

# Welcome!

First Congregational Church  
of Webster Groves United Church of Christ



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

MARCH 7, 2021  
THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT  
SUNDAY OF UCC WOMEN'S WEEK  
CELEBRATION OF VIRTUAL COMMUNION

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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.*



## Order of Worship

### PRELUDE

*Songs without Words (Opus 11, No. 2)*

Clara Schumann

### WELCOME

Roger Barnes

### TOLLING OF THE BELL

### LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES

### CALL TO WORSHIP

*Disciples of Christ*  
*A reading for Women's Week*

Women of First Church

- 1: Let us remember and celebrate twelve of Jesus' disciples, people who were touched by him and who tended him.
- 2: We remember Mary, the girl from the country town, the poet and singer, who became pregnant with God, by God, for God's sake.
- 3: We remember Elizabeth, Mary's older cousin, who shared Mary's excitement, who herself bore John, the friend and baptizer of Jesus.
- 4: We remember Anna, the old widow and faithful believer who saw an eight-day-old baby and recognized that the Messiah had come.
- 5: We remember Martha, the cook and housekeeper, the plain speaker, who gave Jesus her anger so that he could give her his love.
- 6: We remember Joanna, who with Susanna and many other women, provided the hospitality which Jesus saw as crucial to the Gospel.
- 7: We remember Peter's mother-in-law, who was so grateful to be healed that her first act after recovery was to make a meal for Jesus.
- 8: We remember the Samaritan woman whose conversation with Jesus was full of veiled meaning, but whose life was so changed by him that she became the first real evangelist.
- 9: We remember the Canaanite woman, who challenged Jesus' prejudice and took his exclusive language to task, until he saw and admired her toughness and devotion.
- 10: We remember the hemorrhaging woman who contaminated countless men in her struggle to touch Jesus, who named her faith as the root of her cure.
- 11: We remember the poor widowed woman, who in giving the smallest coins to God, gave Jesus his model for generosity.
- 12: We remember the woman caught in adultery, who let Jesus show how the grace of God is greater than the moralizing of men.
- 13: We remember her whose perfume filled a room with fragrance, yet who let her costliest gift be offered, in love, to God.
- 1: They were disciples of Christ who through the Gospel and through the ages were touched by Christ and who tended Christ. We remember and celebrate them and all the others since, who have borne, guided, and shaped us that we might become God's people. We remember all of these disciples and saints, for we stand in their tradition and bear their legacy of good news in Christ's name. Amen.

**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**

*Bring Many Names*

Brian Wren  
Carlton Young

Bring many names, beautiful and good,  
Celebrate in parable and story,  
Radiant in 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!

Great, living God, never fully known,  
Joyful darkness far beyond our seeing,  
Closer yet than breathing, everlasting home:  
Hail and Hosanna! Great, living God!

**RITUAL OF APPROACH**

*Prayer of Confession* (Responsive – Leader; **People**)

Holy God, you spoke to Eve in a garden, to Hagar in the wilderness, to Sarah in three persons, to Mary of Nazareth through an angel, to Mary of Bethany at Jesus' feet, and to Mary of Magdala, as the resurrected Christ.

**They brought us new insight, new promise, renewing hope, revolutionary ideas, resounding blessing, and good news.**

However, your Church for generations chose to curse Eve, to belittle Hagar, to shame Sarah, to dehumanize the Nazarene Mary, to shy from the Bethanite, and to doubt the Magdalene.

**We have been slow to accept, hesitant to allow, resistant to submit, and reluctant to change. Forgive us, we pray. Remake us so that we may be ready ever more, to attend your word of loving kindness, of compassion, of faithfulness, of truth, no matter whose mouth may utter it, in Christ's name.  
Amen.**

*Silence for Personal Confessions*

*Assurance of Pardon*

The goal of salvation was Christ, is Christ, and Christ leads us on unto a new day, full of purpose and renewal.

