you all those who are sick and in need of healing, grieving and in need of comfort, hot and in need of water and cooling shade, hungry and in line for food, flooded and in search of those who have been washed away, homeless in the wake of wildfires and the soaring cost of housing and in need of shelter, ravaged by violence and in need of safety and the promise of peace. Pour out your healing love upon each of them and all of us, that we might know your comforting touch and sustaining presence, gentle strength and compassionate courage, persistent wisdom and unfailing hope.

Hear our prayers, spoken and unspoken. And hear us as we join in the prayer that Jesus taught his friends when they asked him how they should pray: Our Father...

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (depts)

OFFERING

God has shown us the meaning of generosity in the beautiful diversity of creation, in the overflowing love of Jesus Christ, and in the never-ending gift of the Holy Spirit! God has abundantly blessed us and called us to be a community that blesses others through the sharing of our love, our talents, and our material possessions. Let us rejoice in what we have been given and in what is ours to give.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (in unison)

Loving God, through all our years, let the church be a place where we learn about love and practice it, where we envision peace and work to build it, where we meet partners in faith and cherish them, where we discover our gifts and offer them. May your Spirit guide us toward joy and generosity. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. (Glen E. Rainsley, *Hear Our Prayer*)

HYMN "Eat This Bread"

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.

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Words of Invitation

We have met together at countless tables: Fellowship and Chili Suppers, Soup and Pie fundraisers and Christmas dinners; and month after month, we have come together around this table, Christ's table. At this table more than any other, we are invited to come as we are, casual or formal, broken or whole, confident or filled with doubt, wrapped in love or cloaked in fear. Here, Jesus meets us as we are, binds up our wounds, whispers peace to our hearts, feeds our deepest hungers, draws us close and welcomes us home. My friends, come to this sacred table, trusting that our loving God waits for us here.

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.

Holy God, our loving Creator, close to us as breathing and distant as the farthest star, we thank you for your constant love for all you have made. We thank you for all that sustains life, for all people of faith in every generation who have given themselves to your will, and especially for Jesus Christ, whom you have sent from your own being as our Savior. We praise you for Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection, and for the calling forth of your church in its mission in the world. Gifted by the presence of your Holy Spirit, we offer ourselves to you as we unite our voices with the entire family of your faithful people everywhere:

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!

Merciful God, as sisters and brothers in faith, we recall anew these words and acts of Jesus Christ. Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat: This is my body." Jesus took a cup, and after giving thanks, gave it to the disciples and said: "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." We remember Christ's promise not to drink of the fruit of the vine again until the heavenly banquet at the close of history, and we say boldly what we believe:

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Come, Holy Spirit, come. Bless this bread, and bless this fruit of the vine. Bless all of us in our eating and drinking at this table that our eyes may be opened, and we may recognize the risen Christ in our midst, in each other, and in all for whom Christ died. **Amen.** *(New Century Hymnal)*

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)

Lord Jesus Christ, you have put your life into our hands; now we put our lives into yours. Take us, renew and remake us. What we have been is past; what we shall be, through you, still awaits us. Lead us on. Take us with you. Amen.

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

FAREWELL LITURGY

Greeting

Joan: Our church family is constantly changing. People come and go. Babies are born. Children grow up. People commit themselves to one another. Loved ones and friends among us come to the end of their lives. Individuals move into our community and church life. Others leave us, moving away to new places, new experiences, and new opportunities.

It is important and right that we recognize these times of passage, of endings and beginnings. Today we share the time of farewell with a pastor who is retiring.

Ending an Authorized Ministry

Joan: In January, 2014, Alice Ling became this church's Designated Pastor and on December 14, 2014, she was called to serve as Pastor and Teacher.

Alice: I thank the United Church of Christ Congregational, its members and friends, for the love, kindness, and support shown me these last years. I ask forgiveness for the mistakes I have made. I am grateful for the ways my leadership has been accepted. As I leave, I carry with me all that I have learned here.

People: **We receive your thankfulness, offer forgiveness, and accept that you now leave to minister elsewhere. We express our gratitude for your time among us. We ask your forgiveness for our mistakes. Your influence on our faith and faithfulness will not leave us at your departure.**

Alice: I forgive you and accept your gratitude, trusting that our time together and our parting are pleasing to God.

Vows of Release

Mark: (Addressing the Congregation): Do you, the members and friends of the United Church of Christ Congregational release Alice Ling from the duties of Pastor and Teacher?

People: **We do, with the help of God.**

Mark: Do you offer your encouragement for her ministry as it unfolds in new ways?

People: **We do, with the help of God.**

Joan: (Addressing Alice) Do you, Alice, release this local church from turning to you and depending on you?

Alice: I do, with the help of God.

Joan: Do you offer your encouragement for the continued ministry here and on the relationship with another who will come to serve?

Alice: I do, with the help of God.

Mark: On behalf of the Pacific Northwest Conference and the United Church of Christ, I witness to the words spoken: words of thankfulness, forgiveness, and release. The member churches of our conference hold each of you in prayer. We pledge our support in the transition signified in this service.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

Prayer

Joan: Let us pray:

God, whose everlasting love for all is trustworthy, help each of us to trust the future which rests in your care. The time we were together in your name saw our laughter and tears, our hopes and disappointments. Guide us as we hold these cherished memories but move in new directions, until that time to come when we are completely one with you and with each other, in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

(UCC Book of Worship)

HYMN No. 286 *“Blest Be the Tie That Binds”*

Blest be the tie that binds Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds Is like to that above.

When we asunder part, It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart, And hope to meet again.

BENEDICTION

So now we leave this time of worship. And while so much of the road ahead is uncertain, the path constantly changing, we know some things that are as solid and sure as the ground beneath our feet, and the sky above our heads.

We know God is love.

We know Christ's light endures.

We know the Holy Spirit is here, found in the space between all things, closer to us than our next breath, binding us to each other, until we meet we again,

Go in peace. Amen.

(Rev. Nora Vedress, Calvary United Church in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada)