



# First Congregational Church

## Highlights Newsletter

### June 2020

*"Be devoted to each other as members of the same family. Take the initiative in honoring one another. Don't let your enthusiasm fade. Radiate the presence of God's power. Serve our lord. Be joyful in your hope. Be patient in adversity. Be persistent in prayer. Treat the needs of the Christ's people as your own. Take hospitality seriously" - Romans 12:10-13*

Beloved Faith Community,

How is it with your soul?

How is it with the souls of those you care for?

As a church we are continuing to learn and explore how we can care for each other's souls and be sacred community together in these times, with the help of God.

The Apostle Paul's guidance to the Jesus followers in Rome, quoted above, is always good to keep front and center. But it is especially helpful in times of great challenge. As he later writes, "Have no obligation to each other, except to love one another, because the person who loves the other has fulfilled the law ... Love does no wrong to the neighbor. Therefore, love is what fulfills the law (Rom. 13:8&10).

What this love means in practice for us in the midst of this deadly pandemic is that we will not rush back to in-person worship until it is clear that will not risk the spread of this coronavirus.

Some churches have been clamoring to re-open their doors, in the name of "religious freedom." Already, several churches in our country and Canada that re-opened have had to shut down again as Covid-19 runs rampant through their communities of faith. Our church and the United Church of Christ broadly knows that our God does not demand such tragically unnecessary human sacrifice. Rather, God calls us to sacrifice our comfort to care for each other, especially the most vulnerable.

So, as hard as it is to be a part, my friends, we'll need to just settle into this for a while longer.

For that reason, we're offering more opportunities to connect to each other and our faith, in keeping with the best medical advice. Please see the announcements at the end of my letter.

Needs? Ideas? Inspirations? Feedback?

Please let me know!

Wishing you peace & courage, rooted in God's grace,

Pastor Nathaniel

# Worship, Fellowship, Meeting, and Event Access Information



## Drive-by Blessings -Sundays 10:00 am-10:45 am

by the Masked Reverend

This is how it'll work:

I will be outside the parking lot entrance of First Congregational Church of Walla Walla, wearing a face mask.

[You can come by in your car.](#) Please wear face masks, travel only with family, and stay in your cars. As people come by I will offer you a blessing, at a safe social distance. It will be wonderful to see some of you.

Please enter via Alder Street and Marcus and exit via Palouse Street. This will keep a smooth flow East to West through the parking lot.

This idea is in keeping with guidelines from Governor Inslee, and in consultation with medical professionals. We are committed to doing church in a safe and responsible way. We are consulting with medical professionals and abiding by public health guidelines.

Things will not return to normal for a good while yet. Churches pushing to reopen are acting irresponsibly.

Peace

Pastor Nathaniel

## **Virtual Coffee & Prayer Time - Sundays at 11:00 am**

Chat & check in with you church friends. And pray together.

**With computer, smartphone, or tablet**

Go to this link:

<https://zoom.us/j/638358688>

You may be asked for this password: **589720**

**With landline or cellphone**

Dial (253) 215-2782

You may be asked for the meeting ID: **638 358 688** and password: **586720**

## **Weekly worship service videos on YouTube**

Lovingly produced by our worship team

You can access them via the link on our church's website: [www.firstchurchuccww.org](http://www.firstchurchuccww.org)

Or by going to Youtube.com, searching for:

**“First Congregational Church of Walla Walla,” and clicking “Playlists.”**

This link will also get you there: <https://bit.ly/36lN27m>

Please keep sending in photos of yourselves or your gardens or experiences in nature.

We use these for our music montages. It's a way for us everyone to stay connected.

## **Bedtime Prayers -Thursdays at 7:00 pm-7:30pm**

Close the day with a simple and comforting time of prayer with an Open & Affirming community of faith.

Bring a candle to light, if you like and feel free to have a beloved prayer or poem or piece of scripture to share. There will be a time in the service for that.

**With computer, smartphone, or tablet**

Join us via Zoom: <https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/87477496096>

You may be asked for the meeting ID: **874 7749 6096** and password: **699678**

**With landline or cellphone**

Dial (253)-215-8782

## **Sacred Silence Siting Circle-Mondays 12:10 pm-12:45 pm**

Our time of shared time of silent prayer is now online

Practice the ancient art of silent prayer with others from the comfort and safety of your home.

You can sign in or call in via Zoom:

**With computer, smartphone, or tablet**

Go to this link:

<https://zoom.us/j/638358688>

**With landline or cellphone**

Dial (253) 215-8782

You may be asked for the meeting ID: 868 0904 7475

## **New Instagram Account**

Our church is now on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/fccwallawalla/>

Please follow and contribute, if you're into that sort of thing.

Deepest thanks to Izzy Sherwood-Reid for getting this going.





## *Greetings from your Deacons!*

Wherever you are in this life's journey, your deacons wish you well and are concerned for your being. The recent months have been challenging times for so many of us. We are grieving many losses. Coffee with friends, shopping, play dates, volunteering, church, choir, band, school, sports, cinema, dining out, theater, even family visits! These activities are not available for now in our traditional ways.

This might be a wonderful time to reclaim some older traditions such as writing cards or letters, phoning a friend to chat. Also reading those books on your shelves, daily prayer, dancing to your favorite tunes, walking, knitting or crocheting, baking, biking, meditation, gardening or studying could help in soothing a wounded soul.

Perhaps we might appreciate exploring some new options. Seeing friends responding to you in real time such as on Zoom, Facetime or other live options can really help us to feel more connected. Highly recommended! How about Thursday evening Bedtime Prayers on Zoom, a coffee date on Zoom or Facetime with a friend.

Projects may give us purpose such as making face masks for your family or community, begin your Christmas card or craft projects now, create/join an online or Zoom book club or learn something new!

Be sure to nurture your spirit. Be kind to yourself. Be creative! This is a time to reinvent ourselves and our communities in caring and intentional ways. And to be sure, this is a time to reach out. Whether you are wanting some contact with others or wanting to support others. If you are realizing your needs are not being met, do not sit silently. Reach out. We are all in this together. Reach out to friends, family, your pastor, your church community. Reach out to me. Just having contact with a caring soul may help in this journey at this time.

Celebrating the work of the church!

Ladies Lunch Outreach lead by Becky Kirtley and Jan Eyestone

Worship Team of Julie Jones, Jackie Woods, Izzy Sherwood, Eric Weissner and Pastor Nathaniel providing a wonderful Worship service via YouTube video weekly

Drive By Blessing at 10:00 am-10:45 am on Sunday mornings

Sunday Prayer service at 11:00 am

Bedtime Prayers at 7:00 pm on Thursdays

To all of the members, leaders, committees keeping us gathering and doing church on-line and off, in all sorts of new ways, blessings to you all. Keep up the good work!

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Chacon, Chair, Board of Deacons

509-525-6618





## Notes from the Fellowship of the Youth at Home...

I am so grateful for the technology that has allowed us to continue to be connected these days. To be sure, it's a TON of trial and error, but so is life, eh? And especially adolescence! This is one of the main lessons I hope to impart to our beautiful, goofy, mercurial Youth. When we are tempted to judge - ourselves or others, "good people can make mistakes," is the mantra that comes out of my mouth. And when we are bowed for the Children's prayer, "....that we may live and grow ever more fully into who you have created us to be..." that "who" is THE big question of this transitional journey in humanness. Yes, may we all be blessed by the guidance of a still small voice we find in stillness, or a big booming revelation from above. But let us also find the ease to relax into the grace of trial and error.....

On that note, I will share some of the Youth Group successes ~ Bubble Blue Teal Mountain Land Trust Wild and Scenic Film Festival (it's still running a few more weeks if you'd like to check it out -fabulous short documentaries that are provocative, uplifting, and eye-opening). And for Mother's Day, we made Hummingbird Feeders! To go along with our theme of "The Birds and the Bees," and stewardship of God's pollinators.

Last Wednesday, Marelu Greco and I hosted an all-kid story hour. And while not many were in attendance, the time we shared was rich, indeed. When I asked the lesson of the story I read, "I Love You, Stinky Face" one of our intermediate kids nailed it: "no matter who you become and what you do, I will always love you." Then one of our pre-k kids chimed in: "It reminds me of that thing we say in church...No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

Amen.

