

# Welcome!

First Congregational Church of Webster Groves  
United Church of Christ

***Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.***

June 21, 2020

Third Sunday After Pentecost  
Sunday after the Summer Solstice  
Sunday of Juneteenth Weekend  
Father's Day



***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.***



Cover Art: Edmonia Lewis's Hagar in the Wilderness. Ms. Lewis (ca. 1845 – ca. 1911) was a mid-19th Century sculptor of both African American and Native American descent; this work appears in the American Art collection of the Smithsonian Institution. Born in New York state, the daughter of a free Black man and his Chippewa wife, Ms. Lewis was educated at Oberlin College, graduating in 1863. In 1865, she traveled to Europe where she would spend practically the rest of her life. Hagar in the Wilderness was featured in an 1875 exhibition of her work, presented in San Francisco, along with numerous other pieces celebrating her racial/ethnic heritage.

## Order of Worship

### WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Joan Musbach, *Announcer*

Good morning and welcome to worship with the First Congregational Church of Webster Groves. Today is Sunday, June 21, 2020, the third Sunday after Pentecost, Father's Day, the day after the summer solstice, and the Sunday of Juneteenth Weekend.

This morning's worship has been prepared by Pastor Dave Denoon, Music Director Leon Burke, soloist Marilyn Davis, Director of Christian Education Tracey Harris, and volunteer recording engineer Ian Didriksen. Our PowerPoint slideshow is being facilitated by Gwen Denoon.

Let our worship begin.

### PRELUDE

*Just As I Am, Without One Plea*  
Leon Burke III, *organ*

arr. Dale Wood

### PRAYER OF APPROACH (Responsive – Leader; **People**)

from Psalm 86

Incline your ear, dear Sovereign, and answer us, for we are poor and needy.

**Preserve our lives, for we are devoted to you; save your servants who trust in you.**

You are our God; be gracious to us. Gladden the hearts of your servants, for to you we lift up our souls.

**Turn to us; be gracious to us; give strength to your servants; save the children of your servants. Amen.**

### 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.**

### HYMN OF THE DAY

*This Is My Father's World*  
Marilyn Davis, *soloist*

Maltbie D. Babcock, words  
Franklin L. Sheppard, tune

This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears  
All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.  
This is my Father's world, O bless me in the thought  
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas – his hands the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world; O let me ne'er forget,  
That though the wrong seems oft so strong God is the Ruler yet.  
This is my Father's world; why should my heart be sad?  
The Lord is King, let the heavens ring. God reigns; let the earth be glad!

### NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLY

Tracey Harris, *Director of Christian Education*

### THE WORD SHARED

Joan Musbach

*From the Writings*

Genesis 21:8-21

New Revised Standard Version

<sup>8</sup> [Sarah and Abraham's son Isaac] grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. <sup>9</sup> But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. <sup>10</sup> So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac."

<sup>11</sup> The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. <sup>12</sup> But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you.” <sup>14</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

<sup>15</sup> When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. <sup>16</sup> Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, “Do not let me look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. <sup>17</sup> And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. <sup>18</sup> Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” <sup>19</sup> Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

<sup>20</sup> God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. <sup>21</sup> He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

*Response.*

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

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**ANTHEM**

*God's Eye Is on the Sparrow*

Civila Durfee Martin, words  
Charles Hutchinson Gabriel, music

Marilyn Davis, soloist

*<sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>31</sup> So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:29, 31)*

Why should I feel discouraged? Why should the shadows come?  
Why should my heart be lonely and long for heaven and home?  
When God is ever my portion, my constant friend will be;  
God's eye is on the sparrow, and I know God watches me.  
I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free.  
God's eye is on the sparrow, and I know God watches me.

Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,  
When song gives place to sighing, when hope within me dies,  
I then draw close to my Savior, from care I am set free:  
God's eye is on the sparrow, and I know God watches me.  
I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free.

God's eye is on the sparrow, and I know God watches me.

**MESSAGE OF THE DAY** *“Phase 4: Restoration of Spirited Life”* Rev. David Denoon, Pastor  
“Be bold and courageous.”

That's what the bookmark that I received in the mail, this week, from Tracey and the Christian Education Ministry said to do.

“Be bold and courageous.”

They sent this message and sentiment for Father's Day, to all us “fathers in the faith.” And this is the sort of thing that I associate with fatherhood, too... actually, with

parenthood. I don't think that any of us with children can afford to be anything less than either, as we offer examples to our little ones of how they ought to live their lives.

And then, I suppose, you don't really have to be a parent to want to offer this kind of example. You don't have to have kids to know how important it will be for those who are watching us to learn from us how to live fearlessly.

The scripture readings, this morning, reassure us that God is making sure that we have warrant to live without fear, to live confident that – as long as we are in line with God's will and God's expectations – God is in line with us.

The story in Genesis, especially, gives a remarkable example of this.

