

# Welcome!

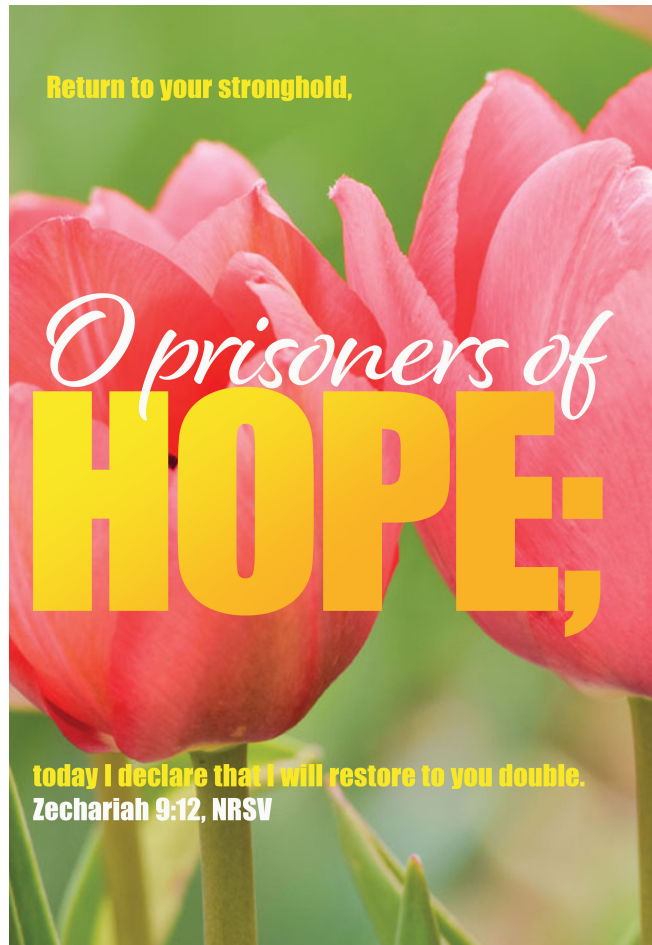
First Congregational Church of Webster Groves  
United Church of Christ



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

Ju[h \$, 2020

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*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.*

**FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
INDEPENDENCE DAY WEEKEND  
ORDER OF WORSHIP**

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Diane McLean, *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, Diane McLean. I have enjoyed the fellowship of the church for the past fifteen years with my son, Gus. And I have participated in things like the bell choir, the Room at the Inn, and the Facility and Finance Ministry, all very rewarding.

Today is Sunday, July the fifth, 2020, the fifth Sunday after Pentecost and the day after Independence Day.

This morning's worship has been prepared by Pastor Dave Denoon, Music Director Leon Burke, soloist Jenny Jones, and volunteer recording engineer Ian Didriksen.

This service includes a moment for remembering Christ's last supper. 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 Pastor Dave 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**

*Now My Tongue the Mystery Telling*  
Dr. Leon Burke III, organ

Flor Peeters

**A slideshow accompanying the Prelude included a series of images of the sanctuary's Globe, lighted in remembrance of Catherine Ann Twining Moody and including captions as follows:**

The Globe is lighted today in loving memory of Catherine Twining Moody, 1837–1925. Mrs. Moody, who was church member Bob Moody's great-great-grandmother, joined First Church on Sunday, July 5, 1880, 140 years ago. She was the first of six generations of Moodys at First Church.

Catherine Twining Moody was a teacher and a librarian during her working life. She was the daughter of the Rev. William Twining, a Congregationalist pastor and college professor after whom Twining Avenue in Webster Groves is named.

Mrs. Moody sang in the church choir, leading the Music Committee for many years. She also loved to write verse and composed several holiday poems that appeared in church bulletins throughout the years. Catherine Twining Moody was the author of a volume about the history of First Church, written for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church's founding, 1916. Her image was used as that of the mother of the disciples James and John, on a mural by Frederick Stoddard which graced the south wall of the 1894 sanctuary from 1903 until it was razed in 1993. (The painting was salvaged and remains in storage.) She taught for 31 years in First Church's Sunday School and for 17 years was the President of the Women's Association.

Pastor Dwight Bradley, who laid Mrs. Moody to rest, wrote of her, "Her gracious tolerance was an example to everyone... Few men and women are so gifted as was she."

With the Moody family we offer thanks to God, today, for the life and ministry of Catherine Twining Moody.

"You are the light of the world." (Matthew 5:14)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Psalm 145:8-14

Led by Diane McLean

(Responsive – Leader; **People**)

Our God is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

**Our God is good to all,  
and the Creator's compassion is for everything in creation.**

All your works shall give thanks to you, O holy One.  
And all your faithful shall bless you.

**They shall speak of the glory of your reign  
and tell of your power,  
to make known to all people your mighty deeds,  
and the glorious splendor of your rule.**

Your reign is an everlasting reign,  
and your dominion endures throughout all generations

Our God is faithful in every word God speaks,  
and gracious in every deed God does.

