



Welcome!

First Congregational Church
of Webster Groves
United Church of Christ

Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.

February 14, 2021

**Solemnity of the Transfiguration
Science & Technology Sunday (UCC)
Racial Justice Sunday (UCC).**

Presidents Day Weekend. Valentines Day



**“It is good
for us to
be here.”**

MARK 9:5

*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, r
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

Herb Niemeyer, *Announcer*

Hello 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.

This is our worship for Sunday, February fourteenth, 2021. Today, we observe the solemnity of the Transfiguration. It's Racial Justice Sunday in the UCC, as well as Science and Technology Sunday. This is also the weekend of Presidents Day, and it's Scouting Sunday, not to mention Valentines Day. It's a day of days.

I'm your announcer, Herb Niemeyer. I am joined in leading worship, by Pastor Dave Denoon, Pastoral Assistant Halley Kim, members of Scout Troops 301B and 301G, and Music Director Leon Burke the third.

This service includes spoken responses, and songs to sing. To participate with us, you are encouraged to download a copy of this morning's order of worship from our website – First Church W G dot org.

To prepare for worship, I invite you to center yourself by taking a deep breath and exhaling, close your eyes and greet God's Spirit here with me and there with you.

Our worship begins with the tolling of the bell and lighting of the candles.

TOLLING THE BELL

LIGHTING THE CANDLES

Philip O'Halloran, *Troop 301B*

PRELUDE

Adoration

Florence Price

CALL TO WORSHIP (Responsive – Leader; People)

Herb Niemeyer

from Psalm 50

Please join me responsively, in the Call to Worship:

The mighty one, God most holy, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

Our God comes and does not keep silence, with a devouring fire before and a mighty tempest all around.

God calls to the skies above and to the earth below, "Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me!"

The heavens declare with us the righteous judgment of our God.

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*The Vast Expanse of Time and Space*

Barbara Hamm

The vast expanse of time and space outruns the reach of human mind.
Not years, but eons, mark this place, this earth, the home of humankind.
What quantum particles emerged in light years far beyond our ken?
What strands of matter first converged, in time becoming rock and wren?

What pulsing forces formed the stars and led the fiery cosmic dance?
Then earth, and Saturn, Venus, Mars — what plucked them out of random chance?
What power brought forth this universe among the many that could be,
Caused form and substance to disperse, evolving into you and me?

New universes may appear to which my life and death give birth.
The self-same Power that brought me here gives life to all and gives it worth.
Though other words and wonders wait, though time and space may cease to be,
God's love for me will not abate, for it enfolds eternity!

PRAYER OF APPROACH (Unison)Brendan Yn, *Troop 301B*

O Holy One, on mountaintops and valley floors you reveal to us the light of your love. Our hearts' desire is to bask in the glory of the divine presence; with each encounter we are changed and transformed. Draw us nearer, that we might receive a double portion of your Holy Spirit. Help us, O holy One, to live our lives as a reflection of your glory. May we walk among our brothers and sisters as a blessing, bearing light into dark places, bearing hope to displace despair, and bearing love that casts out hate. Our world is hurting and we need the followers of Jesus to follow more closely. Maybe then we will hear your voice speaking to us and saying, ... "listen to my Child, the Beloved!" Amen.

NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLYHalley Kim, *Pastoral Assistant***THE WORD SHARED***From the Prophets*

2 Kings 2:1-12

NRSV

Read by Rev. David Denoon, *Pastor*

Now when Yahweh was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; for Yahweh has sent me as far as Bethel.”

But Elisha said, “As Yahweh lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel.

The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today Yahweh will take your master away from you?” And he said, “Yes, I know; keep silent.”

Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here; for Yahweh has sent me to Jericho.”

But he said, “As Yahweh lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.”

So they came to Jericho, and the company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today Yahweh will take your master away from you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know; be silent.”

Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; for Yahweh has sent me to the Jordan.”

But he said, “As Yahweh lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.”

So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.”

Elisha said, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.”

He responded, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.”

As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

From the Gospels

Mark 9:2-9

NRSV

Read by Thérèse Schuster, *Troop 301G*

Six days [after Peter recognized Jesus to be the Messiah], Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.

And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.)

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Human One had risen from the dead.

Response.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the people.

Thanks be to God.

ANTHEM

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

Traditional

MESSAGE OF THE DAY

“Bound for Greatness”

Rev. Denoon

I started off, planning for this message to have the title, *Bound for Greatness*, and I have to tell you – Transfiguration or no – I think I may have overshot the mark a bit. You won’t hear me use that phrase again, but I invite you to consider whether that (or another title) is appropriate about what I have to say.

