

Welcome!

First Congregational Church of Webster Groves
United Church of Christ

Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

October 4, 2020

Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost
World Communion 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

And the table will be wide. And the welcome will be wide.

And the arms will open wide to gather us in.

And our hearts will open wide to receive.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Marilyn Davis, *Announcer*

Hello and welcome to this time of 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 am the announcer for this morning.

This is worship for Sunday, October 4th, 2020, the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost. Today we celebrate Worldwide Communion Sunday with churches around the globe.

This morning's worship has been prepared by the Rev. Jan Barnes and our Music Director Leon Burke, our student ministers Merrimon Boyd and Elston McCowan and volunteer recording engineers.

To prepare for worship, I invite you to center yourself by breathing deeply and then exhaling, planting your feet, that you might be in touch with God's created space. Close your eyes and greet God's spirit here and now, knowing that spirit is over all of us, in every place and time.

Let our worship begin.

PRELUDE

Adagio from the Sixth Sonata

A. Guilment

CALL TO WORSHIP (Responsive)

L: Throughout God's world this day Christian churches are celebrating the Eucharist as one family dining together in one room under one roof.

P: Our sisters and brothers in Africa, Europe, Central America, Asia and in all lands and countries join us in lifting the bread of life and the cup of salvation.

L: Neither powers nor principalities shall stop us nor deter our purpose, our sense of mission, or our challenge to go forth as disciples into every town, village, and crossroad proclaiming the love of Christ for all creation.

P: In Christ's love there is no East, no West, no North, no South, but only one Spirit of hope, love and peace for all.

L: Let us praise Christ! May we be empowered to be agents of hope and peace in a time of uncertainty and strife.

P: The bread and wine that we will share are not for us alone but are symbols of a universal message that surpasses the might of missiles and the walls of oppression.

L: May Christ bless the worldwide communion of the church this day!

All: Praise be to Christ our Creator, Redeemer, and Savior! Amen

RAISING THE COVENANT

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.

OPENING HYMN

"Sing a New World Into Being"

Words, Mary Louise Bringle

(to the tune of Ode to Joy – Ludwig von Beethoven)

**Sing a new world into being, sound a bold and hopeful theme.
Find a tune for silent yearnings, lend your voice and dare to dream.
Dream a church where all who worship find their lives and loves belong.
Sing a new world into being, sing as Christ inspires your song.**

**Sing a new world into being, where each gender, class and race
Brings its rainbow gifts and colors to God's limitless embrace.
Where the lines that once divided form instead the ties that bind.
Sing a new world into being, risk transforming heart and mind.**

**Sing a new world into being, where the homeless find a home.
Where no children ever hunger, but are filled with God's shalom.
Where all people work for justice, where all hate and vengeance cease.
Sing a new world into being raise the harmony. Raise the harmonies of peace.**

PRAYER OF APPROACH

Merrimon Boyd, *Student Minister*

God, you are the source of our life. Gather us now together, we pray. Form us into a holy community of your own people. Mold us by the breath of your holy spirit. Reveal in this corporate body the face of your anointed Christ. Amen

NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLY – For Grown-ups, Too

Rev. Janice Barnes, *Pastor*

How Big is a Bigger Table?

Think about this for a minute...how many tables do you have in your house? Can we name some of them? Lets see. A coffee table to set our snacks on while we watch TV. A Kitchen table to roll out pie dough, do crafts, eat breakfast in the morning. Maybe a dining room table where we might gather for dinner and talk about our day, or for holidays and happy times like birthdays and Thanksgiving. End tables where we can stack our books, bedside tables for laying aside the things we want to be able to find first thing in the morning. There are lots of kinds of table, huh? And if your house is like my house most of them have stuff piled up on them...Our most special table though is our dining room table that once belonged to Roger's parents. It has special boards that can make it very, very big, bigger than our whole dining room. The reason for that was that his family had lots of cousins and friends and family, grandchildren,...all kinds of people were invited to come to sit at the table and share the good food his mother cooked for them. They came to sit around that table to talk to one another, maybe argue a bit, laugh at his mother's stories, share the things that were important to them, tell stories and just be together. No matter how many people were around the table, no matter how many of us there were, there always seemed to be enough. Enough food, enough seats, enough time, enough love, enough...the table always seemed to get bigger, as big as we needed it to be. So here is what I think we need to think about...there are people who don't have a table where they are welcomed, who don't have enough of much of anything, who because of how they look or dress or sound get pushed away from every table. Our job is to make the table, any table, our table or the church's table bigger so there are places for everyone who needs one to have a place. When worship is finished today and we gather together for a special Lord's Supper, let's make sure there is a place, and juice, and bread for anyone and everyone who comes wanting a seat at our table.

