

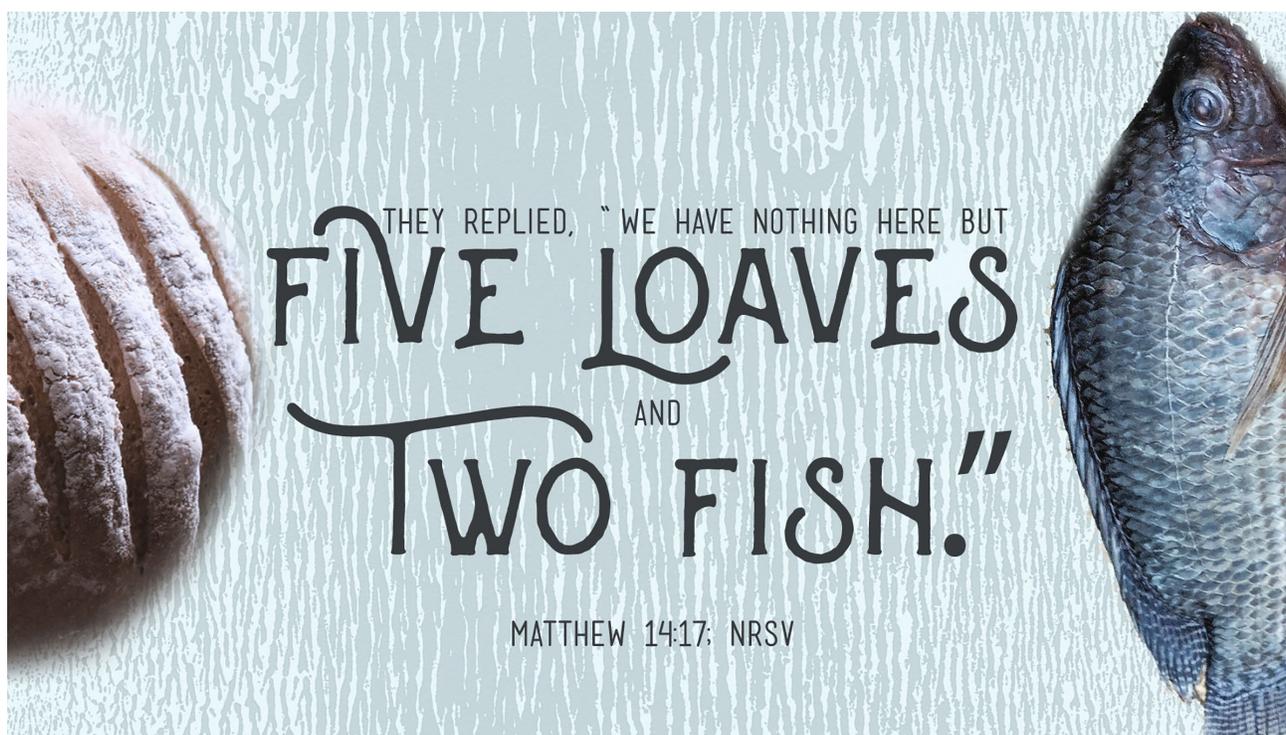
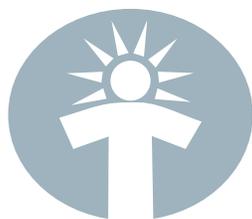
Welcome!

First Congregational Church of Webster Groves
United Church of Christ

Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

August 2, 2020

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost



*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

MUSIC FOR MEDITATION

Intercession
Leon Burke III, organ

O. Scheldrup Oberg

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Andrea Welnick, *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, Andrea Welnick. My family and I have been part of this church since I was a baby. And it is my faith community, my spiritual home, and I am so happy to have you here with us, this morning.

Today is Sunday, August second, 2020, the ninth Sunday after Pentecost.

This service includes a time when we will remember 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. 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

Prelude
Leon Burke III, organ

Louis Marchand

CALL TO WORSHIP (Responsive – Leader; People)

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me."

We have come, to learn and love, sing and play.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry."

We have come, to be filled.

Jesus said, "Let anyone who is thirsty, come to me."

We have come, to be refreshed.

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

RAISING THE COVENANT (Unison)

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 *Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ*
performed by Leon Burke III

Fred Kaan

Let us talents and tongues employ,
reaching out with a shout of joy;
bread is broken, the wine is poured,
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.

Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around, loaves abound! (Repeat refrain)

Christ is able to make us one,
at his table he set the tone,
teaching people to live to bless,
love in word and in deed express.

Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around, loaves abound! (Repeat refrain)

Jesus calls us in, sends us out
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,
gives us love to tell, bread to share;
God (Immanuel) everywhere!

Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around, loaves abound! (Repeat refrain)

PRAYER OF APPROACH (Unison)

Merrimon Boyd

Provider of our daily bread, to you we lift our hearts. We are thankful: for us, there is always enough. But in our world often there is not sufficient food or other resources to go around. Sometimes authorities have been unprepared. Sometimes corruption has broken the chain of distribution. Sometimes otherwise faithful people have not acted. And sometimes people can be ignorant or apathetic.

Change us, we pray. We may not speak for everyone, but we do speak for ourselves. You have shown us what is possible when good people are willing to feed overwhelming numbers of hungry people. Your power is there, so ours can be too. Show us again what abundance is possible, most gracious God, and let us show you; in Christ's name. Amen.

NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLY *My Loaves and Fishes* Rev. David Denoon, *Pastor*

[The Pastor interacts with the children about an olive wood carved set of a basket with two fishes and five loaves in it, which someone presented to him after their trip to the Holy Land. The carvings recall

the story of the Feeding of 5,000 Families by Jesus, one of the few stories told in all four gospels. Taken as a miracle, the story causes us to wonder at the power of Jesus, but in Matthew's telling of the story Jesus is showing the disciples how to be resourceful and how to provide for needs even in the face of overwhelming odds against them. This story reminds us that our resourcefulness in the service of others will reveal God's bountiful providence and provision, no matter the circumstances in which we may find ourselves.]

THE WORD SHARED

Andrea Welnick

From the Gospels

Matthew 14:13-21

The Inclusive Bible

A reading from the gospel according to Matthew, the fourteenth chapter. The version from which I am reading is *The Inclusive Bible*, by Priests for Equality:

¹³ When Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been executed by Herod, he left Nazareth by boat and went to a deserted place to be alone. The crowds heard of this and followed him from their towns on foot. ¹⁴ When Jesus disembarked and saw the vast throng, his heart was moved with pity, and he healed their sick.

¹⁵ As evening drew on, the disciples approached Jesus and said, "This is a deserted place, and it is already late. Dismiss the crowds so they can go to the villages and buy some food for themselves."

¹⁶ Jesus said to them: "There is no need for them to disperse. Give them something to eat yourselves."

¹⁷ "We have nothing here," they replied, "but five loaves and a couple of fish."

¹⁸ "Bring them here," Jesus said.

¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit on the grass. Taking the five loaves and two fish, Jesus looked up to the sky, blessed the food, broke it, and gave it to the disciples, who in turn gave it to the people.

²⁰ About five thousand families were fed.

Response.

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

People: Thanks be to God.

MESSAGE OF THE DAY "What I Believed on My Vacation"

Rev. Denoon

Since the middle of March, we've been meeting online for worship as a response to the health crisis brought on by the coronavirus. And it hasn't just been us. Churches all over the planet have taken advantage of internet media in order to gather while scattered.

This has guided all of us into a new age for being the church and provided us an opportunity to see how others are praising God all over the world. I personally

have worshiped or observed the worship of faith communities in Illinois, Virginia, Washington, DC, Ohio, Hawai'i, and Ghana. Our worship has been attended by people from all over as well.

So, when the time came for me to take a vacation, and I despaired that there would be no worship hosted by my church as a result, it occurred to me that we might take advantage of others' worship services. And when I suggested to Moderator Mark Edwards that church members be directed to other nearby churches' worship, our Moderator imagined that it might be good for us to look a bit farther afield. Thus, for live worship you directed to the Old Sloop Congregation in Rockford, Massachusetts, and for recorded worship to the churches of former student ministers.

I've heard from many of you about the experience, and everyone concurs that this was a very satisfying decision. Pastor Derek van Gulden of First Congregational Rockport and his Congregation offered wonderful spiritual hospitality. And Pastors Christopher Czarnecki and Joanna D'Agostino of the First United Protestant Church of Hilo and Lakewood Congregational Church all welcomed us warmly. It was refreshing to observe and participate in worship that was at one and the same time traditional to us and a little bit foreign.

We heard familiar Bible passages expounded upon. Pastor Chris is following the lectionary cycle through the Hebrew Scriptures, and peering at the life of Jacob through a modern lens. Pastors Joanna and Derek, like me, have been considering the New Testament series of parables of growth from the gospel according to Matthew.