**What's past is past. God's grace in Jesus sets us free to be the Church we are called to be. Thanks be to God.**

**NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLY**

Merrimon Boyd, *Student Pastor*

Mark 5:25-34

New Revised Standard Version

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?"

And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'"

He looked all around to see who had done it.

But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.

He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

*Pause.*

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the people.

**Thanks be to God.**

**MESSAGE OF THE DAY**

*"When Women Are Heroic"*

Halley Kim  
*Pastoral Assistant*

I joked that my second child and first daughter was my "Rosie the Riveter" baby because she was literally born with her elbow bent and her fist raised (ask me later about how much that hurt). Phoebe's hand was born before the rest of her body and she's been reaching for the stars ever since. Always fiercely determined, that girl has never met a challenge she couldn't overcome. And during Phoebe's infancy, a very specific question haunted me: Was I really going to tell my little girl that she couldn't be a pastor just because she has a uterus? At the time, that is precisely what my beliefs dictated.

I was an evangelical Christian and I believed the Bible was inerrant, authoritative, and trustworthy in everything because it was straight from God. And that included 1 Timothy 2:12 — "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet." Those words hurt me the very first time I read them, around age 16, and I scribbled a heartbroken, two-word prayer in the margin of my Bible: "Help, God."

Despite my pain and confusion, I wanted to comply with what I thought God wanted of me. I figured there was some divine reason for this gendered hierarchy, some good I couldn't yet appreciate, because surely the God who loved me so much couldn't actually want to keep me down...right?

But regardless of God's intentions, if you were female in my conservative Christian context, then a degree of subjugation was the cost of following Jesus. Good Christian girls were responsible for their own chastity as well as that of their male peers, because boys, I was told, couldn't control their lust if girls did not dress modestly. Upon marrying, godly wives joyfully submitted to their husbands. And women did not and could not hold leadership roles in church, and most assuredly they could not preach behind a pulpit like I'm doing now.

Men and women were "equal but different," they said, "equal in essence, but different in role." For the most part this was communicated to me with sugary sweet words, even pained expressions. "This is what the Bible says...we're sorry!"

But my experiences as a nurse and a doula slowly chiseled away at that pleasant misogyny. I saw women's raw power over and over again as I witnessed mothers labor, birth, and nourish new life. I had seen my own inner warrior emerge when I brought my own children into the world, when I walked into my legislators' offices and spoke my mind, when I had to draw tough boundaries, when life as a pastor's wife was fraught and painful, when God seemed detached and uncaring. It really seemed like I was more than a man's helper.

All of this simmered beneath the surface until I had a daughter. I read a book called "Jesus Feminist" when Phoebe was 7 months old that changed my life. It presented a perspective I'd never heard before: an egalitarian understanding of Scripture. It argued that 1 Timothy 2:12 shouldn't be interpreted as a universal prohibition on women's leadership, and that the female branding of "second to be created, first to sin" need not be my identity. I was undone and I had a thousand questions.

I devoured books about feminist theology. I fell in love with the stories of Deborah, Tamar, Mary Magdalene, Junia, Lydia and countless others. They redefined a "biblical woman" for me. And, I read what famed church fathers had said about women and I let my blood boil. Tertullian said women were the devil's gateway and blamed them for the death of Jesus. Augustine mused, "What is the difference whether it is a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in any woman." Luther said of women, "Let them die in childbirth. That is what they are there for." I watched a celebrity pastor say on video that wives might have to endure "getting smacked around for a season" in order to faithfully submit to their husbands.

As Gloria Steinem says, the truth will set you free but first it will piss you off. And after I let myself get enraged, I cried. Because it turns out there was another story about women that my churches hadn't bothered to tell me. And because men wrote the Bible, and revised it many times over, and the slew of Scriptures which denigrate women are products of an ancient patriarchal culture, not the heart of God. And it was actually true that God loved me every bit as much as I always hoped She did. Claiming my full worth was the beginning of my resistance.

In their must-read book *Half the Sky*, Nicholas Kristoff and Sheryl DuWunn detail the atrocities faced by girls and women around the world: sex trafficking, rape, female genital mutilation, child marriage, acid burnings, honor killings, denial of education, unsafe abortions, sky-high maternal mortality rates and debilitating childbirth injuries.