[Insert preferred title, here]

We have a couple of readings today that draw our attention to moments that might seem ordinary but which, before they are complete, guided the participants in them to recognize how extraordinary those moments were.

In the first case, the prophet Elisha is traveling with Elijah on the elder prophet’s final speaking tour. At each venue, those whom Elijah has been addressing go to Elisha and offer him the advice that The Boss doesn’t look so good. And at each venue, Elisha’s response is, “I know. I know. Shut up about it.”

He may not have looked so good, but that old man had more energy than Elisha could understand. The story begins in Gilgal, central Judah. From there, they go to Bethel – about seven and a half miles over some hilly terrain. Elijah tells Elisha to stay home. “Nope, I’m coming,” says Elisha.

After Bethel, Elijah’s next speaking engagement is at Jericho – this time, about eleven and a half

miles as the crow flies but back over the same hills. In fact, Jericho is just a stone's throw from Gilgal (Why didn't he go there first? I don't know. I'm working with what we have here. A mystery.)

After Jericho, Elijah says, "I'm going down to the river; you stay here." So, "Nope, I'm coming," says Elisha, and off they go. Six miles, this time, but all downhill from what I can tell and maybe for this reason now they get an entourage – fifty people.

They get to the Jordan, and there's no bridge, no ferry, so Elijah removes his cape and whacks the water with it, which parts like the Red Sea for Moses, and across they go. On the other side, Elijah – apparently seeing that chariot about to swing low – says to his protégé, "What can I give you?"

Now, a lot of people think that this journey of twenty-five miles or so (maybe 26.2 with the river crossing..?) has all happened in the course of a single day. Elijah maybe doesn't look so good, but Elisha finds himself winded trying to keep up with him, so he says, "What can you give me? How about a double-share of your spirit!"

"OK," says Elijah, "watch this!" Fiery chariot, and off he goes into the sky.

It had felt like an unusual marathon anyway, but now this..!

And you all know the story of Jesus on the mountain with Elijah and Moses. Peter was so impressed he said, "It's good for us to be here. Shall we build shrines?" And Jesus, maybe indicating that *No, he's the carpenter here*, says instead, "You know what? How about you just keep quiet about this, for now."

Those two incidents – in a river valley and on a mountaintop – put me in mind of other extraordinary times I've heard about: Billy Graham on another mountaintop hearing his call to ministry, Katharine Lee Bates on Pike's Peak inspired to write *America the Beautiful*; Brigham Young and the Mormons establishing their settlement in the Salt Lake Valley, or Jean Baptiste Point du Sable setting up his trading post along the Chicago River; Einstein's dreams and Darwin's travels on *The Beagle*. Each started out as something that seemed maybe a little auspicious but certainly nothing of the grandeur that would eventually develop because of those moments. Each was more a matter of practicality to begin with – getting away, trying to make a home or a business or both... sleeping. In retrospect, though, each of these moments provided a new beginning, made for things that have not belonged only to the originators but which have changed the shape of things and caused us to re-examine the moments themselves.

In retrospect interpreters of these and other transfigured moments have recognized something extraordinary about them. Which is to say that they have indeed started out looking like one thing, but memory says they were really something more, something richer.

I'm speculating here, and – granted – we aren't on a mountaintop or by a riverside. But does anyone else have a feeling that this moment we're in, this historical moment, has the very real potential to be kind of like that too? I think, it certainly has that potential about it!

We are enduring a marathon time away from our familiar, sacred spaces, isolated from one another. And I'm inclined to think that, once we are back together, we won't be the same church as we were when this pandemic started. Things about us will look different.

I mean, sure, I guess that goes without saying... The nature of reality practically *being change*, we are bound to experience one another differently, and our building differently, when we gather again in person. Children will have grown. Adults will have grown... a little older, maybe a little more mature (we'll see). We'll have new flooring. There is no project that has been suggested to or by our Strategic Planning Committee, as they have continued to meet, which will not substantially change who and how we are!

Maybe we'll have an appreciation for what once was, in ways that may actually exceed the situations *themselves*. But here's the thing (and I don't want to seem presumptuous here, or over-build expectations, nevertheless): after what we've experienced and seen and done and thought about, there is the very real possibility that *this retreat we've been on* – like Elijah's journey and Jesus' retreat – could refit us and those who come after us, in space and time, in ways that will *befit* the needs and healing the world around us has and will have.

