

Welcome!

First Congregational Church of Webster Groves
United Church of Christ

Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

June 7, 2020

Feast of the Trinity



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

Marilyn Davis, *Announcer*

Good morning and welcome to worship with the First Congregational Church of Webster Groves. We are a member church of the United Church of Christ, located near St. Louis, Missouri. I'm your announcer for the day, Marilyn Davis. For the next few weeks, our announcers will be members of the Executive Ministry of First Church, a seven-member panel of officers who make decisions on behalf of the Church between Congregational Meetings. I am the Clerk, which is the officer in charge of record-keeping.

Today is Sunday, June 7th, 2020, the feast of the Trinity.

This morning's worship has been prepared by Pastor Dave Denoon, Music Director Leon Burke, and volunteer recording engineer, Ian Didriksen. Our PowerPoint slideshow is being facilitated by Gwen Denoon.

Two last items before we begin. As I mentioned just now, this service includes what Pastor Dave calls, "a moment like communion." If you have not done so already, you are encouraged to prepare a small portion of bread or (perhaps) a roll, and with it a small serving of wine or grape juice or water. As the pastor says, it's "like communion," so not everything has to be as it is on a Sunday in the sanctuary. But this will allow you and anyone with you to partake when he does, at the given time.

Let our worship begin.

PRELUDE

"Chorale" from *Suite Gothique*
(Leon Burke III, *organ*)

Léon Boëllmann

OPENING WORDS (Responsive – Leader; **People**)

Psalm 8

Great God, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Great God, our Sovereign
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

Great God, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.

Great God, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,

all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Great God, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

RAISING THE COVENANT

Covenant of 1977

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

Holy, Holy, Holy

Reginald Heber
John B. Dykes

Holy, holy, holy, God the Almighty!
Early in the morning we praise your majesty.
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty:
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
All your works shall praise your name in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty:
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLY

Tracey Harris, *Director of Christian Education*

THE WORD SHARED

From the Gospels

Matthew 28:16-20

Marilyn Davis
NRSV, adapted

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Response.

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

People: Thanks be to God.

MESSAGE OF THE DAY

“Phase 2: Restoration of Space”

Rev. David Denoon, *Pastor*

Some churches are already meeting again in their sanctuaries, but we are not yet. We’re still awaiting Phase 2. This past week, we did experience a slight downturn in coronavirus cases in St. Louis County. If that trend continues this week, we can open up the building to as many as ten people at a time. After two more weeks of a downturn, it would be 25 people, and after four *more* weeks, the number would be 50. But the familiar protocols would need to be followed – temperature-taking, masks, social distancing, and handwashing or sanitizing. But what we’re anticipating is an opportunity finally to return to our sacred space.

This has had me thinking, *What makes space sacred?*

During the past few months as we have endured Stay-at-Home orders and requirements of isolation, we have sometimes longed for a return to our sacred places, like the sanctuary of our church.

Meanwhile, we have watched as new places of sacredness and solemnity have arisen – the place where George Floyd was killed, St. John’s Episcopal Church in Washington. I’m wearing my “demonstration garb,” this morning, because I am anticipating creating sacred space with hundreds of others at Blackburn Park in a student-led demonstration at noon today.

But for some, those same places either have different meanings or no meaning.

[amused] *Speaking of which...*

Have you ever had one of those intimate moments where you just said the wrong thing? You're with someone you love, whom you live with. And you're playing that question game... "What was your favorite..?"

Coco and I do this, every once in a while, just trying to assess where we are (I think is why we do it) and how we are.

You know?

And on one of these times, she said to me, "What was your favorite place where we've lived?" (And of course, this must have been before Webster Groves, right? Because I said...)

"Oak Park, I think."

Now, this was not the right thing to say. At least not in that moment. But in fairness to me, I answered that way because Oak Park means we were living in a one-bedroom apartment. I was between jobs, and actively searching, doing a little gig work designing websites for local churches and the Chicago Metro Association of the UCC. We lived within blocks of Coco's brother, sister-in-law, and their four teenage kids. I was cooking all our meals, going out for runs daily either through our neighborhood or on some beautiful trails.

In all fairness to her, however, I must add that this one-bedroom apartment included not only ourselves but four cats, one of which was prone to pee in the wrong places. Where I cooked was a galley kitchen. There was no central air (just a window unit we'd purchased for the bedroom), and that summer was very hot. Almost everything we owned was in storage. Our upstairs neighbor was a campus minister who tended to invite students over late and move furniture. And Coco was doing her best to make ends meet for us, by toiling away at photo studios producing advertising and catalogues.