In America 1 in 3 women have experienced some variety of physical violence from an intimate partner. The median wage gap in our nation is 82 cents paid to women for every dollar paid to men — and the gap is significantly bigger for women of color. And women have only had the right to vote here for 100 years — and that's only white women. More women die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes in America than in any other developed nation on earth. And Black mothers die at 4X the rate that white mothers do.

Kristoff and DuWunn's research showed that while the oppression against women is truly horrific and ubiquitous, the global opportunity available by harnessing women's power is breathtaking. In fact there is no more effective way to combat world poverty than by letting loose the power of women.

But to get from oppression to opportunity it will take our collective and ongoing resistance. This week is UCC's Women's Week, this month is Women's History Month, and tomorrow is International Women's Day. The theme of this year's IWD is "Choose to Challenge." I've just told you how I challenged my theology of women, and I wonder how you will choose to challenge yours?

I think it's helpful to go back to the very beginning. The toxic belief that every woman is an Eve did not die with Augustine. It's in our cultural water and we all drink from a poisoned cistern. The evidence is everywhere: the way women apologize excessively. The way we use the word "just" to communicate that we don't need to be taken seriously: "I was *just* wondering" or "it's *just* an idea."

We are conditioned as girls to make ourselves smaller, less inconvenient, and more tolerable to a world that finds us inferior and suspect. As author Glennon Doyle sums up the story of Eve, "When a woman wants more, she defies God, betrays her partner, curses her family, and destroys the world." It's pretty hard to live fully as women when that's the script that was passed out to us as little girls.

But I've found that my honest reckoning with that script fuels the fire of my resistance. Contrary to the advice I received to cultivate a gentle and quiet spirit, I've found that righteous anger is a whole lot more useful.

It's the demonization of Eve that keeps me in holy fury, and it's the under-appreciated women in Scripture who show me what resistance looks like in the thick of things. Women who chose to challenge patriarchy and other systems of oppression. Women who wrote a new script, who ditched the maiden or harlot dichotomy and cast themselves as the hero instead. Here's a sampling:

There's the story of Queen Vashti who said "no" to King Xeres in the book of Esther. No, I will not dance naked in front of all your drunk friends. I imagine she paid for her resistance with her life.

There's the story of Rizpah, the mother who demanded a proper burial for her innocent sons who were executed by the state. Rizpah guarded their bodies from wild animals for months, and did not cease her resistance until justice was accomplished.

There's the story of the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, who refused to kill the male Hebrew babies as Pharaoh commanded them. Without their civil disobedience there would be no Moses.

There's the story of Tabitha the disciple, who challenged society's contempt for vulnerable women by operating a thriving ministry to provide clothing to widows.

And there's the story of the hemorrhaging woman who reached out to touch Jesus' cloak, one of my favorites from the Gospels. I just love that she didn't ask for permission. She wanted healing, she saw an opportunity, and she went for it. I also really love that this story is about blood, and not just any blood, but a woman's blood, and not just woman's blood, but blood that seeped from her vagina! Gasp!

Perhaps the nature of her condition is why she didn't ask for permission — better luck to ask for forgiveness, she figured. After all, according to the Torah this woman was perpetually unclean. Her chronic uterine bleeding barred her from the temple, participating in her community, and sharing a bed with her husband. And I imagine that because she could not fulfill her "wifely duties" she may have endured domestic violence as well.

Basically everyone thought her blood was disgusting, and infuriatingly, not much has changed in 2,000 years when it comes to what men think of women's blood. Men's blood shed in battle has been memorialized and revered throughout the ages, but women's blood shed in vitality and birth is considered repellent and you're supposed to pretend it doesn't exist. Sure, I'm allowed in public spaces when I'm on my period, but I better not mention it because men don't want to hear about *that*. I can scarcely imagine the exile it would be mean to be on my period for 12 years straight in the 1st century. This woman

probably anticipated that Christ would find her gross just like everyone else did, and you don't ask for permission when you are expecting to hear, "eww, no."