This week's passage immediately follows the parables of growth in Matthew and reveals to us something of where Matthew was going with those parables. Jesus withdraws from the crowd, perhaps grieving the murder of his own spiritual director John the Baptist by government authorities in Jerusalem. But they will not leave him alone.

Next comes a series of unexpectedly merciful acts on Jesus' part. He lets the people come near, even in his isolated place – thousands upon thousands of people crowding him when he had sought to be alone. And when the disciples try to compel him to send them away, for the people's own sakes because of the evident lack of provisions to feed them, Jesus says, "No, you feed them here."

When the disciples complain that there isn't going to be enough to go around, Jesus shows mercy not only toward the throng but toward the disciples. He seats them and then shows the disciples how to feed five thousand families with five loaves of bread and two fish. And just in case you missed that he was doing this as a way of reminding the disciples that God will provide, Matthew points out (along with all the gospel-writers, because all of them tell this story) that the leftovers amount to *twelve* baskets full.

The parables of the sower, the wheat and the weeds, and yeast in the loaf, all

come to this – the Word of God always produces abundantly.

And as I listened to the sermons of the three pastors I mentioned over the past couple of weeks, I found myself with some new insights about the passages upon which they preached. Or else I had some familiar insights refreshed. And I'm thinking that you did, too.

So, in the spirit of sharing the abundance of God's Word, I want to ask you what you believed on my vacation. Phrase a bit better perhaps, I'd love to hear from you new or refreshed insights you gained – from messages, from settings in which the messages were delivered, from other elements of services...

And right now, I want to try something a little different – to make this a bit of a conversation. If you have an insight you'd like to share briefly, please open up your mic at home or type a response into the Chat feature. What did you experience in those other settings that was new or refreshed for you, either in the words you heard or the settings you experienced? This isn't a time for critique; it's a time for wonder. What happened, special for you, in worship these past couple of weeks? (We'll do this for a few minutes, and then I'll wrap us up.)

Jacquie Bryant

Just some quick observations. First of all, it was delightful to see the inside of the New England Congregational church. I was a member of a church there for 35 years, and the white enamel and the walnut was very comforting to see, although I wouldn't give up our stained glass windows. And then the other thing I observed was, in New England they have "trespasses," in Florida they have "debts," but here we have "sins." And as I went from place to place, it took me years to get used to the new version of the Lord's Prayer.

But I wanted to observe that Pastor Derek was talking about the Wheat and the Chafe (Weeds). And he told the story about his wife, after being married for years with him, faced the fact that she was a gay person. And they separated, divorced over time, and in the process the Pastor was going to his daughter's church to comfort her (they still had a loving relationship).

When he decided to go to the church where he'd belonged to for many years, at the doorstep he was stopped because his ex-wife was gay, and they did not approve. Not only was she not welcome there, but he was not welcome as well. And I was struck by the fact that these people understood that *they* were the Wheat, and he and she were the Chafe.

And the second thing that dawned on me was, a few weeks ago, John Lewis told the story about how someone who had beaten him when they were both young came to speak to him. And the man was so repentant and John Lewis, of course *being John Lewis*, forgave him. And they spent some time talking about their youth and what was going on at the time.

And I'm thinking, I have often thought, "Why didn't they just pull the weeds

while they were at it?” and the reason is, this man who repented much later in his life shows that we never know who’s the Wheat and who’s the Chafe. I always have a flower garden, and we have lots of birds. Every year when the weeds come along, I am very careful not to pull the weeds until I see if they will produce flowers, with the help of the birds, of course.

Thank you, whoever’s idea this was, it was a wonderful experience.

Marilyn Davis

I attended all three services, that Sunday (the Wheat and the Chaff). I was struck by the difference of the interpretation of the pastors. First, Chris’s (Rev. Czarnecki of the First United Protestant Church of Hilo, Hawai’i) was not “the Wheat and the Chaff;” his was about Jacob in Genesis. But Joanna’s (Rev. D’Agostino of Lakewood Congregational Church in Lakewood, Ohio) and Derek’s (Rev. Van Gulden of the First Congregational Church of Rockport, Massachusetts; “the Old Sloop”) was. I was struck by the difference of the approach that they took, because Derek focused on the seeds and on what grew up from the seeds and being careful, as Jacquie said, not to pull those weeds too quickly because they may, in fact, turn out to be beautiful, flowering plants at some point. Joanna’s take was totally different: her take was to focus on the Sower and how the Sower threw (abundantly) the seeds everywhere, and that it was important for us to share our bounty and our seeds, all over the world. What comes up comes up. But we can’t say, “I’m only going to serve here,” or “I’m only going to serve there,” but we have to be willing to serve everywhere. So, that was the difference.