THE WORD SHARED

From the Gospels Matthew 21: 33-46

33-46: Here is a story: Listen closely. There was once a man, a wealthy farmer, who planted a vineyard. He fenced it, dug a winepress, put up a watchtower, then turned it over to the farmhands and went off on a trip. When it was time to harvest the grapes, he sent his servants back to collect his profits. The farmhands grabbed the first servant and beat him up. The next one they murdered. They threw stones at the third one but he got away. The owner tried again, sending more servants. They got the same treatment. The owner was at the end of

his rope. He decided to send his son. “Surely,” he thought, “they will respect my son.” But when the farmhands saw the son arrive, they rubbed their hands in greed, ‘This is the heir! Let’s kill him and have it all for ourselves.’ They grabbed him, threw him out, and killed him. “Now, when the owner of the vineyard arrives home from his trip, what do you think he will do to the farmhands?” “He’ll kill them—a rotten bunch, and good riddance,” they answered. “Then he’ll assign the vineyard to farmhands who will hand over the profits when it’s time.” Jesus said “Right—and you can read it for yourselves in your Bibles:

The stone the masons threw out is now the cornerstone.

This is God’s work; we rub our eyes, we can hardly believe it!

“This is the way it is with you. God’s kingdom will be taken back from you and handed over to a people who will live out a kingdom life. Whoever stumbles on this Stone gets shattered; whoever the Stone falls on gets smashed.” When the religious leaders heard this story, they knew it was aimed at them. They wanted to arrest Jesus and put him in jail, but, intimidated by public opinion, they held back. Most people held him to be a prophet of God.

Response

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the people,

Thanks be to God!

MESSAGE FOR THE MORNING

The Three B’s

Rev. Barnes

Good morning First Church! It is a joy and a pleasure and a gift to be worshipping and preaching this day, although it is a bit different than what I am used to! May God pour God’s blessing on our work.

My message for today is The Three B’s. Pretty much things that you already know about but maybe we can dig a little deeper. First...Bullies. Most of us have encountered bullies at times in our lives and it could be that we have been a bully ourselves at some time in our lives. I hate to think it, but it could be true, actually I know it is true having wrangled with them, that there are still bullies among us. The second B is Bibles. Bibles that are everywhere in churches, homes, Great Grandma’s treasure chest...without which many of us wouldn’t have a family history. The unfortunate thing is that Bibles are often the tools Bullies use to control and wound others. The third B is Bullhorns. Bullhorns, both literally and figuratively can be used by people to overwhelm those with whom they disagree, theologically, politically or any other way. They believe that if you can raise the decibel levels you are sure to win the argument!

These three “B’s” can make us call a halt to our work or doubt our call because of the unease they can make us feel deep down inside. Bullies, Bibles and Bullhorns can bring us to face our fears so that our knees shake. They can cause physical and spiritual bruises. Cruel words, twisted theology and abuse can cause bruises that take a long while to heal. And sometimes they bring on a battle weariness, even a compassion fatigue that wraps itself around us. If we let them, these three B’s can and do keep us from building a bigger table... A bigger table? A table that we as a church, as a faith family, are called to build. It is a family table that allows us to engage in radical hospitality, total authenticity, true diversity and an agenda-free community.

At the very heart of the bigger table is this... It is about tangibly living in a way that responds to what we believe about our own belovedness and the belovedness of those we live alongside. My friends, we are beloved and those alongside us, whether we know them really, or agree with them they are beloved as well. It is about knowing and being known and trying to see a living, real Jesus in our midst and trusting God with whatever happens while we walk that road. There is no battle to win, no ground to protect, no persuading to do. There is simply this: a real-time, relational, intentional communion, community with others where each and everyone may and can be redeemed. Picture the Sermon on the Mount...there is where you can find a bigger table. In Jesus there is the greatest model of compassion and kindness that ever journeyed through this creation. And knowing that should influence how we as followers of Christ interact with people we disagree with. Or we will be as clanging cymbals,

just loud, loveless noise. We have to live without the bullhorn and find a quiet place of civility...as Jesus did so many times with so many people. Today especially, we have to grab onto the idea of universal family or kinship with all people created in the image of God, all creations of the same Creator, all equally flawed, all equally worthy of compassion. Our story is that every person is the neighbor we are called to love as ourselves.