Margaret Thomas

Mother's Day Hummingbird Feeder  
Jen and Oliver Rickard





# Christian Education



By now, your Pre-K and Primary students should have received homemade cards in the mail. We are trying to assure them that, even if Sunday School classes are not happening, we have not forgotten them and we miss them!

We plan to continue trying to send fun items in the mail to keep the spirit of God alive and give them hope that they will see each other's faces again soon.

Please let Dot know if this is helping spread cheer or if we need to try other ideas by e-mailing her at [dot4willis@gmail.com](mailto:dot4willis@gmail.com). We would appreciate your insight and input!

# N-SID-SEN

Dear Church Campers

Sorry to say that Camp N-Sid-Sen has cancelled the remainder of the 2020 sessions. Hopefully, 2021 will bring a re-opening of the camp. "Fingers crossed and knock on wood".

I'll be in touch with the director of the camp, Mark, and keep you updated!

Be safe and stay well!!

Judy Gibbs

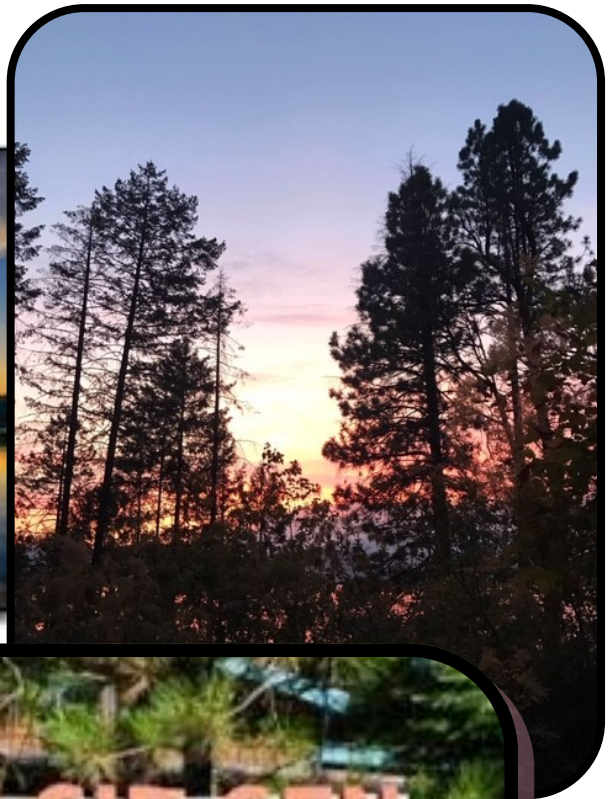
But wait, there are still opportunities to enjoy N-Sid-Sen!

Families and individuals can arrange to stay in the lodgings that have kitchens.

Camp staff is careful with cleaning and rotating so it is safe.

Make arrangements for this Summer or Fall with Mark at

[Mark@n-sid-sen.org](mailto:Mark@n-sid-sen.org) or 208-689-3489





# Phone Tree

## Stay Connected With Each Other

Want to call others in our church community? Want to receive calls?

Becky Kirtley and Jan Eyestone have worked with Pastor Nathaniel and our Church Council to set up people to call each other. If you want to call or receive calls, give us a call!

Becky at 509-301-0583

Or

Contact the Office at 525-8753 {leave a message} or [office@fcchurch.net](mailto:office@fcchurch.net)

Or

Pastor Nathaniel at 608-469-1406 or [pastornathanielmahlberg@gmail.com](mailto:pastornathanielmahlberg@gmail.com)

### WORSHIP SERVICES

– **online videos and call-in video-conference meetings**

Contact Pastor Nathaniel with any questions! You don't need a computer to participate in some of our offerings.

### EVERY SUNDAY

**10:00 am** - Video of the worship service will be available on our [YouTube channel](https://bit.ly/39M7pLa):  
<https://bit.ly/39M7pLa>

**11:00 am** – Prayer and Fellowship meeting

**With computer, smartphone, or tablet**

Go to this link: <https://zoom.us/j/638358688>

You may be asked for this password: 589720

**With landline or cell phone**

Dial **(253) 215-8782**

You may be asked for the meeting ID: 638 358 688  
& the password: 586720

**The connecting info does not change Sunday to Sunday**

# The Lunch Bunch and Wednesday Community Free Lunch



Thank you, First Congregational Church, for supporting our Wednesday Community Free Lunch! We want to let you know what has transpired with the free lunch program since this time of the . Changes took place quite rapidly after we learned of the pandemic. This will be from my memory but I hope fairly accurate.

By the first week in March, we were doing extra sanitizing in the serving area and encouraging more distance between clients. We were also visibly checking for people who were not feeling well, even delivering one of our ill clients to the VA during one lunch. By mid-March we began serving lunches outdoors. This was a brown bag, Grab 'n Go lunch served outdoors in the breezeway. We asked for distancing, provided hand sanitizer or a trip to our restroom, one at a time.

Our number of clients coming for lunches had greatly dwindled, maybe 25 to 35. Christian Aid Center and the Sleep Center had created a stay in place and isolate policy. Perhaps other of our guests were taken in by friends or family. We began serving our clients who came by the church and also lunches for the Sleep Center for a couple of weeks. By April 10<sup>th</sup>, we began taking all of our Grab 'n Go lunches to the Christian Aid Center. Providence Hospital, who had been providing lunches to the CAC, switched to providing the lunches for the Sleep Center. The Walla Walla churches began providing the lunches for CAC residents as well as the community at large. These are served outdoors from the CAC where a handwashing station has been provided by Covid-19 funding. We get the count each week from Christian Aid Center, enough to feed their clients plus anyone else from the community. It is still Grab 'n Go.

In the beginning, we were using a significant amount of free food from the Blue Mountain Food Bank. There was always an abundance of food at our soup lunches. Guests could eat till they were satisfied. Mid-March, Punkey Adams was no longer allowed to go in to the food bank to glean foods as she had been. Jeff Mathias offered to look for things if we had specific requests. Their policies and demands were also changing due to the pandemic. Now, we began buying most all of the foods we needed for our lunches, from our Soup Lunch Funds at FCC. These simple Grab 'n Go lunches are more expensive to create.

We are grateful for Sue Gillespie, who is managing to keep us well stocked with free bread

for the time being, Cheryl Pira for baking cookies or brownies for all of our lunches, Jane Drabek who hard-boiled eggs for a couple of weeks. To everyone who has helped us with lunches or even offered to help, you are so appreciated!

Our lunches currently consist of a tuna salad sandwich (occasionally chicken salad) with lettuce, juice, a fruit or vegetable, a package of chips or crackers and a cookie or brownie in a brown bag with napkin (and spoon, if necessary).

The FULL Soup Lunch Crew, usually 13 or more people each week, REALLY miss working together. Several of our volunteers needed to isolate due to health concerns for themselves or their families. Some have repeatedly offered to help from home. We honor everyone's decision and thank them all for their service to this ministry.

For the time being, we are masked and gloved, working in shifts, in pairs of 2, trying to stay at least 6 feet apart. It takes 3 teams of two people to put out a tuna salad sandwich lunch. Shopping and organizing are done by the leadership team. Patricio Morales delivers to CAC. There are about 9 people currently covering shifts to put lunches together.

To all of you who help with the free lunch: baking, buying, cooking, work assignments, transporting, gleaned foods, donating funds, donating goods, THANK YOU ALL for the important work you do for this community!

Respectfully,  
Judy Chacon, Leadership team of Free Soup Lunch

Soup lunches now are grab and go.  
We only work in twos.  
The camaraderie we miss,  
It's not what we would choose.

We miss the fun we used to have.  
For now we chat on Zoom  
We hope that this pandemic ends, And we're together soon!

~ Linda Schopp



# Reflections ~ Part II

1) Word of the day - How do you spell "comfort food"? In my case, "pounds and inches keep stretching my britches"!

2) If you are sharing your space with someone else, silly arguments. In my case, we argue about who left the car keys in the refrigerator again!

3) Another favorite argument. In my case, "What do you mean that you forgot to get toilet paper when you went to the store"!

4) All the preparations that we go through to get out in public. The biggest challenge is teaching my husband how to highlight his eyes. With most of our faces covered, we rely on our eyes to communicate what we are saying because we don't understand what others are saying through their masks!