**The One who rules over us upholds all who are falling,  
and raises up all who are bowed down.**

Let us in this time lift up praise and bow in prayer.

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

*This Is My Song*  
Jennifer Jones, soloist

Lloyd Stone, words  
Jean Sibelius, music

This is my song, O God of all the nations,  
A song of peace for lands afar and mine:  
This is my home, the country where my heart is;  
Here are my hopes, my dreams my holy shrine,  
But other hearts in other lands are beating  
With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,  
And sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine,  
But other lands have sunlight too and clover,  
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.

O hear my song, O God of all the nations:  
A song of peace for their land and for mine.

NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLY

*What Is Joy, for You?*

Rev. David Denoon, *Pastor*

THE WORD SHARED

*From the Prophets*

Zechariah 9:9-12

Diane McLean

*The Inclusive Bible*

The reading is from the book of the prophet Zechariah was written at a time when Israel and Judah pretty much served as occupants of the middle of an intersection regularly crossed by great empires. They dreamed of a day when peace would prevail and their God's Law would rule the world. In the midst of despair and powerlessness for his people, Zechariah envisioned a brighter day. Here is part

of his vision, from the ninth chapter of Zechariah's prophecy:

<sup>9</sup> Rejoice in heart and soul, offspring of Zion!

Shout with gladness, offspring of Jerusalem!

Look! Your ruler comes to you:

victorious and triumphant,

humble, riding on a donkey,

and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

<sup>10</sup> The ruler will banish chariots from Ephraim

and horses from Jerusalem;

the bow will be banished.

The ruler will proclaim peace for all nations

with an empire stretching from sea to sea,

from the river to the ends of the earth.

<sup>11</sup> As for you, due to the blood covenant with me,

I am returning your prisoners

from the waterless pit.

<sup>12</sup> Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope!

Today I declare that I will give you back double!

Response

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

People: Thanks be to God.

**MESSAGE OF THE DAY**

*"Joy Now?"*

Rev. Denoon

As I pointed out to you, back in March, as we began a series of sermons using insights from Amy-Jill Levine's book, *Entering the Passion of Jesus*, the imagery that Jesus sought to emulate on what we have come to call Palm Sunday, just a week before he died, originated here in this reading from the book of the prophet Zechariah.

We've all seen military parades, especially the ones in countries run by strongmen – with the goose-stepping rank upon rank of soldiers and the tanks and the missiles parading past as people cheer and wave flags, rejoicing in the might of their armed forces.

The Romans in Jesus' day used to do that too, and the Greeks in Zechariah's day, and the Persians before that and the Babylonians before that and the Assyrians before that and the Egyptians before that... all the conquering powers that used the strip of land where the Israelites lived – the promised land – a coastal country along the Mediterranean that provided a gateway to Asia and Africa and Europe, depending on which direction the armies were marching from.

And if you wondered what the occupants of that little land and their God thought of those conquerors, all you'd need to do is turn to the ninth chapter of Zechariah, and there you'd see the parody of might:

*Behold your ruler,*

*victorious and triumphant riding on a donkey*

*and on a baby donkey, at that!*

A God so powerful that this absurdity looks like overwhelming power by contrast with the arms and the armor that usually marched past.

*Rejoice, shout! For you may be prisoners in your own land, but you are prisoners of hope!*

That encouragement has settled down into me, lately. "Joy? Now?" I wonder.

Yes, I think so.

There's an interview I've been listening to, over and over again in the past few months. Krista Tippett interviewed Ross Gay, a professor of English at Indiana University in Bloomington,

back in 2019. But in March she replayed the interview, and it's just beautiful to me. I've listened to it at least four times since I first heard it, and a fifth time, this morning.

Prof. Gay is a poet and essayist who, a few years ago on his 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday decided that he would spend the following year, every day, not journaling really (and you might think it's journaling) but writing. He points out that the word "essay" in the French language means, "to try," and that's what he was doing. He was trying every day, to write about something delightful.

And what's fascinating to me about this project, which eventually became a volume of essays he would entitle, *The Book of Delights*, is that he didn't land in the most familiar delights – baby fingers, comfort food, smells from a barbecue, laughing with friends. No, he was approaching a mindfulness that drew his attention to ordinary things that you might miss: people sharing the burden of a shopping bag, say, or a bag of laundry. As he would put it, very often his attention was drawn to "physical contact that is pleasant, unambiguously pleasant."