The bigger table allows for the kind of intimacy that Jesus shared with people, the kind that was and is transformational. We can't scream our love for others from across the road with a bullhorn, or shout the words of scripture from a pulpit or write deep and maybe wise dissertations. Twitter and Facebook and TikTok, no matter how funny, or serious, or attention getting is not going to forge the relationships that can happen when we are willing to sit across from people who believe differently than we believe, willing to get close enough and stay long enough to see both their unique humanity and their divinity. This is how we love people well, put flesh on their faith, how we follow so close behind Rabbi Jesus that we are covered in his dust. Jesus' call to embrace love isn't merely a surface, sugary platitude. It is the most difficult, radical, time-consuming work of reflecting Christ in the world in which we live. So don't be a bully, don't chuck a hard cover Bible at someone's head and for goodness sake, we don't need a bullhorn to prove our deep conviction. Just get the hammer and saw and build a bigger table!

WE SHARE OUR BLESSINGS WITH OTHERS

As the days become cooler and the leaves of summer begin to wear their fall colors, we are reminded of the many ways God interacts with the world in order to meet its many needs. The cycle of life goes on and we are among the actors. But more importantly, we are stewards and caretaker of the earth because we are made in God's image. Let us now share in that responsibility as we set aside a portion of our wealth to fulfill our task as stewards of the earth. This is your invitation to support the ministries of our church, ministries of outreach and witness, of care and compassion. While the health crisis continues, we invite you if you are able financially, and you would like to support First Church with a monetary donation please send a check to

First Congregational Church
10 West Lockwood Ave.
Webster Groves, MO 63119

Or go to our website—FirstChurchWG.Org-and to our Donate page.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

O gracious God, bless our offering that it may reach and touch those who hunger, who hurt, who seek new hope. As part of the global village, we care about all of our sisters and brothers. We pray for world peace, for liberty to those oppressed, for joy to those who are weary. In honor of our Sovereign God, Amen.

PREPARING FOR PRAYER

Spirit of the Living God
(Phil Shoulberg, soloist)

New Century Hymnal

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

We Lift Our Joys and Concerns

Let us remember those people and situations for whom we are praying today
our residents in assisted living — Joyce, Paul, Sharon, Bob and Carol
people we love who are living with cancer — especially Bob, Jaymie, and Peter
Becky and David, and all those the world regards as disabled
Pastor Dave as he recovers from surgery and his family
Martin's brother Bill, who broke his leg
all those who are living with dementia; and their caregivers
peace with justice

this faith community, as we seek new staff to lead our ministries for children and youth
forgiveness for those who do us wrong
people in the Western states fleeing fires

Prayer of the Morning

Merrimon Boyd

Gracious God, we come together as Christians from all over the world to share in the bounty of your table. We gather to share the cup of life to share in the bounty of your table. We will gather to share the cup of life and the bread that provides strength for our journey. We gather speaking many languages and worshiping you in ways unique to our culture and heritage. But in our diversity, there is unity. No where else, Loving God, are we made more aware of how interconnected we really are, than at your table. The bread and the cup, symbols of Christ's broken body, speak to us of the broken bodies in the world today which cry out for the healing power of your spirit. And so we humbly offer to you our lives and our spirits, just as we are, knowing that you can use our brokenness to bring about healing and wholeness in your name.

On this Worldwide Communion Sunday, we lift our prayers to you, knowing that you already hear the yearning of our hearts. We lift prayers for our global neighbors, especially those persons living in fear or poverty, and for those who have lost hope. Give us the courage to recognize and name the pain of our global neighbors and to reach out where we can. In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayers.

We lift prayers for our earth that we all share, and that you have entrusted to us to nurture and care for. Enable us to use our power wisely as our earth is reaching to point of being unable to feed its people and because land is being destroyed by greed, careless development, and erosion. In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayers.

We lift prayers for those close to us, some of whom we name in our hearts...the sick, the addicted, the abused, the imprisoned, the depressed, and those grieving some loss in their life. May they be comforted and fed by the bread and cup of new life. In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayers.