5) Still trying to "sleep like a baby". But unlike a baby, I get up to go to the bathroom too many times!

6) I'm increasing my vocabulary and honing my spelling skills. My husband is really into crossword puzzles and asking, "What actor's name ends with a 'p'." "Or, what does a golf ball do on a golf course that ends with a 'g'?"!

7) Which reminds me, early on in this "new normal" life, my husband was able to find puzzles to work on. It kept him busy and increased his focus, both good things, however his hand-eye coordination suffered and he is now wearing a brace on his hand!

8) It is wonderful that we now have the time to "smell the roses", but I find myself counting all the holes in the leaves of my plants left by grubs and/or slugs.!

9) Then there is the "snuggling with your loved ones", which is a good thing. But, I have come to realize that our poodle, Charlie, really needs some breath mints. And, furthermore, I need to learn to cook without garlic!

10) Further thoughts on 1). I am noticing that my face is getting thinner and I am redistributing my weight through **exercise!!!!**

Take care out there dear friends,  
Judy Gibbs



# *Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice!*



*Introducing Lauren Marie McClure*



*May 11th, 2020*

Congratulations to parents Nathan & Liz McClure

Local Grandparents Dan & Sarah McClure

&

Great - Grandmother Barbara Stanford



Lauren, brand new in this world



Lauren's first car ride adventure

“She is a joy to behold, we feel truly blessed to welcome her into our family, the church family and greater the communities of life. “

~McClure Family



# Altar flowers in honor of Lauren Marie McClure



## June 2020



### Trustees Meeting

Wednesday, June 10th, 6:00 pm

### Council Meeting

Sunday, June 21st, 11:30 am

### Deacons Meeting

Wednesday, June 10th, 6:30 pm



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

### VOUCHERS

Please have your vouchers turned in by the dates indicated above.

Thanks!

## Newsletter Deadline

Tuesday, June 23rd

Please have your  
submissions in by  
then.



### Three Little Limericks

~ Linda Schopp

1. This Covid-19 is a pain.  
It's starting to mess with the brain!  
and staying inside  
we just can't abide.  
We think we are going insane!
2. Social distance is what we must do.  
Wash your hands and wear a mask, too.  
In fact stay inside  
for many have died.  
If we don't our behavior we'll rue.
3. The church has been closed for so long,  
but the sermon, and scripture and song  
Has kept us connected  
(no flaws were detected).  
To open too soon would be wrong.



# Free Thornless Raspberry Starts

Gwyn Frasco has thornless raspberry starts for anyone who may be interested. Several church members have planted her starts and have had good luck growing them. In a very few years, you will have delicious fruit without pricking your fingers! Interested parties should call Gwyn at 525-8383 for more information.



**“From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know:**

**That we are here for the sake of each other –above all for those upon whose smile and well-being our own happiness depends, and also for the countless unknown souls with whose fate we are connected by a bond of sympathy.**

**Many times a day I realize how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of my fellow men (and women), both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received.”**

**~ Albert Einstein**





In order to protect the privacy of our members and friends, we do not display personal information in the web version



## First Congregational Church United Church of Christ

### Ministerial Leadership

Minister Rev. Nathaniel Mahlberg

### 2020 Church Officers

Moderator	J. R. Van Slyke
Vice Moderator	Jennifer Rickard
Clerk	Larry Frank
Treasurer	Kim Croft
Financial Sec.	Bernie Newman
Asst. Fin. Sec.	Jonathan Webster
Head Usher	Galen Unruh
Diaconate	Judy Chacon
Christian Ed	Dot Willis
Trustees	Dana Taggart
Mission/Social Concern	Heidi McFarley
Music	Open
... and Affirming	Open

### Staff

Admin. Asst.	Gayle Kubrock
Bookkeeper	Kim Croft
Youth Leader	Margaret Thomas
Custodian	Art Davila
Pianist	Jackie Wood
Choir Director	Julie Jones
Webmaster	Izzy Sherwood-Reid

### Church Office Hours

Monday- Friday  
9 am - 2 pm

### Pastoral Assistance

Church Office 525-8753  
Rev. Nathaniel Mahlberg  
(608) 469-1406

You can read Pastor Nathaniel' s sermons in his online blog at:  
<https://thedandelionwayblog.wordpress.com>  
Or hear them on our website at:  
[www.firstchurchuccww.org](http://www.firstchurchuccww.org).

*We celebrate our diversity as an expression of God's Creative love. We welcome persons of all age, race, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, and physical and mental ability.*

# Worship Services

May 3rd - May 31st



May 3, 2020

## “Facing and Embracing Our Shadows with Grace”

### WELCOME

We welcome you in peace.

May you enter this place knowing God has made you good and worthy of love.

May you feel safe to bring your light and your love and your messiness.

Use them to bless our sacred gathering.

May you in turn be blessed here in the presence of the Holy One our God.

### STATEMENT OF IDENTITY

We are a congregation of diverse Christian believers empowered by love and guided by the Holy Spirit.

It is our mission to enable personal Spiritual growth, collective outreach to the community and stewardship of God’s creation.

We are an open and affirming church.

Because of who you and where you are on life's journey,

You are welcome here.

### READING FROM HEBREW SCRIPTURE      Psalm 139: 1-14

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up;

you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down,

and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue,

O Lord, you know it completely.

You hem me in, behind and before,

and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning

and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me fast.

If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,

and the light around me become night,”

even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is as bright as the day,

for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;

you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works;

## READINGS FROM THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

### **Gospel of Thomas 70**

Jesus said, "When you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not find that within you, it will destroy you."

### **Gospel of Thomas 79**

His disciples said, "When will you appear to us? When will we see you?"

Jesus said, "When you strip naked without being ashamed, and take up your clothes and put them under your feet like little children and trample on them. Then you will see the Child of the Living One and you will not be afraid."

### **Matthew 7:1-5**

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."

## **SERMON "Facing and embracing Our Shadows with Grace"**

Now that I've been spending a whole lot of time at home, I have two observations about our cat, Chestnut, which I feel are important to share with you. In times like these, we need to talk about our cats.

Chestnut is a sweetheart, by the way, so this is all said with love.

The first observation is that it seems like even our cat has been stress eating these days. She's just been really tucking into that kibble and filling out.

The second observation is that Chestnut, bless her heart, still sometimes spooks at her own shadow. It happens less than when she was a kitten. But it can still happen, especially when she's gotten really worked up and is on edge and she turns around and "Boo!" there's that shadow, and she's springing back like the devil's on her tail.

I wonder how much a lot of us can relate to Chestnut these days.

You know, when we were all stuck at home more, and we may be more often worked up and on edge 'cause of the stress in the air and grief and fear and uncertainty, juggling work and child-care or dealing with unemployment not to mention illness and distressing news, and isolation - a lot of us are having to face our shadows more - whether we're facing that fact or not, you know what I mean?

An elder colleague of mine recently said that in their experience, whenever there's been a large group trauma you can expect that whatever your issue is, whatever your personal challenge,



the "thorn in your side" as the Apostle Paul put it, it's likely that the volume is going to get turned up on it.

So, we're needing a lot of grace for ourselves, and for each other - and we're needing especially to be spending regular time basking in the Source of that grace, which is God.

We need God's help to Face and Embrace Our Shadows with Grace

I'm using this image of "The Shadow." I like this image because this is about those parts of ourselves that we'd rather not look at, those parts of ourselves we may want to pretend aren't there - whether it's because of shame or guilt or pride or distaste - our own judgment, other people's judgment - whatever.

But however much we may look the other way and wish that stuff isn't there, however much we try to keep it off camera or put makeup on it - it's with us, it's a part of ourselves - it goes wherever we go, like our shadows dragging behind us.

If we catch sight of it, all of a sudden, that can really give us a scare, right?

Or it can make us mad and ready to attack or defend. Think of a cat spooking at her shadow. Her claws are out.

Often times we catch sight of our shadow because we see somebody else seeing it in us. You know the experience I'm talking about? It can be really uncomfortable. When you realize that someone is seeing part of yourself that you wish wasn't there. Our weakness or our meanness or what have you.

Often times it's the people closest to us who see our shadows clearest.