And still, this outcast found the courage to push her way through a crowd in order to reach Jesus and write herself a new story. And not small crowd — I imagine hundreds of crazed fans trying to reach Michael Jordan in his heyday. This woman, courageous and desperate, bloody and holy, fought her way right into the epicenter of the action. She had reckoned with the patriarchal script and that must have fueled her resistance. She defied the law and challenged the social order when she dared to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. And as soon as she did, we read that her bleeding stopped.

Jesus knew someone had touched him, and curiously also that some power inside him had...shifted. Jesus looked around, trying to figure out what had happened. And this brave woman came forward and offered timidly, "Hey that was me." I love what Jesus says in response to her: "Daughter, your faith has made you well." He could have said, "I made you well," but he didn't. He acknowledged that she was the hero in her story. Her advocacy, her bravery, her tenacity, her resistance to systemic sin, her faith that things could be different.

What do you need to take hold of for your own healing from misogyny or toxic masculinity? What metaphorical hem can you reach for to further the healing of all women? You might have to fight your way through a mob to manage your resistance, but will you do it anyway? Will you forget about permission? How will you shift the balance of power? What injustice will you make well with your determination and faith?

You can promote Equal Pay Day which is coming up on March 24 and symbolizes how far into *this year* that women must work to catch up to what men earned *last calendar year*. You can donate to Jamaa Birth Village, the equal access midwifery clinic in Ferguson which is doing crucial work to reduce mortality among Black mothers and babies. You can ask a local establishment why they have a changing table in the women's restroom but not in the men's restroom. You can make sure that your sons and grandsons know that there's nothing wrong with enjoying nail polish or princess movies and that the way we regard what's "girly" betrays the way we regard girls. You can be careful with the language you use. For example, when describing the story of David and Bathsheba, don't call it adultery, call it rape. Men, will you think about how you personally benefit from male privilege? How will you harness that privilege for good? Women, will you think about how you personally have internalized misogyny? How will you take up more space? How will you become the hero in your story?

I was in my thirties before I heard a woman preach or serve communion. It's often said of aspirations that "you can't be what you can't see," and after today my daughters will be able to say they saw a woman preach at ages 5 and 3. They will have a different story because today I resisted the patriarchy and made myself a hero.

**ANTHEM**

*Choose to Challenge*  
(Spoken word performance)

Anisa Nandaula

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

*Joys and Concerns*

Elston McCowan, *Student Pastor*

- Prayer of joy for our sister K Wentzien who was honored this past Tuesday by the Webster Groves City Council for her leadership in advancing women's rights, in this Women's Month and a month declared by the Council to recognize efforts toward diversity, equity, and inclusion

- Our prayers of concern are for the family of Fred Kaul, upon his death which occurred last Saturday
- The family of Clarine Falconer, who died with congestive heart failure on Wednesday of this week
- Our sister Laura as she recovers from back surgery
- 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
- 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 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*

Rev. Denoon

Thankful are we for all the blessings of this life: love, freedom, bounty and beauty. The joy we know is beyond our words to express.

We can only imagine the suffering and pain of human slaves, past and present, and that sometimes is our downfall. We may forget how they yearned from the depths of their souls to know the freedom we enjoy. Or we may consider ourselves impotent to address the needs of those trafficked today, and therefore do nothing.

But historic examples testify to what is possible. So, we remember this day the heritage we have in the cause of human freedom. We celebrate this day our spiritual ancestors who worked for the freedom of the Mendi people on the slave ship, *Amistad*. May that ship, like the cross, remind us of the ever-present possibility of human evil. May that ship, like the cross, remind us of the power of your love. May we, through that same Holy Spirit that guided our forebears in faith, shed the false, un-neighborly, covetous, and dishonorable desires of the lives we sometimes live and keep the commandments and walk in the way that brings life.