What I really liked about Chris’s was his welcome to us with the lei that he put on the altar for us. I thought that was great. I liked his story about Jacob, too, and how he focused on Jacob not being a great guy at all but still being able to fulfill God’s promise for him.

Andrea Welnick

I never remember sermons. I just don’t. However. When I was listening to Joanna, the thing that has stuck and continues to stick, as we continue to stick in this pandemic, was her idea of looking at the pandemic as a parable... and what I can be learning from the pandemic as it goes on and on, and I feel like I keep hitting my head against a brick wall. There is probably more for me to know, there is probably more for me to learn, there are probably lots of ways to grow, even though it feels like this is not a growing season. So, when my thoughts dip toward, “Augh! Another day!” now I am more inclined to think, *What is this part of? What is the bigger story? What is the growth that, with God’s grace, we get at the end?*

Elston McCowan

[Reported in a text message that he and his wife enjoyed the service from the former student minister in Hawai’i.]

Leon Burke

(The Pastor prompts the Music Director, observing that he and the music director of the Old Sloop seem to have developed “a mutual admiration society.”) Oh, yes, as it turns out, he went to Oberlin Conservatory as well, and we know a lot of the same people in the Boston area from all my connections there. And it seemed like the more we talked, the more people we knew. And the more people we knew, the better friends we were. And so I’m looking forward to going to that Rockport church, sometime when I’m in the Boston area. He even knew my old roommate who is the head rabbi at Marblehead, further up the coast, just a little bit north of Salem! These guys get around: it was really nice, really very nice, and I’m looking forward to a long relationship with Pastor Derek and his staff. Thank you.

I’ve already said, I was really impressed with the music that all of us were able to do together, and to see how other churches have adapted in this time. I know that, as we’ve talked about the challenges we’ve faced, we’ve been intimidated by this, but I’ve been wondering about how it is (as I mentioned three weeks ago in my sermon then) that when the Word of God goes out, it always returned with abundance.

Some might have thought when we began that there wasn’t much for the people in the virtual pews to say or to thing. But consider the abundance of the Word as it came to us and filled us up, over these last couple of weeks, to hear familiar voices and not-so-familiar voices lifting up the abundance of God’s provision and wisdom.

The “miracle” of the loaves and fishes, the feeding of five thousand families with what appeared to be just a little, and the reaping afterwards of leftovers still – a dozen baskets full! – that abundance continues wherever God’s Word is found or sown or kneaded out, maybe even when we hardly expected it.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

SHARING OUR BOUNTY (REPAIRING THE WORLD)

Andrea Welnick

The purpose of worship is not only to praise God for the grace we have received, and continue to receive, for our daily living, but to remind us – as we have been reminded this morning – of the bounty of God. This reminding is intended to evoke a response from the participants in the worship service, a commitment, an offering of themselves.

So, here is our invitation to you, to respond. While this health crisis continues, until a vaccine is found, we won’t be passing plates or collecting in person. If you are able financially, and you would like to support First Church with a monetary donation, 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 then to our “Donate” page.

Our giving spreads the bounty we have received and supports the ministries of our church that extend into the world for the sake of reconciling people, repairing a damaged creation, and honoring our God – Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (Unison)

Caring God, we find you not remote but close at hand. As so many times you have given food to hungry people, even as you have fed us well, bless and use these gifts so that more yet may be sustained by your provision; in Jesus’ name. Amen.

RITUAL FOR CHRIST’S TABLE Led by the Pastor, Merrimon Boyd, and Andrea Welnick

Invitation

Jesus said: I am the bread of life. You who come to me shall not hunger; you who believe in me shall never thirst.

In company with all who hunger for spiritual food, we come to this table to know the risen Christ in the sharing of life-giving bread.