Or people we've hurt because of our blind spots or because we meant to hurt them in the moment. It can also sometimes be our enemies who see our shadows clearest. Now *that* can *really* drive us nuts, right?

So what do we do when we see someone seeing what we don't like about ourselves? We could claw their eyes out. Or we could run away, if flight is more your style than fight. Either way, our reaction is to try to get rid of the mirror that's reflecting our shadow.

We can go to great lengths to avoid seeing our shadows. We can get really clever about it, or really mean, or really intoxicated, or really into eating cat food, if you're a cat.

Even just hearing me talk about this may be making you uncomfortable, because it's calling to your awareness something that's hard to admit about yourself. You may be tempted to just turn this video off. Or go at me for spouting a bunch of mumbo jumbo.

So, why?

What are we defending against? What are we attacking, exactly? Who is it, *what* is it, that we're actually defending? Why can it feel so unbearable to face the shadows of ourselves?

Jesus, in what he taught and what he embodied, was all about *radical* honesty with ourselves and before God – about facing and embracing our shadows, with grace.

This has everything to do with what Jesus was revealing about who we truly are and who God truly is.

We are simply and humbly and exquisitely children of a living and loving God, who is present with us, among us, beyond us in a clear and powerful way

If only we get out of the way and allow God to embrace *all* of us, not only our Sunday best.

The problem we make for ourselves is that we make ourselves out to be different than we actually are, we construct a false sense of self out of how we compare ourselves to others, make judgments, tell these stories that involve competition, envy, rivalry, where we end up convinced that we're better than other people or convinced that we're worse than other people.

Either way, we are pushing parts of ourselves into the shadows. And either way we are acting out of a deep fear that simply, honestly who we are is not good enough.

This is why Jesus said, "Judge not lest ye be judged."

This is why he called out religious hypocrisy that's obsessed with other people's sins while denying our own, hating in other people what is actually true about ourselves.\*

This is why Jesus drew out the poison of hate and fear that rose up to crucify him, and revealed the lengths humanity can go to deny the simple goodness and vulnerability and strength and love at the heart of each of us.

This is what Jesus was teaching in the story of the Prodigal Son, taking that risk to turn from our petty obsessions and return, as we are, to the welcoming embrace of our Creator.

This is what Jesus taught his disciples in the Gospel of Thomas:

"When you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not find that within you, it will destroy you." - Gospel of Thomas 70

And:

"When you strip naked without being ashamed, and take up your clothes and put them under your feet like little children and trample on them. Then you will see the Child of the Living One and you will not be afraid." - Gospel of Thomas 37

As we hear in Psalm 139

"Even the darkness is not dark" in God's luminous embrace

"the night is as bright as the day,

for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

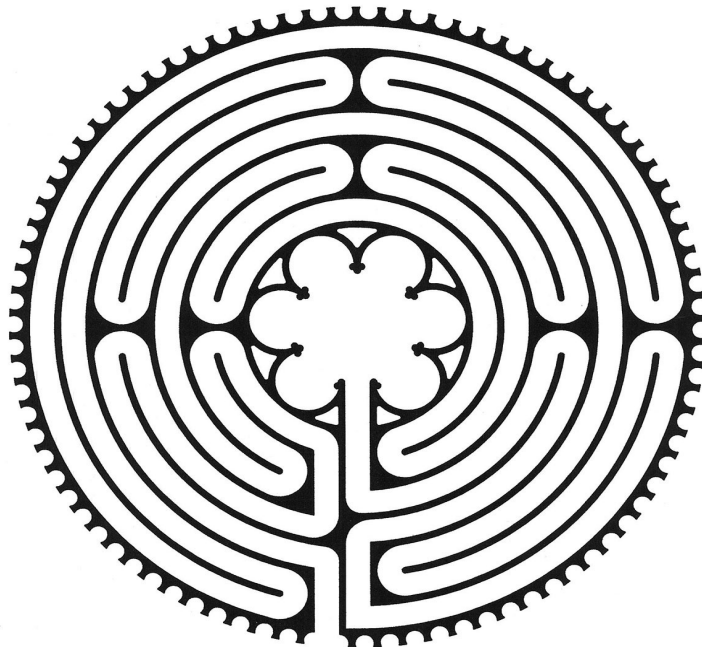
Wonderful are your works;

that I know very well."

For this I give deepest thanks.

## **BENEDICTION**

May the blessing of light be on you - light without and light within. May the blessed sunlight shine on you like a great peat fire, so that stranger and friend may come and warm themselves at it. And may light shine out of the two eyes of you, like a candle set in the window of a house, bidding the wanderer come in out of the storm. And may the blessing of the rain be on you, may it beat upon your Spirit and wash it fair and clean, and leave there a shining pool where the blue of Heaven shines, and sometimes a star. And may the blessing of the earth be on you, soft under your feet as you pass along the roads, soft under you as you lie out on it, tired at the end of day And now may the Lord bless you, and bless you kindly. Amen. -Scottish Blessing



**May 10th, 2020**

**“The Motherhood of God – Connection, Comfort, Challenge, Wisdom”**

### **OPENING PRAYER**

However it may be with your soul my you feel comfortable and safe to bring it before God, to be embrace and transformed. O Holy One our God Stir us Awake Stir us awake to your presence here within us, among us, between us, connecting us across space, and your Presence beyond us, drawing us beyond ourselves, beyond the limitations of our concerns, beyond our expectations of what we think is possible. Lift our eyes to to what Hope speaks in our hearts, so that we may be as beyond ourselves, beyond the limitations of our concerns, beyond our expectations of what we think is possible. Lift our eyes to to what Hope speaks in our hearts, so that we may be as we are before You, fully present, fully embrace, ready to be led in Jesus' Way of healing and peace. We pray in Your many holy names, and especially in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **WELCOME**

We welcome you in peace.  
May you enter this place knowing God has made you good and worthy of love.  
May you feel safe to bring your light and your love and your messiness.  
Use them to bless our sacred gathering.  
May you in turn be blessed here in the presence of the Holy One our God.

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You are welcome here.

### **READING      Acts 2:43-47 The Message Translation**

Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.

### **SERMON      “The Motherhood of God – Connection, Comfort, Challenge, Wisdom”**



A few months ago, one of our many awesome kids who go to Sunday school came up to me and said, "You told us we can ask you questions. So, can I ask you a question?"

"Of course," I said.

"My mom told me that God is beyond gender. But in that prayer you pray, you say 'Our Father and Mother.'"

So here she's saying to herself, "People in church are calling God 'Father and Mother.' But mom told me God is beyond gender. What's with that?"

I love it!

Because I've had a couple of people – adults – come up to me after church to say, "The way you add 'Mother' to the Lord's prayer, what's with that? That isn't right. That's not in the Bible. It's God the Father period."

I love that the controversy for this kid was with putting a gender on God at all.

I think we're doing good work, everybody. And good job mom!

What I told her is that, first, yes, she's right – and her mom's right.

God is not some guy with a beard on a throne in the sky. Or a woman with on a throne in the sky, with a beard or not.

God doesn't have a gender. God is infinite. God is eternal. God is the source of everything that is, and beyond all that.

Most living things don't have a biological sexes. Bacteria far, far outweigh humans. They don't have sexes or genders. Earthworms are hermaphrodites, there are more than 10 times more earthworms than humans by weight. God created them too.

Stars ... blackholes ... gender does not apply.

Gender does not apply to God's nature. Wrong category

*And ...*

God is not *only* some amazing powerful eternal spirit way off in the cosmos,

God comes to us so we can have a relationship with God.

God comes to us in ways that we can understand.

That can feel to us to be like a mother, who gives birth to us, who nurses us and nurtures us.

And that can feel to us to be like a father, who supports us, and guides us, and protects us. Or

God can feel to us to be like a teacher or a leader, like Jesus.

How we imagine God is very important, because it can shape how open we are to experiencing what God has to offer us, it can direct us and limit us, shape what we value and who we value.

We do need to have some images and words for God, to help us grow and evolve in knowledge of God and of ourselves. But clinging to them too tightly turn into idolatry.

For Mother's day I want to lift up those images of God as a strong female figure.

The Bible mostly presents God in masculine terms. Although there are lots and lots of images for God that are from the natural world, and poetry that takes us way past the bounds of the human realms.