I don't think I ever felt closer to her than that year I depended on her so much (until maybe NOW with the quarantining and social distancing). But we *were just scraping by*. And it was 2001. And September 11 happened in the midst of everything. So, there was a sense of dread about everyday living. (Do you remember how it felt?)

What we were doing then, Coco and I, of course, was waiting for our personal, family history to unfold. We were waiting to see what would happen next. I think we both knew that something good was coming. I was interviewing with churches across the country – California, New York, Wisconsin. Something was in the offing; we just had no idea what it might be. (You know how that feels, don't you – having those alternate feelings of dread and hopefulness.)

I had to concede after only a little prodding that Oak Park was not my favorite place to be. It certainly wasn't *our favorite place*. I just remember how connected I felt with my spouse and how much purpose there was in every moment we were living. I've had both those sensations in our life since – often, both at the same time.

I sort of sense that we're at a time like that now. All of us in America... and maybe in the world. The combined effects of a virus and a plea for more compassion from those who swear to protect and defend us... all of us... are drawing us closer together, even for as difficult as it is for us in our spaces and places.

Necessary intimacy is not always something to appreciate.

Today, we ponder the Oneness of our God, by contemplating the contradictory Threeness in which we have experienced that same One through our history as a religion. We consider the intimacy our God calls us to emulate in our relationships with one another.

We didn't always think in this way, as Christians. When the religion began there was no talk of Trinity. We mentioned "the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," as indicated in our scripture reading, this morning. But as the archaeologist and theologian William Foxwell Albright wrote in a commentary I read recently (Albright was a moderate, almost conservative, biblical scholar), that statement by Jesus about "making disciples of all nations and baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" wasn't Jesus' formula for how to take over the world and baptize everyone in it, the way some think of it now. The Master doesn't seem to Albright to have been talking, that early on, about a formula for believing

in God and overcoming the world.

The Christ meant something, instead, about *immersing people in the knowledge of these Three in order to guide them to the One*. We do a disservice to Christ's Great Commission if we concentrate too much on the confusing reality, the implacable illogic, the divine mystery, the impenetrable theological reality. It pulls us away from those who are not Christian. It sets us at strange odds with the world. It can actually put us in conflict with those whom we are called to love.

Instead, let us explore the reality into which we are being drawn. Let us develop an appreciation for the otherness of human beings living with us and around us. They're crazy and sometimes stupid, but they bring richness and beauty to this world as well.

And let us help others to understand the profound necessity of our common connection. We cannot successfully live this life alone or in our little interest groups and enclaves. So, all of our failings and past mistakes beg forgiveness, as our spirits ache for purpose and connection. And let us do this by considering where we are – historically, geographically. Let us reimagine the way in which we encounter the sacred... and the places.

God calls us to rethink people, our associations, and our compassion.

To do that, we will be drawn to consider either how we will restore the sense of the Holy we encounter in different places – our sanctuary and other sanctuaries and monuments and shrines – or how we will encounter once mundane places (to us) and affirm their newfound holiness (for others and ourselves). How we treat our and others' spaces and places affects how we treat those we encounter in them.

This isn't appropriation I'm talking about. It isn't to try and make ourselves the same as all others or them the same as we are. It's to practice a measure of respect, a celebration of integrity, the oneness in the many.

I'm not telling you anything new, by saying that we must do this. I'm telling you that, as we imagine God doing it, as we endeavor to immerse ourselves in the identity and identities of God, we will inevitably (and thankfully) be inclined to embrace all others, anywhere we or they may be.

Hallowed be the spaces, and blessed be the place that awaits us, after once long enough we have dwelt in separate spaces. We'll get there again.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

RITUAL FOR CHRIST'S TABLE

Invitation

Gathered in our various places, we are still one as the body of Christ. To affirm our oneness with Christ, let us share now in a remembrance of so many meals he shared with his loved ones and friends. As announced earlier, this is a time when you are encouraged to find a morsel of bread and a sip of something, to share in an activity like the Sacrament of Christ's Table. For here at our tables the Christ is the host who welcomes us and invites us, even as he is the guest as we welcome and invite him.

Communion Prayer

Come, Christ Jesus, be our guest.