We lift prayers for ourselves and for our society that puts so much worth on material wealth and possessions. Free us so that we can learn to receive and give with equal joy. In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayers.

Pour out your Spirit upon all the nations of the earth and upon all whom you have named and claimed as your own in Christ's name. For all the blessings in our lives and for your promise to always be with us, we lift our prayers of praise and thanksgiving, saying together as one body the prayer Christ taught his disciples...

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; 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

BENEDICTION

May the God of Life be your guide on the road everyday,
Be your refuge in times of uncertainty,
And be your rest in times of fatigue.
May the God of Life strengthen you when you feel sad
And hug you when you feel alone.
May the God of Life who loves you and knows you
Cover you with the tenderness of a Mother,
Forever.
Amen (Argentina)

POSTLUDE

Marche Triomphale

T. Dubois

DISMISSAL

Marilyn Davis

Our worship for this Sunday has come to its end. Please, stay with us for our sacrament of Communion and then our Virtual Coffee Fellowship on Zoom.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION (Responsive)

L: We rejoice in the God of life, who gives us bread; the fruit of the earth worked with human hands, and who makes it into the bread of life.

P: We rejoice in the God of life who gives us wine; the fruit of the vine tended with daily care, and puts the flavor of the new world into it.

L: As the wheat and the grapes are joined on this table in bread and wine—into a visual symbol for us—

P: May we join together as a visual symbol for the entire world. (Germany)

RECONCILIATION: (Unison)

I commit, God, to searching for:

The healing of my relationship with you.

The healing of my relationship with myself.

The healing of my relationship with others.

The healing of my relationship with all your creation.

Shalom (Chile)

ASSURANCE OF GRACE:

Forgiveness is forgetting bad things, remembering good things. Forgiveness is accepting God's love. (China)

NAMING OF COUNTRIES

L: In this World Communion, we pray for these particular countries.

(Please respond by unmuting and naming countries you may have been praying for this week or a country that comes to mind at this moment.)

WORDS OF REMEMBERING

Remember, the Lord, the friend of sinners, who were the oppressed, the estranged, the weak, the sick, widow, orphans.

Remember, the Lord, the one disliking of the common structure and power.

Remember, the Lord, the one sharing of daily food in life.

Remember, the Lord, the one liberating from a dictator.

We remember thy suffering. O Lord, at thy Last Supper. (Korea)

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION:

You emptied yourself completely keeping nothing for yourself. You have given yourself to us as bread that sustains us and as wine that consoles us. You are Light and Truth. You are the Way and the Hope. You are love. Grow in us. (Guatemala)

SHARING OF THE ELEMENTS

The ears of wheat are broken and scattered on the hillside to grow. Gathered, they are broken again and scattered throughout the city to make bread. The bread is scattered to each home and broken to make nourishment. Broken and scattered, broken and scattered, and some becomes Christ's body broken for us as we are people of God scattered through the city and, perhaps, broken to give nourishment to others. (South Africa)

We receive this bread, broken, scattered and made whole. Take and eat.

We drink this cup, thirsty, longing, willing to be poured. Take and drink.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (Unison)

We give you thanks O Lord, for all food that has arrived at our table from your generosity. Bless the people who have made it possible, from the cultivation of the earth until it arrived to us. Give bread to those who are hungry, and to those who have bread give us hunger for you. Amen (Mexico)

CLOSING

Having eaten of the feast, let us go in peace, prepared to build a bigger table at which all may have a seat.



10 West Lockwood Avenue
Webster Groves, MO 63119
314-962-0475
www.FirstChurchWG.org

Contact Information

Moderator
Mark Edwards
marke@wustl.edu

Pastor
Rev. David A. Denoon
DDenoon@FirstChurchWG.org

Office Administrator
Debbie Tolstoi
Admin@FirstChurchWG.org

Director of Music & Organist
Dr. Leon Burke
Leon.Burke@FirstChurchWG.org

Facilities Manager
Chip Isringhaus
cti1234@FirstChurchWG.org

Custodian
Darrell Lakies

Assistant Custodian
Gus McLean

Director, Center for Counseling & Healing
Rev. Linda E. Smith, BCRN, HTCP/I
lesrhs@sbcglobal.net

Director of MICA
Rev. Cliff Aerie
cliff.aerie@gmail.com

Student Minister
Merrimon Boyd
merrimon.boyd@gmail.com

Student Minister
Elston McCowan
emccowan@eden.edu

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