We celebrate today the efforts of women and their advocates throughout our history who have flouted and continue to resist the restrictions placed by patriarchal and exploitive systems. Renew us in our cause to establish rights for women and girls not different from those of men, but which empower them to become people who are both ordinary and heroic, and undaunted in their quest for equality and equity. Remind us how we may be of best use in your cause of justice and peace, by Christ's example and in Christ's name. Amen.

**WE SHARE OUR BLESSINGS WITH OTHERS**

Roger Barnes

*Invitation*

Combining gifts of substance and ability, we are able to be of service and support to one another. Next Sunday, you are encouraged to make a special offering for One Great Hour of Sharing, our springtime denominational collection for Church World Service which provides

assistance to communities across the globe on behalf of the World Council of Churches. As you present your gifts to First Church, I encourage you also to consider giving a generous donation to One Great Hour of Sharing. You can find more information about the special offering in the *Covenant News* and our weekly eNews.

While the health crisis continues, until it is safe again to pass plates or collect in person, we will be receiving monetary 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](http://FirstChurchWG.org) – and to our “Donate” page.

Thank you.

*Prayer of Dedication (Unison)*

**God of all goodness, we thank you for your blessings: more numerous than the stars; more bountiful than the greatest of harvests; more steady than the beat of our hearts. Here we dedicate our gifts and rededicate ourselves to your vision of hope and wholeness. May all that we do and all that we give be pleasing to you, and a testimony to your loving purposes. We ask it in Jesus’ name; Amen.**

**BENEDICTION**

Halley Kim

**POSTLUDE**

*Song for Piano (Opus 2, No. 1)*

Fanny Mendelssohn

**DISMISSAL**

Roger Barnes

**RITUAL FOR VIRTUAL COMMUNION (during Fellowship)**

*Prayer of Thanksgiving (Minister)*

Holy God, during this Women’s Week we gather at our tables and remember all the tables where women have gathered to do your work in this world: Women disciples

- at classroom tables, teaching those yearning to learn your good news;
- at artists’ tables, envisioning the shape of your new creation;
- at conference and boardroom tables, pursuing your justice in workplace, community and church;
- at kitchen tables, offering your hospitality to all who hunger;
- at laboratory tables, seeking your possibilities in the mysteries of nature;
- at bedside tables, healing with your compassion all who suffer;
- at Communion tables, preaching your word and presiding at the sacrament of your presence.

And because you are one with us here and at other tables all over the earth, enable us to share your life with the world by sharing ourselves with the world.

We pray for the church throughout the world. We pray for the sick, the bereaved, the oppressed, and the homeless. We pray for the broken and torn fabric of the earth as it yearns for healing.

And with Christ whose body we are we pray, 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**

*Sharing the Story*

Blessed is our brother Jesus, who walks with us through the wildernesses of this on land and at sea, and guides us out of our wandering, even as you once led the Hebrew people unto a promised land. They struggled and worried, doubted and wondered, while their God made a way for them. And although we may have strayed, prophets and apostles and ordinary people have sounded warnings. And as then still now the Holy Spirit draws us into your spiritual land of salvation and loving redemption. Your healing is for all who would take hold of it in order to be set free.

This is what we have come to know, that: On the night of his arrest Jesus took bread and having blessed it he broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying, "This is my body given to you."

In the same way he took a cup and having given thanks for it gave it to his disciples, saying, "This cup is the new relationship with God, sealed with my blood. Take this and share it."

Let us pray:

**Loving God, through your goodness we have this bread to offer and the contents of this cup, which earth has given and human beings have prepared. May we know your presence in the sharing of this bread, so that we may know your touch in all bread, all matter. We celebrate the life that Jesus has shared among Christians through the centuries, and shares with us now. Come to us now as he did in that cup of life so long ago. Amen.**

*Sharing the Gifts*

*Prayer after Communion (Unison)*

**We give you thanks, O God, for blessing us at our tables with the presence of Christ. Send us from our tables, rejoicing with our sisters and brothers in faith, to share your abundant love and grace with all we meet. Amen.**



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

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