Peter, James, and John didn't understand what was happening, and neither did Elisha. They each thought one thing was going on, when suddenly (or possibly in retrospect) that one thing wasn't what it was at all. *We're going to go pray up, on that hill*, the disciples thought. *I'm going with my mentor so he has someone with him when he dies*, Elisha assumed.

And they did. But then, there was more to it. Jesus transfigured, Elijah carried aloft. What do you do with that? *Best not talk about it*, they all concluded, *until the time was more fitting. (Don't want to freak anybody out...)*

You know, we've got the Scouts with us today. And I got some of the inspiration for what I'm saying to you now from their Courts of Honor over the last few months, in which they all talked about the experiences they had together and how different, truly meaningful those experiences have been in retrospect than how they thought of them when they began. Their Leaders knew this would happen, because such things happened with them when they were Scouts. (And if the Leaders didn't know, then they've also been pleasantly surprised.)

I suppose any moment is more than the sum of its parts, as that goes.

Just like people are more than the sums of their parts. The Transfiguration is a sacred image for many transgender people or homosexual people, because their coming out causes others sometimes to regard them in newer, truer ways. That is definitely what happened for Jesus and the disciples.

What will we come to know that is newer and truer about *ourselves*, as individuals and a church, because of what we have experienced over these past many months? Will this long moment be transfigured for us? I think it will.

Yes, it will, by God's grace.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Rev. Denoon

Joys and Concerns

- Our prayers of concern are for our residents in assisted living and skilled care
- All people who are living with dementia, their families and their caregivers
- People we love who are living with cancer, like Ildi (Chris Barnes's mother-in-law) who was recently diagnosed
- All those the world regards as disabled
- People with mental illness, as well as their family, friends, caregivers, and roommates
- People who are lonely or alone
- Those who are grieving, like the family of Tom (Cathy Buerk's friend who died on Monday night)
- Those whose employment and businesses are at risk
- COVID-19 patients
- Front line workers and their loved ones; with a special prayer for medical personnel who are working with COVID patients
- For our governmental leaders, and for healing for our country and all its people
- Peace with justice

Prayer of the Day

In the subtleties and complexities of creation we discover your traces. You are unfailingly faithful and challenge us to be so as well... even when the things we may discover seem to point away from you as we have known you – our uncenteredness in the universe, the roundness of our world, the constant progress to new creation of our material reality. But you are more than we can comprehend, and you offer us more than we can either ask or imagine.

We worship you, because you are both intimate and majestic, both mighty and ultimately

vulnerable. Teach us your ways. Help us to practice your faith in us, for you and for one another. May we show forth your love, for one and for all.

Endow our leaders with wisdom, our protectors with good judgment, our servants with unmatched hospitality. Yes, make us all like you.

We pray in the name of the One who is so ultimately like what we would seek to be – a perfection of humanity and divinity – your child and our brother Jesus, the Anointed and our Sovereign, as we pray not only in his name but with the words he taught, saying,

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.

WE SHARE OUR BLESSINGS WITH OTHERS

Invitation

Herb Niemeyer

What wonders we can accomplish together through the Church, by God's grace! Combining material gifts, we are able to serve and support our community and communities all over the world. While the health crisis continues, until it is safe again to pass plates or collect in person, we'll be receiving offerings only by mail or online. 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 to our "Donate" page. Thank you.

Prayer of Dedication (Unison)

Herb Niemeyer

Creator God who makes us many and makes us one, here we have combined many gifts into one. With our Scouts and their Leaders who appreciate the wonders of creation and the blessedness of being your children, we renew our pledge. Bless all these gifts, we pray, that they may pass into your creation, to the end that all the world may become one in you, in Christ's name. Amen.

BENEDICTION

Prayer for the Church
(Video)

M. L. King, Jr.

POSTLUDE

Bethena: A Concert Waltz

Scott Joplin

DISMISSAL

Herb Niemeyer

That's our worship for this week at First Church. We're glad you could worship with us. Please, join us for our Virtual Coffee Fellowship, Sunday at 11am on Zoom. The beginning of Virtual Coffee Fellowship this time will be a presentation of the Charter for Troops 301B and 301G. All of us here hope to see you there! The Virtual Coffee Fellowship link is on the homepage of our website.

We want to encourage you to attend our observance of Ash Wednesday, either by streaming the service on February 17 and afterward, or else by joining us for a Zoom watch party at 7 o'clock, on the evening of Ash Wednesday, at the web address you see on your screen now.

Our worship next Sunday will be in observance of the first Sunday in Lent. Please plan to be with us then, as we mark this solemn season in our preparation for the festival of Easter.

But, as for today...

Our worship has ended. Let our service begin.



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH of Webster Groves

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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