Now, I don't have the energy or the desire to go into the matter of Father Abraham and his behavior toward his own son Ishmael. I personally think that people who practice Islam and who read the Qur'an have more than compensated for the dismissive attitude of the Bible toward Ishmael. Whereas the Genesis author asserts that Ishmael became the father of the great nation of Arabs and "an expert at the bow," thus somehow overlooking that – because of our great father of the faith, Abraham – Ishmael grew up fatherless, Muslims assert that Ishmael was in fact the favored son of Abraham (peace be upon him).

Later, one of our own faith's founders, the apostle Paul, would not only be dismissive toward Ishmael but toward Ishmael's mother Hagar. She was an enslaved African who acceded to her mistress Sarah's judgment and lay down with her master and bore a son to him, and then was cast out from the family because Sarah finally managed to bear a son of her own biologically. Paul insisted that it is better to be Sarah's offspring than Hagar's, because being the child of a freewoman bears a greater status than being the child of a slave.

Paul, in a fit of ethnocentrism (maybe even racism, but there was no such thing as race in his day; that's something that was invented centuries later by Europeans and European descendants to justify their subjugation of whole swaths of people), but in a fit of ethnic superiority and perceived privilege, Paul would completely ignore the fact that Hagar is the first and only woman in the Bible to challenge God and receive a reply.

And what was her challenge about? It was about how afraid she was that she was going to have to watch her child die. It was the fear of a parent for the welfare of her child... to which God replied with a word of comfort (*Do not be afraid.*) and a promise (*I will make a great nation of him.*).

So it would be.

I've been offering to you my insights about how our return to a state, something like the one we enjoyed before the pandemic, parallels the changes in and about ourselves as a community which will have to take place.

This is a phased approach.

- **Phase 1: Shelter in place** – This is a time of imagining and reimagining, and longing. We know this time well; it tells us that the world has changed, and we must change with it.
- **Phase 2: After a time of clear recovery, restore staff to the building** – We know that, because the world has changed, how we imagine God in it has changed. We don't experience the spaces of our world in the same way, and – because we don't actually have access to our traditional sacred spaces, we have to recognize the sanctity of every space we go (because God is there).
- **Phase 3: After a little more time, restore minimal activity to the building** – We begin to practice that understanding of sacred place as an understanding of the vitality of meaning for us. What does it mean to be *us*? And, furthermore, what new meaning are we discovering because of our exile?
- **Phase 4: After double the amount of time recovering, restore more of**

**the community to the building.** Try old things in new ways – gathering certainly, but also singing and praying. – That’s what I’m considering with you today. *What will it mean, while some of us are still in exile, in quarantine..? How can we live, especially for our children, who don’t have access yet to the familiar faces and spaces, so that they know most assuredly that they are loved by God and that they are benefactors of God’s promises and delight?*

I mean, the obvious answer is that we have to make sure they understand that, just because the community isn’t gathered together, that doesn’t mean there is no community.

First, we have to be able to tell ourselves that, to assure ourselves of that.

I think that this is the reason we started meeting using Zoom instead of staying strictly with the somewhat higher production values of YouTube videos. We were longing to see each other’s faces, to know that everything (if not all right) was at least not all wrong... that, just because we cannot be together in the same space, that doesn’t mean that we cannot experience the same time, the same meaningful, meaning-filled time... and there, to be spiritually refilled ourselves. Having a device, a platform like this allows a little of that reassurance.

When Hagar receives God’s reply in the wilderness, part of that reply is for her to be directed to a source of water. There, she and Ishmael are able to drink and to be refreshed. Even in the middle of a wild place, perhaps a desert, the mother and son find refreshment.

God’s Holy Spirit is often associated with water, isn’t it. And Jesus speaks of the person of faith as one who will not only be able to come to him and drink but from whom “rivers of living water” will flow.

Here, as we conceive of the fourth phase of our restoration into life together, we imagine a spirited community – not the one in exile, not the one sheltering in place; and not the one doing reconnaissance with a couple of staff making sure everything is OK; and not even the one with a skeleton crew restoring activity. Here, as we conceive of the fourth phase of our restoration into life together, we imagine what it will be like to feel again the Holy Spirit moving in and around and through us.

We sense the challenge of the Spirit. As people learn when they are seeking to convert from one way of being into another, moving from alcoholism to recovery or from brokenness to wholeness or from sin to righteousness, what we learn is... “If it doesn’t challenge you, it doesn’t change you.”

If it doesn’t challenge you, in fact, it *won’t* change you.

And we need to be changed.

As individuals we need to be changed. We cannot afford the dissipation that the world practices. We cannot afford to go back to our practices and policies of privilege. As we have been reminded repeatedly during this health crisis, there is more affecting our health and our siblings’ health than just a virus. There is violence, there is loathing, there is fear, there is poverty, there is corruption, there is ignorance, there is evil.