And, in the Bible are some powerful times when The Divine speaks with a female voice.

These moments in scripture are particularly powerful in how they express Connection, Comfort, Challenge, and Wisdom. It is with a female voice perhaps that we best experience how God finds connections with us, how God comforts us, how God challenges us. We have a deep, deep need for all that these days.

In the book of Isaiah God speaks with a mother's voice saying,

"As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." – Isaiah 66:13

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?

Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you." – Isaiah 49:15

These are good words of connection and comfort. As we hear in Psalm 131: "I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me."

Yet there are also words of fiery challenge.

In the Book of Proverbs the Wisdom of God is a female character. Wisdom, Chokhmah, was the first of God's creation, we hear. And it was only with her, only through Wisdom that God is able to create everything else. She pervades the universe as the fundamental order of creation. And when she speaks to us, it's heard as a powerful female voice, challenging us to live in a wise and prudent way.

And later:

"Lady Wisdom goes out in the street and shouts.

At the town center she makes her speech.

In the middle of the traffic she takes her stand.

At the busiest corner she calls out:

"Simpletons! How long will you wallow in ignorance?

Cynics! How long will you feed your cynicism?

Idiots! How long will you refuse to learn?

About face! I can revise your life.

Look, I'm ready to pour out my spirit on you;

I'm ready to tell you all I know.

As it is, I've called, but you've turned a deaf ear;

I've reached out to you, but you've ignored me.

"Because you hated Knowledge

and had nothing to do with the Reverence for God,

Because you wouldn't take my advice

and brushed aside all my offers to train you,  
Well, you've made your bed—now lie in it;  
you wanted your own way—now, how do you like it?  
Don't you see what happens, you simpletons, you idiots?  
Carelessness kills; complacency is murder.  
First pay attention to me, and then relax.  
Now you can take it easy—you're in good hands." – Proverbs 1: 20-33

*Carelessness kills; complacency is murder.*

I dare say in the midst of the crisis we're in, we need to hear and to heed what we hear in these feminine divine voice from scripture. Connection & comfort & challenge & wisdom.

*Carelessness kills; complacency is murder*

We need a renewal of the Spirit that cares for and shares with and seeks the uplift of all humanity,

We need the same Spirit that was at work in the followers of Jesus who scripture says, "lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met." – Acts 2:44-45

Let me end with some words of wisdom learned from a close study of the order of nature, formed by Wisdom. This is from the biologist and writer Robin Wall Kimmerer, about different organisms who form close symbiotic partnerships with each other:

"When times are easy and there's plenty to go around, individual species can go it alone. But when conditions are harsh and life is tenuous, it takes a team sworn to reciprocity to keep life going forward. In a world of scarcity, interconnection and mutual aid become critical for survival." – from *Braiding Sweetgrass*, pg. 272

So I wish you all connection with God's wisdom at this time – connection, and the comfort and challenge that comes with it.

God bless you.

And thanks be to God.

### **A Litany for Mothers**

To those who gave birth this year to their first child—we celebrate with you

To those who lost a child this year—we mourn with you

To those who are in the trenches with little ones every day and wear the badge of food stains—we appreciate you

To those who experienced loss this year through miscarriage, failed adoptions, or running away—we mourn with you

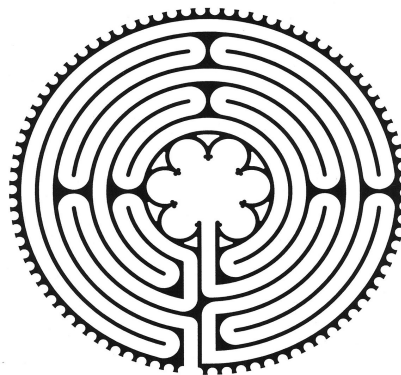
To those who walk the hard path of infertility, fraught with pokes, prods, tears, and disappointment—we walk with you. Forgive us when we say foolish things. We don't mean to make this harder than it is.

To those who are foster moms, mentor moms, and spiritual moms—we need you  
To those who have warm and close relationships with your children—we celebrate with you  
To those who have disappointment, heart ache, and distance with your children—we sit with you  
To those who lost their mothers this year—we grieve with you  
To those who experienced abuse at the hands of your own mother—we acknowledge your experience  
To those who lived through driving tests, medical tests, and the overall testing of motherhood—we are better for having you in our midst  
To those who will have emptier nests in the upcoming year—we grieve and rejoice with you  
And to those who are pregnant with new life, both expected and surprising—we anticipate with you  
This Mother's Day, we walk with you. Mothering is not for the faint of heart and we have real warriors in our midst. We remember you.

— written by Amy Young

**BENEDICTION**     by William Sloane Coffin

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May God's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May God give you the grace never to sell yourself short; grace to risk something big for something good; grace to remember that the world is too dangerous for anything but truth and too small for anything but love. So, may God take your minds and think through them; may God take your lips and speak through them; may God take your hearts and set them on fire.





**May 17th, 2020**

**“Sandhill Cranes, Pandemic Despair, & the View from Eternity”**

### **OPENING PRAYER**

O Holy One our God Stir us awake. You are the Eternal Spirit in which we all live and move and have our being. Help us awaken to your presence here, within us, among us, connecting us one to the other, and always ever beyond us. Move within us in this sacred time so we may be transformed more deeply into who it is you have created us to be. We pray this in Your many holy names, especially the name of Jesus. Amen

### **WELCOME**

We welcome you in peace.  
May you enter this place knowing God has made you  
good and worthy of love.  
May you feel safe to bring your light and your love and  
your messiness. Use them to bless our sacred gathering.  
May you in turn be blessed here in the presence of the  
Holy One our God

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church. Because of who you and where you are on life's  
journey, you are welcome here.

We have two readings this Sunday, one is a poem by Robert Lax, the other is Psalm 65 from the Hebrew Scriptures. May our hearts be open to receive what the Spirit is speaking through these words.

**A POEM FROM "CIRCUS DAYS AND NIGHTS"**

By Robert Lax

In the beginning (in the beginning of time to say  
The least) there were the compasses: whirling in  
Void their feet traced out beginnings and endings,  
Beginning and end in a single line. Wisdom danced  
Also in circles, for these were her kingdom: the sun  
Spun, worlds whirled, the seasons came round, and  
All things went their round: but in the beginning,  
Beginning and end where in one.  
And in the beginning was love. Love made a sphere:  
All things grew within it; the sphere then encompassed  
Beginnings and endings, beginning and end. Love  
Had a compass whose whirling dance traced out a  
Sphere of love in the void: in the center thereof  
Rose a fountain.

**PSALM 65**      *A Version for the New Zealand Book of Prayer*

Praise is your due O God in the holy city;  
promises made to you shall be fulfilled;  
You answer prayer  
You accept all who come to you.  
Sin would overwhelm us, but you wash it away.  
Blest is anyone you choose to live with you;  
your house is an inspiration, a hallowed place.  
You spread your justice, God our Savior,  
across the world to the farthest oceans.  
You have laid down the mountain ranges and set them fast;  
you make the seas calm and the sounds peaceful;  
you reconcile the peoples who dwell here.  
So in this corner of the earth we wonder at your deeds;  
at the meeting of east and west we sing your praise.  
You water the land and make it flourish,  
from your own bursting river.  
To provide our crops, you plough and irrigate the land,  
softening it with rain to make it fruitful;  
a record harvest is achieved, and the stores are overflowing.  
The tussock land becomes pasture  
and the brown hills turn green;  
the paddocks are crowded with sheep  
and the plains thick with wheat:  
the world itself a canticle of praise.

## **SERMON      "Sandhill Cranes, Pandemic Despair, & the View from Eternity"**

We have to be honest that it's not like things are okay these days. That's not the end of the story, of course, and as people of faith, we have hope that in God's hands good can come of this, but we're sure in the middle of it right now, and there is real struggle and real pain for many.

A few weeks ago, I'll be honest, I was despairing.

The count of people we've lost was really mounting, as predicted and feared – and it's far worse now, of course. So I was feeling the grief of that, as I feel it now. And feeling the pain of knowing that people can't come together to grieve their dearly departed.

