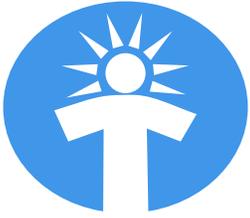


Welcome!

First Congregational Church of Webster Groves
United Church of Christ



Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

May 24, 2020
Seventh Sunday of Easter



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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RINGING OF THE BELLS

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES

OPENING WORDS

Psalm 68:32-35

Merrimon Boyd, *Student Minister*

Sing to God,
O kingdoms of the earth;
sing praises to the Lord,
O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens;
listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.
Ascribe power to God,
whose majesty is over Israel,
and whose power is in the skies.
Awesome is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel;
He gives power and strength to his people.
Blessed be God!

PRELUDE

Pastorale in F Major, II. Allennunde
Leon Burke, III, Organ

Johann Sebastian Bach

GATHERING HYMN

Blessed Assurance

F. Crosby & P. Knapp

PRAYER OF APPROACH

Divine Wisdom, be our companion as we endeavor to deepen our knowledge of both good and evil. We long to be practitioners of justice, but the way is not always clear. Guide us in our efforts to become wise as serpents and soft as doves as we labor together in love. Amen

RAISING THE COVENANT

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.

ANTHEM

It Is Well with My Soul

Horatio Spafford

(video featuring Brigham Young University "Vocal Point" a cappella choir)

NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLY

Rev. Dave Denoon, *Pastor*

THE WORD SHARED

From the Epistles

1 Peter 4:12-14 5:6-11

New Revised Standard Version

Read by Erick Falconer, *Youth Minister*

^{4:12} Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory,[a] which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. [

^{5:6} Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

⁸ Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

MESSAGE OF THE DAY

Transitions, Part 1

Tracey Harris, *Student Minister &*

(based on 1 Peter 4:12-14)

Director of Christian Education

Good morning God's Beloved People,

I want to let you know that Pastor Merrimon and I are sharing the message this morning. But before we begin, I ask you to center yourselves, take a deep breath, and listen as I pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O God, our rock and redeemer.

Let us take a look at the background of 1 Peter, the scripture you heard read by Pastor Erick. The author of the book says he is Peter and is one of the apostles of Jesus. These days, scholars have concluded from the language and dating and structure that was probably written by a disciple of Peter. We do know that the letter was written by the author in Rome, to Christian assemblies in what is now the western half of Turkey where God's people were scattered and where they encountered neighbors' hostility, rejection, and contempt for their conversion to Christianity. Come along now as Merrimon and I have a look at "Peter's" words for us in our moment of time.

Otis Moss III is the Pastor at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, and he has written a book called, "*The Gospel According to the Wiz and Other Sermons from Cinema.*" In the book he talks about never wasting a good storm. God is not trying to mess you up but trying to develop you, he says. Think about these stories that should be familiar: Noah's Ark – Noah was in a storm, but he ended up saving humanity; Joseph, Coat of Many Colors – was in a storm and he moved to second in command in Egypt; Jesus – Jesus was in a storm and he saved the entire world. Otis says God will use your storm. I think this is what Peter was trying to tell the Christians who were facing adversity for doing the work of justice and following Christ. The early churches were persecuted not for what they believed, but for what they did. They preached the good news to the poor, freedom to the imprisoned, liberation to the oppressed. It was not easy then and it is not easy now. Peter speaks to these circumstances when he says, "But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed."

We are struggling in this world, trying to do what is right and just. That is how it feels right now, like a struggle, when we can't worship in our sanctuary because we are trying to help keep people safe. It can feel like we are being persecuted by those who think we should be in our building, but think of the strength we are showing in finding new ways to enjoy family and new ways to support our neighbor and new ways to worship together. People have written prayers and songs to lift others up. People have reached out to share food, giving blood because it is in short supply and many people sewing masks to give to those who need them. In the middle of the storm, these people have become strong having learned that God has already done something in their life. Maybe there was a storm in your life and the storm taught you how to pray? If you never had a storm, you would not know that God could open doors.

My struggle has been to become a pastor at my age. It is not always easy, but now we are getting to the part of Peter's story that talks about following Christ in the midst of the struggle, and it might take you out of your comfort zone. First Congregational, you have been my comfort zone, the place where I have grown as your Director of Christian Education. Then I found myself in a storm that took me to Eden Seminary. In this time, I have learned about community, justice, peace and grace and so much more. God has been developing me. And now the hardest part of this journey of following Christ comes in getting ready to move into the next step of becoming a pastor away from First Congregational. My time as a student pastor here ends today, and in a few weeks the Spirit will place me where the Spirit leads me, to struggle and grow among other followers of Christ. This will be a struggle for me, but I expect to find joy, and when I am ready to be ordained, I will come back here to share that joy with all of you to get ordained in the sanctuary at First Congregational Church of Webster Groves. I believe that the struggle of deciding to follow my call has led to learning skills and recognizing strengths that only are recognized after a struggle. Christ has blessed me with joy as Christ's glory is revealed.

This is a time of transition for our church in staffing, building usage, and the need to transition due to Covid 19. This virus may change how we do many things, but nothing will change the fact that we follow Christ, who will be with us in a storm and show up for us and teach us through our struggles.

