

Welcome!

First Congregational Church of Webster Groves
United Church of Christ



Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

May 10, 2020

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Mother's Day

Festival of the Christian Home



We respond to God's call by welcoming everyone regardless of ability, age, ethnicity, race, gender identity, sexual orientation or socio-economic background.

To proclaim in word and deed the love of Christ, we affirm that all may share in the full life, ministry, fellowship, responsibilities and blessing of our congregation.

*No matter who you are
or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.*

Order of Worship

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Rev. David Denoon, *Pastor*

TOLLING OF THE BELL

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES

PRELUDE

Impromptu in B-flat

Franz Schubert

RAISING THE COVENANT

Tracey Harris, *Student Minister*

We who are called of God into this Christian community covenant together: to seek to know the will of God, to experience the joy and struggle of discipleship, to proclaim in word and deed the love of Christ, and to work for peace and justice among all people. We trust God's promise of grace and forgiveness and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our trials and rejoicing.

GATHERING HYMN

O God, Whose Steadfast Love

J. L. Haddix

O God, whose steadfast love
true motherhood has blessed;
who shields the infant small
upon its mother's breast.
Embrace us, too, O God, our God,
and hold us in your loving arms,
and hold us in your loving arms.

May your household of faith
one family become,
that love may be increased
and none may be alone.
That mother's love and father's care
and children's joy we all may share,
and children's joy we all may share.

PRAYER OF APPROACH (Responsive – Leader; **People**) Leon Burke III, *Director of Music*

A Prayer for Mothers

from *The African-American Lectionary*

Mothers come in many different forms, and today we celebrate them all!

Thank God who is our Mother!

Everyone here is either a son or a daughter.

Thank God for my mother!

For those women who have joined God in heaven and whom we miss dearly here on earth:

Thank God for the mothers of the past.

For every woman who is working day and night to raise her children right now:

Thank God for the mothers of today.

For all the women who are expecting, but aren't quite mothers yet:

Thank God for the soon-to-be-mothers.

For those women who prayed for and received children as their own through adoption:

Thank God for the mothers-in-fact.

For the women who took in others' children through foster care:

Thank God for the mothers with hearts so big.

For the women and girls who exercised the wisdom to recognize that someone else needed to become the mother of the children they would bear:

Thank God for the brave birth-mothers.

For those women who have lost a child to death and must carry on:

Thank God for the mothers who are so strong.

For all the women who wanted to have children of their own, but who chose instead to mother everyone else:

Thank God for the mothers in spirit.

We thank you, holy One, for the women who have influenced our lives in so many ways.

We pray that we will honor them in everything we do. Amen.

NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLY

Tracey Harris, *Director of Christian Education*

THE WORD SHARED

Merrimon Boyd, *Student Minister*

From the Epistles

1 Peter 2:2-10

The Inclusive Bible

² Like newborn be hungry for nothing but milk— the pure milk of the word that will make you grow into salvation, ³ now that you have “tasted that our God is good.”

⁴ Come to Christ—a living stone, rejected by mortals but approved nonetheless, chosen and precious in God’s eyes. ⁵ And you are living stones as well: you are being built as an edifice of spirit, to become a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For scripture has it:

“See, I am laying a cornerstone in Zion,
an approved stone and precious;
those who put their faith in it
will not be shaken.”

⁷ The stone is precious for those who have faith. But for those without faith,
“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”

⁸ and at the same time

“An obstacle and a stumbling block.”

Those who stumble and fall are disbelievers in God’s word; it is their destiny to do so.

⁹ You, however, are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart” to sing the praises of the One who called you out of the darkness into the wonderful, divine light.

¹⁰ “Once you were not a people,
but now you are the people of God;
once there was no mercy for you,
but now you have found mercy.”

From the Gospels

John 14:1-14

TIB

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled.

You have faith in God;
have faith in me as well.

In God’s house there are many dwelling places;
otherwise, how could I have told you
that I was going to prepare a place for you?

I am indeed going to prepare a place for you,
and then I will come back to take you with me,

that where I am
there you may be as well.
You know the way that leads to where I am going.”

Thomas replied, “But we don’t know where you’re going. How can we know the way?”

Jesus told him,

“I myself am the Way—
I am Truth,
and I am Life.
No one comes to Abba God
but through me.
If you really knew me,
you would know Abba God also.
From this point on,
you know Abba God
and you have seen God.”

“Rabbi,” Philip said, “show us Abba God, and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus replied, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and still you don’t know me?