Also, as predicted and feared, it became clear at that point a few weeks ago that the people hardest hit by this pandemic are the people who are hardest hit in our society when there isn't a pandemic. The folks working at the Tyson plant, mostly immigrants, where infection is high – this is our local example of the national trend.

And on top of all that key leaders with massive amounts of power, also predictably, were not stepping up and demonstrating the virtues of sound leadership. But rather continued to lie and blame and dismiss and threaten and throw people under the bus at a time when there is way too much at stake for persistent duplicity and pettiness.

And as much as I have really relished the sense that we're all in this together, it was a couple weeks ago that I really let myself feel my disappointment and anger that, apparently, a lot of our fellow citizens, and indeed pastors and leaders of some other churches in our country, refuse to be even inconvenienced for the public good.

All that grief and outrage and helplessness was just welling up inside of me.

You know what I'm talking about. I wouldn't be bothering to talk about myself if I didn't know that you know what I'm talking about. We're all feeling it if we at all care.

And I know God joins us in this. Jesus wept when Lazarus died. Jesus cried over Jerusalem because it did not know the ways of peace.

I was in our back yard – it was beautiful day – but here I was brooding and moody.

When suddenly a sound caught my attention.

At first, I couldn't place it, it was like something half-remembered. The sound was like a primitive reedy baritone woodwind belting out these gravelly purrs. It made me think of smooth river stones and reeds along the marshes.

Cranes! Sandhill Cranes! Their calls were raining down from the sky.

I look up and at first, I can't find them. When I do spot the dozen or so cranes flying in a V, I'm surprised by how high they are, for how near their calls sound.

They're flying north. Likely to settle for the spring in the wetlands north of the bend of the Columbia River.

I remembered that these are likely the same crane families that I would see when I lived in New Mexico, years ago. They winter along the Rio Grande near Socorro. Eastern Washington is on their migratory route. Cranes are ancient birds. They've been adapting their cycles of migration through millions of years of changes, over mountains as high as the Himalayas, through ice ages and tectonic shifts.

Among many cultures across the world, Cranes have been seen to be messengers between heaven and earth. This is how they felt to me that day. Cranes have also been seen to be symbols of faithfulness. They mate for life. And they take care of their flock. Individual cranes take turns keeping watch over their flocks when they graze. They are faithful to their entire community.

As I stood there and watched and listened as they flew on, I awoke to the truth that's expressed in a saying among the Diné or Navajo people: "Sometimes I go about feeling pitiful. And all the while I'm being carried on great winds across the sky."

When I have the honor of presiding at the graveside when some dear person in our community has reached the end of their earthly days, I always like to include in the liturgy, part of Psalm 90

<sup>1</sup> Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
in all generations.

<sup>2</sup> Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

<sup>3</sup> You turn us back to dust,  
and say, "Turn back, you mortals."

<sup>4</sup> For a thousand years in your sight  
are like yesterday when it is past,  
or like a watch in the night.

<sup>5</sup> You sweep them away; they are like a dream,  
like grass that is renewed in the morning;

<sup>6</sup> in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;  
in the evening it fades and withers.

So teach us to count our days  
that we may gain a wise heart



My friends, we are in the midst of times of great upheaval, of tremendous loss, of tremendous uncertainty. This is nothing new. We can be honest about it. We don't need to deny or dismiss or succumb to delusion. We can keep our hearts open to the struggles of our present reality.

And, if we lift our gaze just a little, we can maybe glimpse a bit of that View of Eternity, a glimmer of God's eye's view of things. There are ancient cycles turning today, as they've turned in the past, cycles of death and rebirth, of loss and renewal. Civilizations, species, have come and gone as the earth wheels around the sun.

And through the changes, our ancient faith sings of the faithfulness of our Creator. God's Covenant has held through war and famine and exile. The Covenant that God will provide new life and new horizons of possibility for those who commit to the Laws of Life and Faith and Justice.

So we hear from Robert Lax, a Christian poet:

"in the beginning,  
Beginning and end where in one.  
And in the beginning was love. Love made a sphere:  
All things grew within it; the sphere then encompassed  
Beginnings and endings, beginning and end. Love  
Had a compass whose whirling dance tranced out a  
Sphere of love in the void: in the center thereof  
Rose a fountain."

So we hear also from Psalm 65:

"You spread your justice, God our Savior,  
across the world to the farthest oceans.  
You have laid down the mountain ranges and set them fast;  
you make the seas calm and the sounds peaceful;  
you reconcile the peoples who dwell here.  
So in this corner of the earth we wonder at your deeds;  
at the meeting of east and west we sing your praise.  
You water the land and make it flourish,  
from your own bursting river.  
To provide our crops, you plough and irrigate the land,  
softening it with rain to make it fruitful."

So, my friends, let's be real about the grief and struggles and the injustices of our time, while keeping our gazes lifted, so we may keep the faith, and keep the old covenant with our God and with each other, to be caring for the most vulnerable, to be living with courage, mercy, prudence, and wisdom.

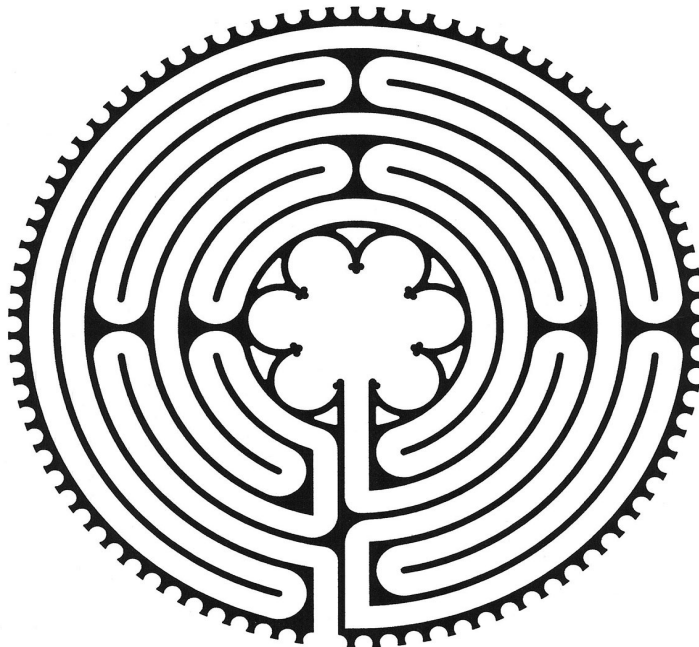
This Sunday, to help us lift our gaze to the wider cycles of life lived in covenant with our Creator, we are especially blessed to have in our worship service, a visual tone poem, a work of art by Melissa Webster, a dear member of our community of faith. She's curated this cycle of images from her woodcut prints and photography. Jackie Wood provides a meditative musical accompaniment.

We offer that now to you.

For all of this, and for our glimpses into the View of Eternity, I give thanks to God.

### **BENEDICTION**

Deep peace of the running wave to you Deep peace of the flowing air to you Deep peace of the quiet earth to you Deep peace of the shining stars to you Deep peace of the gentle night to you Moon and stars pour their healing light on you. Deep peace of Christ, Of Christ the light of the world to you. Amen.



**May 24th, 2020**

**“We Will Not Commit Human Sacrifice in the Name of Religious Freedom”**

## **WELCOME**

We welcome you in peace. May you enter this place knowing God has made you good and worthy of love. May you feel safe to bring your light and your love and your messiness. Use them to bless our sacred gathering. May you in turn be blessed here in the presence of the Holy One our God.

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## **READING FROM SCRIPTURE**      Romans 12:9-13 & 13:8-14

Make sure that your love is without pretense. Abhor what is evil. Stick closely to what is good. Be devoted to one another as members of the same family. Take the initiative in honoring one another. Don't let your enthusiasm fade. Radiate the presence of God's power. Serve our lord. Be joyful in your hope. Be patient in adversity. Be persistent in prayer. Treat the needs of the Anointed One's people as your own. Take hospitality seriously...

You have no obligation to each other, except to love one another, because the person who loves the other has fulfilled the (Mosaic) law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery, do not commit murder, do not steal, do not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this single sentence: "You must love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to the neighbor. Therefore, love is what fulfills the law.

