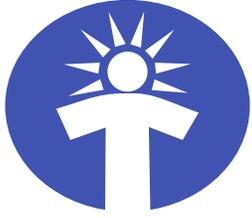


Welcome!

First Congregational Church of Webster Groves
United Church of Christ



Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

June 28, 2020

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost
Pride Sunday



*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

Mark Edwards, *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, Mark Edwards. Mary and I joined the church in 1983. Over the past 37 years, we have raised our family in the church, made some great friends, and have shared our spiritual journey with our church family. I am currently serving as the Moderator of First Church.

Today is Sunday, June twenty-eighth, 2020, the fourth Sunday after Pentecost and Pride Sunday. This morning's worship has been prepared by Pastor Dave Denoon, Music Director Leon Burke III, 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
Dr. Leon Burke III, organ

arr. Dale Wood

CALL TO WORSHIP (Leader; People)

Matthew 10:40-42

Jesus once said, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

"Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous.

"And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple –

"Truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

We come as some who would find the spiritual reward of unity with God.

Children, teenagers, young adults, middle aged, and seniors, we lift our voices in thanksgiving for a reward gladly received and many yet left to come.

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

Bring Many Names
performed by Dr. Leon Burke III

Brian Wren, words
Carlton Young, tune

Bring many names, beautiful and good,
celebrate in parable and story
holiness and glory, living, loving God.
Hail and Hosanna! Bring many names!

Strong mother God, working night and day,
planning all the wonders of creation,
setting each equation, genius at play:
Hail and Hosanna, strong mother God!

Warm father God, hugging every child,
feeling all the strains of human living,

caring and forgiving till we're reconciled:
Hail and Hosanna, warm father God!

NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLY

A Final Interview with Ms. Tracey

Rev. David Denoon, *Pastor*

THE WORD SHARED

Mark Edwards

From the Writings

Jeremiah 28:7-9

New Revised Standard Version

[Jeremiah once said, regarding another prophet's words,] "Listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times predicted war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great governments. As for the prophet who preaches peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that our God has truly sent the prophet."

Response.

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

People: Thanks be to God.

ANTHEM

Church Is More than a Building
performed by Dr. Leon Burke III

Amanda Udis-Kessler, words
Roland Pritchard, music

Church is more than just a building,
More than wood or metal or brick.
Church is how we love our neighbor.
Church is how we tend to the sick
Feed the hungry and heal the suffering,
Welcome strangers, give to the poor.
All our service is as worship,
All our presence an open door.

We're the Church in the path we follow,
Showing care to those in pain.
In the midst of fear and sorrow,
We're the Church, and here we'll remain,
Seeking justice, showing kindness,
Singing praises in all that we do.
Church is more than just a building.
It's our work toward a world made new.

MESSAGE OF THE DAY

"Phase 5: Restoration as a Moving Target"

Rev. Denoon

This has been one confusing week. Past weeks during the pandemic have been laden with emotion, full of the weight of history, with occasional moments of joy and relief but mostly a sense of gravity.

And we've begun to buckle. We've begun to question whether the treatment for the disease is worse than the disease itself. And that's some literal wondering that we're doing now. Literally, we are wondering whether this disease we're facing is as awful as the present treatment.

There are some who have been saying for a while now that we have to get the economy moving again. There are Alt Right people saying that the degree of death we may experience if we do not take all the precautions all the time, is just the historic price we pay for living during the rise of a new contagion. You know, we made it past the Black Death and smallpox and H1N1.

There are people who might be on the Left (I have no idea where they fall politically or if that even applies) insisting that they won't vaccinate because of potential side effects for themselves and their children. I mean, they've been saying that about other things, but now they're saying it about

COVID-19... whenever there finally is a vaccine...

There are young people who seem to have become convinced that the personal protective devices they're asked to wear and distances they're asked to keep, are in order to protect *them* rather than others around them. Or else, upon hearing that others are who they're protecting with PPEs, they'll insist that they personally are not sick now, so why should they have to?

And everybody, frankly, just wants life to go back to the way it was – activities at our own discretions, kids in school (or at camp now!), travel uninhibited... just let things be the way they were.

And we're suspicious about how this whole thing is being managed. Have we been sheltering to protect others and ourselves, or has it been to keep ICU populations low? If it's to protect ourselves, then yes, everything should remain just as it is, and we'll worry about a new normal after a vaccine is found. But if we're doing this in order to avoid straining our hospitals, then we should move ahead, with the caveat that we may have to be isolated again in the case of a local outbreak.

Should we be isolating still, or should we be practicing according to what we consider acceptable risks?

We parents are confronted with these questions every day, about how much circulating our children ought to be doing with other people's children. I'm finding myself weighing things morally, the way I do with whether or not my daughter ought to be in the company of young people with firearms in their homes. Do I isolate her, or is there some acceptable risk when I either know or suspect there's a gun in the house?

You single people out there: Do you continue dating online, if you're dating at all, or do you meet the other for coffee now..? or a meal at the restaurant with the proper social distancing and the mask-wearing staff?

And for us concerned about civil rights, do we march or not? Brown and black-skinned people, and LGBTQI+ people who are supposed to be shouting with pride this weekend, everyone who isn't white or heterosexual or cis-gender or having some measure of financial means or position... or maybe who isn't male... with everyone who is in recovery or in treatment, or on medication to keep life on an even keel... and with every minority here and every once-occupied or currently-oppressed people, everyone tired of living underneath a blanket of violence and the threat of it around the world knows: The struggle continues.