Whoever has seen me has seen Abba God.
How can you say, ‘Show us your Abba’?
Don’t you believe that I am in Abba God
and God is in me?
The words I speak are not spoken by myself;
it is Abba God, living in me,
who is accomplishing the works of God.
Believe me that I am in God and God is in me,
or else believe because of the works I do.
The truth of the matter is,
anyone who has faith in me
will do the works I do-
and greater works besides.
Why? Because I go to Abba God,
and whatever you ask in my name I will do,
so that God may be glorified in me.
Anything you ask in my name
I will do.”

Response.

Reader: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the people.

People: Thanks be to God.

ANTHEM

MESSAGE OF THE DAY

Alone Together

Rev. Denoon

Some thoughts on how to endure our current situation

I have some practical stuff to talk about with you, this morning. It’s not strongly based on anything you just heard read from the scriptures. You don’t read much about pandemics in the Bible, and when you

do – as in the ten plagues in Exodus – they’re usually indicating the wrath of God. I’m not there spiritually now, if I ever was there.

What I have noticed, over the last many days, especially since the turning of the month, is the tendency of people to begin relaxing their attitudes and behaviors about quarantine and isolation. I’m not seeing children on playgrounds, but I have seen parents allowing playdates and get-togethers on front lawns. And young adults ignoring the rules of social distancing as if no harm can possibly come to them in an outbreak that has affected mostly low-income and under-privileged people, or else people with health that is already compromised.

But no one is invulnerable, as I’ve learned through at least one other outbreak, and precautions we are taking should not be for the short term but for the long haul. We’re all going rather mad with stir craziness, and we’re bored, but there’s still further to go, longer to go.

But I know from experience that *we can do this*.

Here.

It’s 33 years ago now.

I was 25 and studying in my second year at Garrett Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, just north of Chicago. If you’ve done the math, then you know that the year I’m talking about was 1987. I was doing my field education internship at an agency called, Chicago House. The founding purpose of Chicago House was to provide a safe haven for persons with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (or AIDS).

If you were single and had HIV back then, and your family was unwilling to take you in – and lots of families were unwilling to take patients in who had the human immunovirus (HIV); you’ll recall that we were only just coming to know about how the virus was transmitted – by sharing body fluids, sometimes with drug paraphernalia – so these were gay men and drug addicts who sometimes were both... Well, if your family wouldn’t take you, then your friends might put you up for a while. But there are limits even to the broad love of friendship. And people with HIV were ending up on the street.

They were either being ignored or vilified by the Church, for the most part, and it’s notable, I think, that my partner-intern back in 1987 was a student at a Unitarian seminary.

So, in the absence of anything other than hospitals willing to receive people with AIDS, and those hospitals being rather few, gay and lesbian bars from across the city of Chicago combined the energies and money of their patrons to organize a new social service agency to purchase large houses and some apartment buildings, run by house managers and their assistants (mostly field ed interns from social work schools, but in addition to them a couple of seminarians like myself and my co-intern at the house on Malden Avenue).

We house managers and assistant managers were given the responsibility of finding meaningful and purposeful and safe things for the residents to do. And I’m telling all of you this because, here we are in another pandemic, and it’s Mother’s Day (and, as we have been calling it for a few decades now, the Festival of the Christian Home). So, I’ve been thinking that it might be helpful to talk with you for a little while about what worked for us during that pandemic. We’re quite a few weeks in, and there’s no real let-up in sight, despite the actions of some authorities who are accustomed to the privilege of being able to do whatever you want when you want to do it... declaring (as I noted in yesterday’s weekend announcement) that we’re going to reopen for business even though there is no downturn in the number of infections yet – only a so-called “flattening of the curve.”

First and foremost of all, do maintain all the safety protocols you’ve been given. In our case today, it’s social distancing, masks and gloves when out and about, and lots and lots of handwashing. In fact, the condition of my hands now is reminiscent of the amount of handwashing I was doing back then in deference to the Chicago House residents.

After that, develop a routine for yourself. It works in professional and spiritual life, and it works for the purpose of physical and mental fitness. Plan your day with tasks and leisure, so that you feel fruitful. With our residents, I remember, we house managers had to help them not to sleep all day. They were

depressed by their isolation. We'd make sure all of them who could afford to be, health-wise, were up before too much of the morning had wasted away (certainly no later than noon). And we'd make sure they had a healthy breakfast and took a shower and did some chores around the house.