## **SERMON**      “We Will Not Commit Human Sacrifice in the Name of Religious Freedom”

When I was growing up kids would do this thing where they'd be mean to somebody, try to push 'em around or get a rise out them. And then if the other kid stood up for themselves and told them to cut it out, the bully would act all offended and say, "What?! It's a *free* country!"

“It's a *free* country!”

Did kids say that when you were growing up? Do they still say it? I'd be surprised if they don't, because plenty of adults do, in as many words.

“It's a free country! You can't tell me not to do what I want to do.”

Kids are little philosophers, and little lawyers. And I remember thinking about this and arguing about this with my friends, and with my enemies – “Yeah, it's a free country, but you still can't treat people however you want. And when you do, they are free to tell you to cut it out and back off.”

That made an impression on me, it was an early lesson in how people can twist the idea of freedom to justify their bad behavior, and in fact justify behavior that deprives *other* people of *their* life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

The worst examples of this have been people who literally enslave other people who then complain about their freedoms being taken away when someone tells them they need to *stop* enslaving people. I mean, really!? Freedom means the freedom to steal other people's freedom!? That's not about freedom, that's about power. You just want to keep your power.

That's the most extreme example of this kind of hypocrisy, this kind of cynical twisting of the idea of freedom to diabolical ends. But there are a lot of small daily ways most of us do this.

It's called being self-absorbed.

Sin has a subtle influence on us in making us feel offended when someone else's needs get in the way of our own feeling that we're entitled to do whatever it is we feel like doing regardless of how it impacts other people.

You see, absolute freedom is *not* the highest good. As Christians, especially, that should be clear to us. Because as Christians we take seriously that we have sin in our nature, as well as we have the image of God in our nature. Left to our own devices, if we are truly free to do whatever we feel like doing, whenever we feel like doing it, other people be damned, well, that's what happens, you got hell on earth, you got a whole lot of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And that damns you too. "Freedom" ends up looking a lot like being chained to a merry-go-round of vicious cycles of desire, violence, retribution.

We *need* ethical boundaries. True freedom is the free play *within* ethical boundaries.

Now, as Christians we know that our salvation doesn't depend on how perfectly we keep within the boundaries. We are not saved by our good behavior. Salvation is a free gift of Grace manifest through Christ.

We are free to receive or reject or reject this gift.

The test of our freedom is what we choose to say "Yes" to and what we chose to say "No" to.

As the Apostle Paul makes very clear, the fact that salvation is a free gift of God does *not* mean that we should just run around doing whatever we want, knowing that at the end of the day we can just run back to God and get forgiven for it all. (Galatians 5:13-14)

This is called "cheap grace."

That misses the whole point. The deeper we get to know God's Grace, the more our entire being becomes reformed in that image of God within us, the more we become agents of that grace, witnessing and honoring that image of God within each person. We naturally grow little more merciful, a little more humble, a little more tough and courageous as agents of God's loving kindness. It turns out, that does lead to better behavior.

"You have no obligation to each other, except to love one another, because the person who loves the other has fulfilled the Law... Love does no wrong to the neighbor. Therefore, love is what fulfills the Law." – Romans 13:8,14



Living in that love is the greatest feeling of freedom. We are freed from the biting limitations of a petty little sense of self.

This is why, in the United Church of Christ we talk about "Freedom *with Responsibility*." And I should remind us that the United Church of Christ has deep, strong, and scarred American roots, in as much as an immigrant church can. Our ancestor church communities helped to shape the very ideas of freedom in our country. This is hard won wisdom about freedom, and a strongly Christian ethic: "Freedom *with responsibility*."

This is why our churches, along with the vast majority of churches in our country, are *not* joining the mad clamor to reopen in the name of "religious freedom" in the middle of a pandemic that has claimed almost 100,000 lives so far in our country, and is now the leading cause of death.

This is an irresponsible abuse of the idea of freedom.

We *know* that gathering in large groups inside and breathing the same air for a long time and doing a lot of singing and talking and touching stuff is a great way to spread this respiratory virus.

Already several churches who have triumphantly reopened have quickly reclosed because the virus ripped through their people. Predictably.

Our God does not demand human sacrifice.

That's idolatry, cut and dry.

I'm not going to sacrifice anyone on this altar.

And to tell other pastors that *you* shouldn't either - sorry, that's not oppressing your religious freedom to be reckless with the lives you are supposed to be caring for.

The Prophet Isaiah, The Prophet Amos, tell us that God *despises* the sounds of our worship if we are not practicing justice (Isaiah 1:12-17, Amos 5:21-24).

Our worship is *empty* if we are not caring for the people that the Prophets and Jesus are unrelenting in telling us that we need to care for:

Those who are most vulnerable, those who are sick, those who are elders, those who are poor, those who are on the margins. These are the dear, precious souls who are the majority of those 100,000 dead in our country.

And these are not *those* people over there, this is *us*. If we ourselves are not vulnerable, we know and care for people who are. And, we may actually be more vulnerable than we think.

That's what these churches are learning the hard way when Covid-19 tears through their communities. Oh, this *is* a bad thing. We *don't* want this to happen. We need to keep responsible boundaries.

Our God does not demand human sacrifice.

What our God demands is that we bear our crosses.

When we *truly* live out the heart of our faith, there will be hardship.

But there is more than that: tremendous Grace and love and, indeed, true freedom.

Most people get this. The most extreme and deluded voices should not dominate our attention.

I am so inspired by how strong and caring and creative and hopeful and open and tough

you all in our church community have been through this.

We'll get through this together.

We *are* getting through this together. But we aren't through it yet.

The church has survived and *thrived* through much, much worse.

So let's keep on keeping the faith, my friends.

God is on the move with you and within you. God is on the move among us and beyond us.

For that I am so grateful.

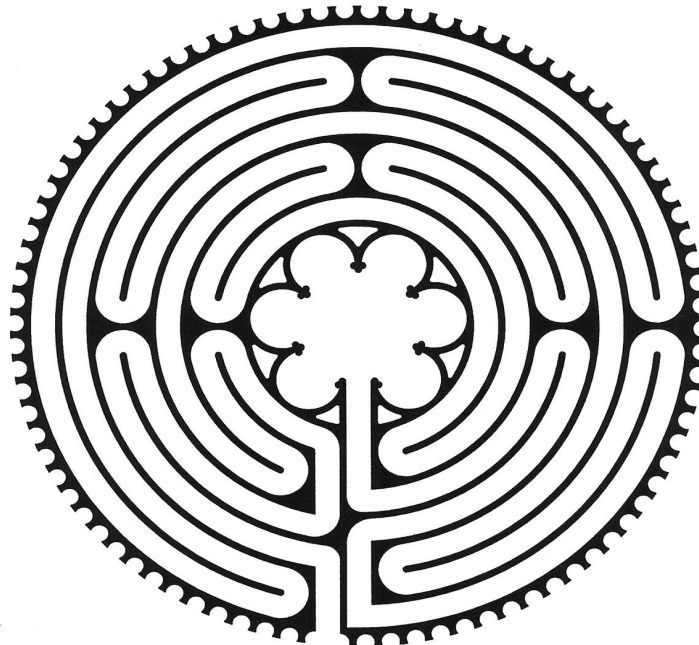
Thanks be to God.

### **BENEDICTION**

May the same mind which was in Christ abide in you:

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding Keep strong in your hearts With the sure knowledge of God's power, love, and mercy. May the blessings of the Almighty: Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer Be among you and remain with you always.

Amen



**May 31st, 2020**

**“Perhaps a Huge Silence Might Interrupt this Sadness”**

**And We Might Listen to the Voices of the Unheard**

## **OPENING PRAYER**

**St. Francis’ Prayer of Peace**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

## **READING FROM SCRIPTURE     Acts 2:1-13**

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

**READING FROM CONTEMPORARY WISDOM**    *Keeping Quiet*                      Pablo Neruda

Now we will count to twelve  
and we will all keep still  
for once on the face of the earth,  
let's not speak in any language;  
let's stop for a second,  
and not move our arms so much.

It would be an exotic moment  
without rush, without engines;  
we would all be together  
in a sudden strangeness.

Fishermen in the cold sea  
would not harm whales  
and the man gathering salt  
would not look at his hurt hands.

Those who prepare green wars,  
wars with gas, wars with fire,  
victories with no survivors,  
would put on clean clothes  
and walk about with their brothers  
in the shade, doing nothing.