Just because we're waving rainbows and baby blue and pink and white stripes doesn't mean that the work is finished. You get these little lifts, moments when it seems as though the wind is shifting, and then it definitely isn't, and you need to be able to get back to the marching and the letter-writing and the petition-signing and the campaigning and advocating. Or else, it's just back to the grind again, trying to live your life so that you come out at the end of a day with some shred of dignity.

So, yes, masks are important, but so are the masses, gathering to speak truth to power and to remind power that we have not taken our eyes off of *that prize*.

What do you do? We're watching for the truth to come forth. But we're living in confusion. And what do we aim for? Jeremiah said that we're waiting for the words of the prophet who preaches shalom, to come true:

As for the prophet who preaches peace, when the word of that prophet comes true,
then it will be known that our God has truly sent the prophet.

You know that's what the confusion indicates, what the confusion we're experiencing now indicates. Something has made our aim unclear, blurred our goal. It indicates that the target has moved or it's been mis-identified. We're not sure of our trajectory.

When I conceived of this series of messages following each of the phases in our restoration process, I hardly imagined that we would still be in Phase 1 (sheltering in place) after fourteen weeks. Three and a half months, and we haven't yet been able even to get to Phase 2, with only ten people in our building at a time!

We're anxious to get back into our sacred spaces.

Our renters are anxious. There are children to care for, people to exercise, dogs to train, events to host.

And *the staff* is anxious. There are surfaces to clean and protect, air recyclers that may or may not be sufficiently filtered, so many variables to consider!

Really, everything about life lately seems to be on the order of a moving target. We're constantly resetting goals, re-calibrating our scopes and night-vision goggles. What is it that we're supposed to be about? What's the answer?

Well, I have an answer, but I'm not sure that it will still the anxiety. It just adds a moral dimension to what we've been trying to make a practical matter. (I'm not even sure what answer it brings. I think that's something for us to discuss.)

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." Paul said, "God [has brought you] from death to life... and sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but grace." And Jeremiah said, "Preach shalom, speak peace, you prophet, and let's see if your peace comes true."

We have to measure, to imagine, to calibrate any of our aims and our goals according to the way we pursue peace, fullness of life, completeness of our society, perfection of love, shalom. And whatever Phase comes next for us because of our behavior or others' behavior with relation to this disease, we have One to whom we must be true. And there is not a thing we do, an action we take, a direction into which we go, a vigil we attend, a march we step, or a song we sing... there is not a single thing in our range of actions and reactions which is not measured according to the peace we preach, the shalom we uphold.

So restoration keeps looking different or confusing, because we're still trying to figure out *what it is with respect to this virus*.

But we know with respect to our faith what restoration is in our own lives with God in them. As our world goes, even our own personal spheres, that restoration *also* can make for a moving target. Today it's civil rights, tomorrow it's a new job (right, Tracey?), the day after that maybe it's the acknowledgment of joy or love or pride in our life and relationships. It's this mask or that hand-washing or another sterilization or some adaptation for our kids to be able to see other kids or for you to be able to go on something like a date.

You know?

Or it's a phone call because we can't visit in person. Or it's trying to figure out how to cope. Or it's this... just this... just this moment. Today... so that we're renewed and the world is renewed and faith is renewed. And shalom gets one more chance.

Thanks be to God.

Thanks to you for listening.

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

George Krewson on his 90th birthday

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 those among us who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex,
or falling somewhere else on the spectrum of sexuality and gender
For justice, that we may know peace.

Let us continue in prayer...

Prayer of the Day

Wondrous God, who has created us in such a multiplicity of ways to be proud and carefree, we offer to you our concerns and regrets that we may have missed that mark sometimes or caused others to miss it. We pray for an end to oppression and the establishment of justice. We pray for the turning of hearts from sin to righteousness. We pray for a world where your shalom is not only spoken but lived.

Dear God, you who have taught us all your ways, we can yet find more, it seems, everyday. And in this confusing time, help us to have a sense of your Spirit's moving with us as we seek as faithful people – faithful to you – to be faithful as well to all those who live and breathe and have their being with us, all these people we share a responsibility for. So teach us along our way, and guide us. We pray all of this, because we know that when we look about and see faces, who we see are your children representing you, looking like you. Help us to be reminded of our obligations to you whenever we see each other. For it was your Child Jesus who taught us best to know that all of us are your children, and that with confidence by your grace and with boldness, we might truly say the Prayer which he taught us...

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, *Director of Christian Education*

I'm leading you as the Christian educator. I'll come back and see you when I'm a pastor. Thank you for being with me, all of you.

We thank you, O God, for this time to pray,
For the songs and the stories that teach us your Way.
We smile as we leave, 'cause all of us know
That you will be with us wherever we go.
We know that you will call us and cause us to grow.
May we share your love wherever we go.
And now, shalom, my friends! Go in peace.
Till we meet again. Amen.

POSTLUDE

O Lord, We Are in Need
Dr. Leon Burke III, organ

J. S. Bach

DISMISSAL

Mark Edwards

That's our worship for this Sunday at First Church. We won't be collecting offerings in person 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 at FirstChurchWG.org
then click on the "Donate" tab

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

The 155th Annual Meeting of the church followed, with an election of the new slate of officers composed by the Nominating Committee, and a Ritual for the Ending of a Ministry conducted with Director of Christian Education Tracey Harris. News of Tracey's next assignment will be forthcoming soon.



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