Next, and most of you are doing this too, stay home as much as possible but find things to do there that interest and comfort you. Puzzles and board games and card games, of course. For those of us with young and school-age children, helping them with their homework and helping them through their boredom. Remember that you're being Alone Together, and *that* togetherness is something that can drive you bonkers or save you... and, in my and my family's experience, sometimes both at once.

Next after that, learn to live into your boredom. Back in our day (and I know, that makes me sound really old), but *back in our day*, the internet was the stuff of academia, a few scientists at a few universities managing to be connected with each other. And mobile phones were much too expensive. As a result, we were forced into relationship with one another. We told each other stories and teased each other good-naturedly as we sat on the porch and mused about the world. Clothing became an acknowledged manner of self-expression. I remember Michael in his tennis skirts and Charles in his flowing robes. Richard with his headscarves and Rick who seemed to have overalls in an endless array of fabrics and (somehow) fashions.

Living into your boredom can also mean, turning that boredom into concentration and reflection. One of our guys used to love to iron, and who doesn't love to look good, so we set up a clothes rack in his bedroom with an ironing board, some speed starch, and a new iron, and we'd bring him our wrinkled shirts and trousers, and off he'd go for hours. We'd pay him per garment, a few dollars at a time, and he'd have some mad money then. But he took his time, musing about life and love, and when he'd come out of his iron contemplation, he would share the insights that he'd gained. The rest of us had learned, with one another as well as with him, to respond positively and encouragingly, not to critique but to reflect. And we learned to listen better, I think, not only to him but to others.

I've heard it said that "boredom is the mother of childhood invention," and I have experienced this and seen that it is true. Of course, sometimes the results of such invention can be a little problematic, shall we say... especially when one decides to substitute one material for another in the making of a food product or when one uses tools and other devices without permission in the accomplishment of one's invention... But, by all means, live into your boredom and see what results you get.

Finally, stay connected with the people you love and who love you. I cannot tell you how important it was to those eight men I shared life and work with, back then, when their loved ones would call... or old friends would write them unexpectedly, from out of the blue, and how their blues would clear. Emails can get lost, and private messages can be just too brief. The richness of connection – real connection that affirms you and allows you the opportunity to affirm another – cannot be overstated. We need each other, and in isolation we need each other more. We need to be reminded that we may be alone, but that we can be alone together. And only we (connected) can accomplish that task.

That's what I learned in the last pandemic I experienced personally:

- Maintain safety protocols

- Develop regular routines to carry you through your day

- Find things that interest and comfort you

- Live into your boredom: express yourself, reflect – alone and together, and let your inventiveness develop

- Finally, don't let your isolation prevent you from being connected

Maybe you've already found this to be true. Or maybe you've found even more that is helping you to tolerate the isolation we all have to endure for a while longer, for the sake of our safety and that of our neighbors. I hope so.

What I haven't mentioned – and part of the "regular routines" I've already mentioned – is that prayer, contemplation, and meditation can be easily set aside under circumstances like these, but also easily

picked back up again. I'll focus on those, next Sunday, when we meet again for our weekly routine.

Be blessed this week, as you and I and our households persevere through this challenging time, but not alone by ourselves... alone together.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

PRAYER HYMN

God, Bless Our Homes

F. von Christiernson

God, bless our homes with peace and love and laughter,
with understanding and with loyalty.

May we together follow Christ our Savior
and know the blessing of community.

O God, in gratitude for homes and loved ones,
we open now our hearts to humankind.
Grant us your spirit — love for all our neighbors —
so in your peace may we our concord find.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

We Lift Our Joys and Concerns to God

Please remember the following as you pray, today:

Joyce Berger, a senior member living at home with support of family and friends

Marshall Brooks, in a senior residence in Arkansas

The Rev. Dr. Paul Davis, in rehab after a bout with poor health

Margaret Gustafson, with a chronic health condition

Carol McCoy, in need of prayerful support

Bob Moody, undergoing chemotherapy treatment with a positive prognosis

The Rev. Jack Newsome, isolated in assisted living

Ken Perry, undergoing radiation treatment with a positive prognosis

Becky Scott, with health challenges

Nancy Hayes, Laurel Hayes's mother who received a pacemaker on Thursday
health care workers, first responders, and delivery and grocery workers

people living with COVID-19

people who are isolated and alone

people with stressed home situations which are intensified by quarantine

Prayer of the Day

Prayer of Our Savior

Our Father who art in heaven: hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

INTERLUDE

REPORT FROM OUR YOUNG WORSHIPERS

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Fugue in F

J. S. Bach

DISMISSAL



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