What I want should not be confused  
with total inactivity.  
Life is what it is about;  
I want no truck with death.

If we were not so single-minded  
about keeping our lives moving,  
and for once could do nothing,  
perhaps a huge silence  
might interrupt this sadness  
of never understanding ourselves  
and of threatening ourselves with death.  
Perhaps the earth can teach us  
as when everything seems dead  
and later proves to be alive.



Now I'll count up to twelve  
and you keep quiet and I will go

**A callarse**

Ahora contaremos doce  
y nos quedamos todos quietos.  
Por una vez sobre la tierra  
no hablemos en ningún idioma,  
por un segundo detengámonos,  
no movamos tanto los brazos.  
Sería un minuto fragante  
sin prisa, sin locomotoras,  
todos estaríamos juntos  
en una inquietud instantánea.

Los pescadores del mar frío  
no harían daño a las ballenas  
y el trabajador de la sal  
miraría sus manos rotas.

Los que preparan guerras verdes,  
guerras de gas, guerras de fuego,  
victorias sin sobrevivientes,  
se pondrían un traje puro  
y andarían con sus hermanos  
por la sombra, sin hacer nada.

No se confunda lo que quiero  
con la inacción definitiva:  
la vida es sólo lo que se hace,  
no quiero nada con la muerte.

Si no pudimos ser unánimes  
moviendo tanto nuestras vidas,  
tal vez no hacer nada una vez,  
tal vez un gran silencio pueda  
interrumpir esta tristeza,  
este no entendernos jamás  
y amenazarnos con la muerte,  
tal vez la tierra nos enseñe  
cuando todo parece muerto  
y luego todo estaba vivo.

Ahora contaré hasta doce  
y tú te callas y me voy.

**SERMON** “Perhaps a Huge Silence Might Interrupt this Sadness”

– Listening to the Voices of the Unheard

By Rev. Nathaniel Mahlberg

“If we were not so single-minded  
about keeping our lives moving,”  
as we heard in Lydia’s beautiful reading of Pablo Neruda,

“Si no pudimos ser unánimes  
moviendo tanto nuestras vidas,  
tal vez no hacer nada una vez,”

“If we were not so single-minded  
about keeping our lives moving, and  
Perhaps do nothing for once  
Perhaps a huge silence  
might interrupt this sadness  
of never understanding ourselves  
and of threatening ourselves with death.”

“If I were a physician,” wrote the Christian thinker, Søren Kierkegaard, “and if I were allowed to prescribe just one remedy for all the ills of the modern world, I would prescribe silence. For even if the Word of God were proclaimed in the modern world, how could one hear it with so much noise?”

When we fall still and listen, when we allow our flashing reactions and endless strivings to settle, and we put our trust in the embrace of the Divine, what do we hear?

What do we hear of the Holy One within us? Among us? Beyond us?

And from *whom* do we hear that voice, those voices, of our still-speaking God at work in in our times amidst all its troubles?

Are those voices still cries in the wilderness?

This Sunday in the ancient story cycle of our church, we have the opportunity to hear anew the story of Pentecost.

The story of Pentecost occurs after the followers of the Way of Jesus have passed through the experiences of bearing witness to Crucifixion, and to Resurrection, and to Ascension. We can’t understand Pentecost without remembering that it’s coming out of an experience of crucifixion.

Jesus suffered the state sanctioned violence and terror of the Roman Empire, which was a fate that his Jewish disciples all feared for themselves. It was all too common way for the Empire to assert its dominance in the name of peace and order. Crucifixion, by the way, ultimately kills through asphyxiation. They couldn't breathe.

For the faithful we know that through Christ, God, Godself - the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all and everything in the Universe – joins creation in bearing the wounds of our sinful alienation from each other, from ourselves, from our true God and our true purpose.

And, for the faithful, we know through the Resurrection & Ascension, that the Power and Love of the Creator overcomes the powers of death, breaking through and blossoming out to embrace all and everything in universal grace.

For the first followers of the Way of Jesus, who were witnesses to these things, their purpose then became to share the Good News of all this. And to invite those who heard to receive it in their hearts and so undergo what is called *metanoia* and *aphesis*. Often this is translated as “repentance” and “forgiveness.” *Metanoia* in Greek means something like “A shift in our fundamental understanding”, “A Going Beyond our current sense of ourselves and the world.” The word that's used in Hebrew means “A turn around.” The result of this is forgiveness from God, a restoration or reunion with the Transcendent Source of all Being.

When we experience this, even just taste it, we realize that Grace is the reality of God offered freely and abundantly to everyone. And this compels us to reverence and gratitude, to love. It also can cause us to be more attuned to the suffering due to our distance from God, exemplified by the crucifixion, and to more inclined to acts of courage to relieve that suffering and to share the Good News that this suffering need not be so.

The story of Pentecost is the story of the Holy Spirit suddenly filling and enflaming the disciples for this task. One astonishing result of this is that they found they could speak in ways that anyone could understand. Language was no longer a barrier.

What was still a barrier was people's willingness to hear.

The disciples were unsparing in their message. They were very clear about calling on people who themselves helped to crucify Jesus, to hear the Good News and undergo this *Metanoia* and receive forgiveness, to be transformed in the image of God's grace.

Those who did hear this message and receive this message, we are told, were “pierced to the heart”, or one translation has it, they were “conscience-smitten.”

This allowed

*a huge silence*

*to interrupt their sadness*

*of never understanding themselves*

*and of threatening themselves with death.*

In that silence they finally could hear God.

May 31 , "Perhaps a Huge Silence Might Interrupt this Sadness" And We Might Listen to the Voices of the Unheard

Throughout history the people who tend to understand the message of Christianity the best, have been those who well know what it is like to stand in fear of crucifixion.

It is for the rest of us to listen more to them than to themselves.

At present, we're in the midst of a kind of crisis that is turning the volume up on other crises that have long been festering in our nation and our world.

This past week, yet another Black person in America was crucified, George Floyd. Our country's original sin has survived generations and wars and pandemics, because we have not sincerely repented of it. We need not fear that repentance, because we know our God is a God of grace.

I cede the rest of my time to voices greater than my own:

This is Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, from a speech call "The Other America":

I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it America has failed to hear?...It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity. And so in a real sense our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention"

And this is Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, from the end of his book:

"Stamped from the Beginning" (510-511):

Any effective solution to eradicating American racism must involve Americans committed to antiracist policies seizing and maintaining power over institutions, neighborhoods, counties, states, nations – the world. ... An antiracist America can only be guaranteed if principled antiracists are in power, and then antiracist policies become the law of the land, and then antiracist ideas become the common sense of the people, and then the antiracist common sense of the people holds those antiracist leaders and policies accountable.

And that day is sure to come. No power lasts forever. There will come a time when Americans will realize that the only thing wrong with Black people is that they think something is wrong with Black people. There will come a time when racist ideas will no longer obstruct us from seeing the complete and utter abnormality of racial disparities. There will come a time when we will love humanity, when we will gain the courage to fight for an equitable society for our beloved humanity knowing, intelligently, that when we fight for humanity, we are fighting for ourselves. There will come a time. Maybe, just maybe, that time is now.

On behalf of that beloved humanity, I invite us to pause and to hear that huge silence that might interrupt the sadness of never understanding ourselves and of threatening ourselves with death.

May 31 , “Perhaps a Huge Silence Might Interrupt this Sadness” And We Might Listen to the Voices of the Unheard

As Neruda says, “Perhaps the earth can teach us/ As when everything seems dead/ But later proves to be alive.”

So, my friends, let us be still a moment and listen.

I give thanks to God.

I will end with Neruda again:

If we were not so single-minded  
about keeping our lives moving,  
and for once could do nothing,  
perhaps a huge silence  
might interrupt this sadness  
of never understanding ourselves  
and of threatening ourselves with death.  
Perhaps the earth can teach us  
as when everything seems dead  
and later proves to be alive.

### **BENEDICTION**

May God bless us with *discomfort*  
at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,  
so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with *passion*  
To engage with injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,  
so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with *tears*  
to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war,  
so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough *foolishness*  
to believe that God can use us to make a difference in this world,  
As we walk boldly in this Way of Jesus.