Or gestures and gesticulations people would make while conversing, or signs that say one thing but remind him of another, like a "No Loitering" sign he saw in a café:

*I have a fiscal relationship with this establishment, [he writes] which I developed by buying a coffee and which makes me a patron. And so even though I subtly dozed in the late afternoon sun pouring in under the awning, the two bucks spent protects me, at least temporarily, from the designation of loiterer, though the dozing, if done long enough, or ostentatiously enough, or with enough delight, might transgress me over.*

*The Webster's definition of loiter reads thus: 'to stand or wait around idly without apparent purpose,' and 'to travel indolently with frequent pauses.'*

*Among the synonyms for this behavior are linger, loaf, laze, lounge, lollygaggle, dawdle, amble, saunter, meander, putter, dillydally, and mosey. Any one of these words, in the wrong frame of mind, might be considered a critique or, when nouned, an epithet ('Lollygagger!' or 'Loafer!').*

*It occurs to me that laughter and loitering are kissing cousins, as both bespeak an interruption of production and consumption. And it's probably for this reason that I have been among groups of nonwhite people laughing hard who have been shushed — in a Qdoba in Bloomington, in a bar in Fishtown, in the Harvard Club at Harvard. The shushing, perhaps, reminds how threatening to the order are our bodies in nonproductive, nonconsumptive delight. The moment of laughter not only makes consumption impossible (you might choke) ... but if the laugh is hard enough, if the talk is just right, food or drink might fly from your mouth, if not — and this hurts — your nose. And if your body is supposed to be one of the consumables, if it has been, if it is, one of the consumables around which so many ideas of production and consumption have been structured in this country, well, there you go.*

And right there, right there, is something that I have come to love (irreversibly, I think) about Ross Gay, or at least about his perspective. It's the question of what to do in a world, in a time, in a universe in which there is so much abject and unrepentant cruelty (or maybe just ignored and unrepaired relationship). There is a point, I think, at which our mentalities just can't take any more despair.

Believe me, there's a lot of despair, and it isn't going to go away. So you have to figure out how to survive it, and the way to survive it is to allow yourself to feel joy. We need delight, we require tenderness. At some point, you have to raise your awareness to that.

Someone who's kind of like Ross Gay in my mind is Carl Phillips. I haven't heard as much

about him, but again I heard of him in an interview. (I'm like most 50-somethings now, in my consumption of podcasts.)

Carl Phillips is an English professor at Washington University, who – the way he tells it anyway – sounds as though he stumbled across poetry as a possible career when he entered a contest, some years ago, and the judges really liked what he wrote.

His latest collection of poems, *Pale Colors in a Tall Field*, was inspired by a walk in the Shaw Nature Reserve at the Missouri Botanical Garden.

The present historic moment of crisis has caused him to think occasionally about his frequent focus on nature and simple pleasures in his writing:

*I do find moments of wondering [he says], 'What is the point, Carl? What is the point of what you're writing, if you're not writing about this [moment]?' But I have an answer for it, I think, that works for me. I've been talking with a lot of other poet friends of mine — black poets — who have said there has to be a place made, still, for joy.*

In the work of the prophet Zechariah, there are two movements. One is a look back, both temporally and physically. Written in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century before Jesus, the first half of Zechariah resounds with sentiments of the prophet Haggai in the book just before. He addresses the work before the Jewish people of rebuilding their homeland and capital city Jerusalem.

The second half of the book, from which we read today, recognizes the challenge of everything just considered but, with the prophet Malachi whose work follows Zechariah's in order, sees the hard work already done, the challenges that lie ahead, and rejoices in the presence and direction of God.

This second half of the prophecy wonders, How shall we find joy and encouragement? and answers resoundingly, How dare we not when the very Creator of the universe is the source of our every delight?

There is an endless abundance of mercy and tenderness available to us. Not only may we discover and uncover the blessed reality existing all around and in and through us, but we can approach our every day with the knowledge and encouragement that even if we're missing it, it's there.

Even if we're missing God, God is there – full of mercy and steadfast love, as we said at the beginning of this service.

We know that this is true. It undergirds us and lifts us up, despite the heartache and the turmoil and the foolishness and the pain... ready to overcome despair, if we will but allow ourselves some joy.

*Rejoice, you offspring of Zion.  
Shout, you offspring of Jerusalem.  
Your ruler is coming to you,  
looking for all the rest of the world like an idiot,  
but looking to you like victory.*

Right?

Do you understand what I'm saying?

I mean, if you can find encouragement in a military parade that looks like that... Well, how can you go wrong?

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

*We Lift Our Joys and Concerns*

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**, back home after a short stay in 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 whose livelihoods are threatened  
Those lonely and alone  
Peace with justice  
For ourselves, that we may be finding delight  
and showing tenderness, even in the midst of suffering  
For the memory and legacy of **Catherine Twining Moody**  
For **children in quarantine** who long for bike rides and times with friends  
For people who don't think it's important to wear a mask  
for the sake of the health of those around them

*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.

**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; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen.**

These are the gifts of God for the people of God.

Let us celebrate our feast.

*Communion*

*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**

from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*

Go forth in to the world to serve God with gladness; be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people; love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**POSTLUDE**

*Recessional*

Robert J. Hughes

Dr. Leon Burke III, organ

**DISMISSAL**

Diane McLean

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 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.

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