I want to close my portion with a story from Frederick Buechner: "It was a dark time in my life," he says. "I was full of anxiety, full of fear and uncertainty. The world within seemed as shadowy as the world without. And then as I sat there, I spotted a car coming down the road toward me with one of those license plates that you get by paying a little extra with a word on it. And of all the words the plate might have had on it, the word that it did have was the word T-R-U-S-T: Trust. And as it came close enough for me to read it suddenly became a word from on high, and I give it to you here as a word from on high also for you, a kind of present... Trust the deepest intuitions of your own heart. Trust the source of your own truest gladness. Trust the road. Above all else, trust her. Trust him, trust God." Amen

MESSAGE OF THE DAY

Transitions, Part 2
(based on 1 Peter 5:6-11)

Merrimon Boyd, *Student Minister*

Friends, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" If the apostle Peter were alive today, I think he would answer that question with a question, "Are there any good people?" Peter was concerned with the temperament and conditions of the refugees. And he recognized their

arrogance. He addressed their misfortune as suffering but saw it as a strange gift. A gift because it exposed their character, killed their desire, and took them far beyond their limits. Their arrogance asked, *Why me?* Conceit asked, *Why now?* And entitlement protested, saying, *this is unfair treatment!*

In life's conquest everyone will experience being lied on or backstabbing. Some will confuse your motives and misinterpret your intentions. Others will overreact and blame you, saying mean things about you. They will shout at you, point fingers, and accuse you of things that are just not true. And you will get angry, indignant, or depressed. Righteous rage will take you out of character and demand that everyone must know that you are being wronged. When this happens people will scratch their heads and wonder, who is this person?

Friends, consider what Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, says to the exiles of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia:

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:6)

The text teaches us that returning to a self-absorbed life devoid of God's authority will destabilize our confidence in the Family of God. Followers of Jesus should experience a new identity as a chosen people as a royal priest hood which involves being consistent through suffering. It is the duty of every Christian to respect the process of God's care, of love and forgiveness.

Recently, I read an interesting article written by Dan Waldschmidt, an international business strategist. In his article he shares “5 Things to Do When You Get Treated Unfairly.”

- 1) Stop shouting and start listening. Do not do anything for at least 24 hours. Take time to think things through.
- 2) Do not write out a long explanation of why you are right. Writing it down does not help you. Think about this, “who are you trying to convince”?
- 3) Reach out directly and privately. Do not get on Facebook or twitter. Do not use social media as a platform to air your differences
- 4) Sometimes you get things wrong. There will be times when you are not misunderstood—you are just wrong. **Apologize!** It could have been an accident or deliberate. Do not spend time feuding about “**It was not what you said but how you said it**” Whatever the case, Apologize! But do not be fake about it. Mean it.
- 5) Just be “YOU”. Do not make the change because someone is looking. Do not transition because you want more people to like you. Be you! It is better to be you than to pretend to be someone you are not.

But why is it important to humble yourself under God's direction and influence? Because it is the best example that Jesus left for us who have experienced God's transforming power.

Peter reminds us also, *Being treated unfairly is a nasty feeling*. It feels horrible to be taken advantage of publicly. Even if you did something wrong to cause the mistreatment, you will not feel any better while being shamed but, when you are shamed, hold onto your faith and God's loving response will be demonstrated through you. You must hold onto your faith as if that is all you have left to hold on to.

Faith in God is the secret to making it through suffering. Faith is the secret to making it through. Hold on to faith in God and faith in yourself. Stand firm in faith. But you might ask me,

Merrimon, *I am holding on to the faith; now what?*

Now you are ready for the good news...

And the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.

Friends, that's good news! My God will make you strong to endure suffering like a good soldier! My God will make you stout like the giant sequoias of California. My God will make you stable like the stone that the builders rejected. My ancestors kept the faith. I am keeping the faith. God is keeping us and our faith. Are you keeping the faith? Are you keeping the faith?

Friends, keep the faith, and God will make you strong, stout, and established.

PRAYER HYMN

Immortal Invisible, God Only Wise

Walter C. Smith

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, your great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Not wanting, not wasting, but ruling in might;
Your justice like mountains high soaring above
Your clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

So perfect your glory, so brilliant your light,
Your angels adore you, all veiling their sight;
All praise we now render as your angels do
In awe at the splendor of light hiding you!

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

We Lift Our Joys and Concerns

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

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 families of Marshall Brooks and of the Rev. Jack Newsome as they grieve

Ken Perry, who has completed radiation treatment with a positive prognosis

Becky Scott, with health challenges

Rich Smith, with health challenges

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 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.

BENEDICTION

Tracey Harris & Merrimon Boyd

**Let the righteous be joyful, for God is the defender of justice and the upholder of truth. Whatever obstacles stand in the way of peace, they will crumble before love. And so let us press on together, shouldering grief in the community, pursuing wisdom with patience and urgency, and seeking justice through the Spirit of Christ alive in us. God will sustain us and hope will not disappoint.
Go in peace.**

POSTLUDE

Toccata in D minor

Domenico Zipoli



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