With friend and stranger, young and old, be among us. Come close to us that we may come close to you. Forgive us, that we may forgive. Renew us so that, where we have failed, we may begin again.

Among friends gathered round a table, Jesus took bread and, having blessed it, he broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying, "This is my body which is given for you." In the same way he took a cup and, having given thanks over it, he gave it to his disciples, saying, "This cup is the new relationship with God sealed with my blood. Take this and share it. I shall share a cup with you next in the coming realm of God." So now, following Jesus'

example, we partake of bread and cup – the ordinary things of the world through which God will bless us. And as Jesus offered thanks for the gifts of the earth, let us also celebrate God's goodness:

Blessed are you, O God, for you have given us what we eat. Blessed are you, O God, for you have given us what we drink.

Since the beginning you have watered the earth that all people should have food and drink. You called Miriam and her people out of bondage and refreshed them with food in the wilderness. You gave Mary and Jesus their daily bread to share. Here at your table you offer us food and drink for our journeys, to nourish us as your children. And so, with all our siblings before us, beside us, and beyond us, we praise you from our hearts for your unending greatness.

Sovereign Jesus Christ, present with us now, as we do in this place what you did in so many settings but especially in an upper room with your loved ones, breathe your Spirit upon us and upon our simple fare, that they may be heaven's food and drink for us, renewing, sustaining, and making us whole, and that we may be your body on earth, loving and caring in the world.

You are above us, O God. You are beneath. You are in air, in earth. You are beside us, you are within. O God, you are in the betrayed and suffering people of our world just as you were in the broken body of Jesus.

Through your Trinity you remind us that, though separate, you are undivided. By contrast, we know our own separation. So, we reach out from our tables by the aid of your Spirit with prayer for these joys and concerns of our hearts:

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

The Rev. Dr. **Paul Davis**, who has moved to a new residence

Margaret Gustafson, with a chronic health condition

Carol McCoy, in need of prayerful support

Bob Moody, undergoing treatment for skin cancer, with a positive prognosis

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

Becky Scott, with health challenges

People living with COVID-19

People who are isolated and alone

People with stressed home situations which are intensified by quarantine

The family of George Floyd and all who mourn him

Protesters and police

People of Color, dealing every day with anxiety because of the sinful ways in which we have ordered our society

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.

These are the gifts of God for the people of God.
Let us celebrate our feast.

Receiving Bread and Cup

Prayer after Communion (Unison)

We thank you, our Redeemer, that you have made us one with each other and one with Christ, by the grace of the meal that we have shared. Now, become so much a part of us, that we may be clothed in your love and guided by your light that shines on all people equally. Show us your image in everyone we meet, so that nourished by your Spirit we will share with everyone a portion from your table. Amen.

BENEDICTION

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Dave

Finally, all of you, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you... The grace of our Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy spirit be with all of you. Amen.

POSTLUDE

Concerto in G Major
(Leon Burke III, organ)

J. S. Bach

DISMISSAL

Marilyn

That's our worship for this Sunday at First Church. We won't be collecting offerings during our worship services until after a vaccine is found for the novel coronavirus. So, if you would like to support First Church with a financial donation, and you're able to, please either send a check to First Congregational Church, 10 West Lockwood Avenue, Webster Groves, Missouri 63119; or go to our website – FirstChurchWG.org – and go to our “Donate” page.

Something we missed last week was our denominational offering for evangelistic and youth ministries, **Strengthen the Church**. To contribute to Strengthen the Church, please follow the same instructions I already gave you. If you send a check, please include the letters S-T-C in the memo line. If you donate from the website, select “Strengthen the Church” from the pull-down menu.

Also, we will be conducting an election on June 28 for our Congregation's leaders, following worship on that day. The slate of candidates was included with Pastor Dave's announcement video, yesterday, and an actual ballot will be available in the eNews in coming weeks. The ballot also will be sent through the postal service to those who receive most of their communication from the church by mail. Voting can take place either in advance with that paper ballot (by sending it back to the church); these votes will be added to a show of hands using the Zoom platform on June 28.

Our worship has ended. Let our service begin.

About the Cover Art: “Icon of the Trinity” by Kelly Latimore, iconographer, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. Comment by the artist:

I was not taught by a traditional Iconographer, and so to some, I am breaking many rules... Some people may find [my work] theologically unsound and wrong, or for others, helpful and inspiring. I think both reactions are important. My hope is that [my work does] what all art can potentially do, which is, to create more dialogue.



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