As a result of our privilege – race privilege, economic privilege, presumed privilege – we have been on the trailing edge of our world’s needed change. But if every life is sacred, if every space is sacred, if God loves and cares for us all – whatever the skin color, whatever the economic level, whatever the sexuality or gender identity, no matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey... if God loves and cares about us as irreversibly as we give God credit for doing... as we see God doing in the story of Hagar and Ishmael and (God help that pathetic father) Abraham... *if we are going to be bold and courageous for ourselves, others, and **for our children***, then we have to move from the trailing edge to the leading edge.

And God knows, there we have some work to do!

We’ve had a good week, though. The Supreme Court affirmed the civil rights of LGBTQI+ people. DACA was upheld, at least for now.

White people who six years ago were offended at the cry that “Black Lives Matter” are now starting to understand that it was an inclusive shout, not an exclusive one. I even had a lady this week who said she wanted to buy us a “Black Lives Matter” banner to set out in front of the church. Imagine *that* happening, six years ago.

And there have been many of you who have tried to imagine with me how we can get some sort of ONA symbolism into our signboards so that we use that affirmation as part of our outreach.

We’re on the trailing edge, let’s be honest. But people are getting to know us and are inviting us – individuals and church – to move up.

This is challenging stuff, because we want for all of us to be able to move as one... together. But Phase 4 tells us: we’re more than a skeleton crew, but we’re not all going to be able to gather safely. We can try some new things, even some familiar things in new ways, but not all of us in the same sacred space at the same blessed time.

Still, God offers us a Spirit so that we may be that bold and courageous people God is imagining... and which maybe we ourselves our imagining. Y’know, “If it doesn’t challenge you, it doesn’t change you.”

And I know, I’ve got to change. I hope you know that about yourself too. Our world most certainly has got to change.

Can we be those spiritual people? Those spiritual individuals? Can we be that spirited community which is being demanded of us..? Or at least can we be the ones and the one we are being invited to become ... for us, for our neighbors, for our children..?

I hope so. You know, I really do.

Amen.

#### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

*We Lift Our Joys and Concerns to God*

Let us remember those people and situations for whom we are praying today:

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

The Rev. Dr. **Paul Davis**, who fell at his residence and is spending a few days in the hospital

**Margaret Gustafson**, cancer-free for six months

**Carol McCoy**, in need of prayerful support

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

**Becky Scott**, with health challenges

Those who are worried about their business or their employment

Young people who are trying to find something to do  
this summer that doesn’t put them or others at risk  
of coronavirus infection

Those lonely and alone

People with stressed home situations which are intensified by the stresses of this time

Our society as we look hopefully for new policies, practices, and perspectives  
that genuinely honor all people

Thankful for a week of decisions by the Supreme Court,  
affirming and empowering LGBTQI+ people  
and letting DACA recipients breathe easier at least for now

For protesters

For those struggling with physical and emotional distress

## *Prayer of the Day*

Dear God, on this day when we honor fathers and we dare to imagine you perhaps in that role also, we acknowledge that sometimes we haven't been given the best example. And we are pioneering new ways ourselves: new ways to be. To be as affirming as possible of our children, as loving as possible of our neighbors, and as clear as possible representatives of our true faith. Whether male or female or somewhere along the spectrum of sexuality, no matter who we are, we pray to you this day that we may be examples of the faith you have shown us. We pray for all these whom we have mentioned, and there are even more prayers this day we lift to you in silence. Hear our prayers, O God.

We pray for a world that needs to change. But we know, as Christ has told us, that it's going to depend on us as individuals to be changing too, to be offering something new to the world, to be praying for a world of hope and newness and bringing it to birth. Guide and direct us in your Word, teach us your will.

And on this Freedom Weekend, as we remember Juneteenth, help us to establish freedom for all – not just political freedom but spiritual freedom, that all may rest and be comforted in you as once we saw in Hagar and Ishmael out in the wilderness. We from our own wildernesses pray for your sustenance and refreshment. Guide us and keep us ever. This we pray in the name of the one who taught us surely that we are your children, and who taught us to pray saying, **Our Father...**

## *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**

We do not exactly go forth, we simply regather – a people who seek change and are finding ourselves changed, who seek hope and are finding new reasons to hope, who seek love and are finding ourselves to be (even by God!) beloved. So, go and share that love, that hope, peace and freedom. Change! In Christ's name. Amen.

## **POSTLUDE**

*Holy God, We Praise Thy Name*  
Leon Burke III, organ

arr. Diane Bish

## **DISMISSAL**

Joan Musbach

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](http://FirstChurchWG.org) – and go to our "Donate" page.

**Church members, please note that we will be conducting an election next Sunday for our Congregation's leaders, following worship on that day.** Printed ballots have been 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), or else by a show of hands using the Zoom platform next Sunday. June 28.

Thanks for sharing time with us, today. Our worship has ended. Let our service begin.



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*Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.*

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