We Lift Our Joys and Concerns

Let us remember those people and situations for whom we are praying today:
Joyce Berger, who is in the process of moving to a new residence, at Cape Albeon

The Rev. Dr. **Paul Davis**, back home after a short stay in hospital

Margaret Gustafson, cancer-free, thankful and cautious

Carol McCoy, in need of prayerful support in the aftermath of a stroke

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 know and share **the genuine bounty of your Word and your love**

Traveling mercies for **Elston & Joyce McCowan**,
returning today from their grandson’s first birthday celebration in Tennessee

For church members who are missing the outreach and sharing of **the Brown Baggers**

who usually would have prepared meals today for Gateway 180 clients

All the **first responders** in this time of crisis,
thanksgiving for their courage and concern for their safety

Communion Prayer

Eternal God who created the heavens and the earth, who has given breath to every living thing, we thank you for all the gifts of creation and for the gift of life itself. We thank you for making us in your own image, for forgiving us when we act as though you have no claim on us, and for keeping us in your steadfast care.

We rejoice in Jesus Christ, the only one eternally begotten by you, who was born of your servant Mary and shared the joys and sorrows of life as we know it.

We remember Christ's death, we celebrate Christ's resurrection, and, in the beloved community of your church, we await Christ's return at the end of history.

We take courage from the abiding presence of your Holy Spirit in our midst.

We offer you our praise for women, men, and children of faith in every age who stand as witnesses to your love and justice. With all the prophets, martyrs, and saints, and all the company of heaven we glorify you:

Holy, holy, holy God of love and majesty, the whole universe speaks of your glory, O God most high. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God! Hosanna in the highest!

We remember that on the night of betrayal and desertion, Jesus took bread, gave you thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to the disciples, saying: "This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, Jesus also took the cup after supper, saying: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Amen. Come, Christ Jesus!

Gracious God, we ask you to bless this bread and cup and all of us with the outpouring of your Holy Spirit. Through this meal, make us the body of Christ the Church, your servant people, that we may by your word offer your bread of life to all the world.

Amen. Come, Holy Spirit!

Prayer of Our Savior

Our Father, who art in heaven: hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; they 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.

Communion

Earth and heaven are one in this meal: these are the gifts of God for the people of God. Let us share together in the feast.

Worshippers partake of bread and cup.

Prayer after Communion (Unison)

Eternal God, you have called your people from all over the world to be fed as those at the lakeside were by Jesus Christ. We thank you for Christ's abundant presence among us even though we are apart. By the power of your Holy Spirit, keep us faithful to your will. God be with us to the streets, in our homes, and wherever we find labor and leisure that even scattered, we may be the servant Church of the servant Christ, in whose name we rejoice to pray. Amen.

BENEDICTION

Jesus the Christ Says

Pakistani Christian hymn

Jesus the Christ says, I am the bread.

The bread of life for the world am I. (Repeat twice more.)

Jesus the Christ says, I am the bread.

The bread of life for the world am I.

Know Christ's abundance and God's Spirit's presence with and among you, wherever you go. Go in peace. Amen.

POSTLUDE

Trumpet Voluntary

John Stanley

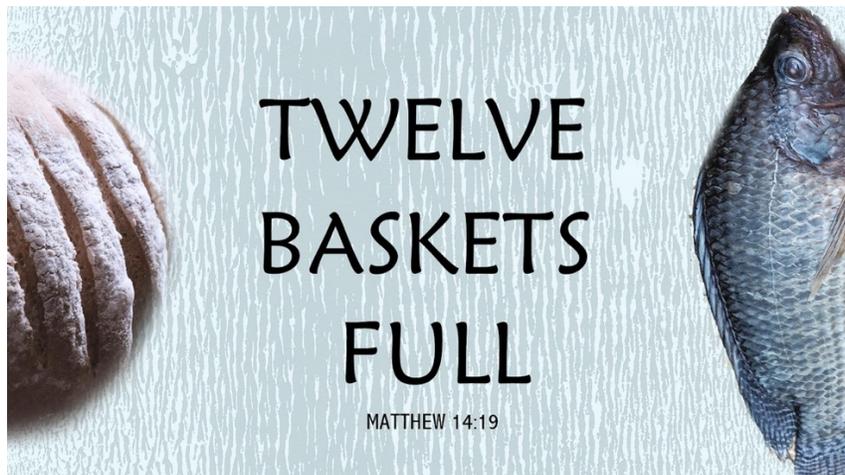
Leon Burke III, organ

DISMISSAL

Andrea Welnick

That's our worship for this Sunday at First Church. Thanks to all of you who took part, this morning, by participating in the Message of the Day. Thanks also to Leon Burke, Merrimon Boyd, Gwen Denoon (PowerPoint presenter), and Ian Didriksen (recording engineer) who all made this morning's worship possible. Finally, thanks to you who came to worship and share this time with us, today.

Our worship has ended. Let our service begin.





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