



First Congregational Church Highlights Newsletter September 2020

Thus says Holy One Beyond Name, your Redeemer:

*“I am about to do a new thing. Now it springs forth. Do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.” – Isaiah 43:19*

What new things could God be doing through our church in these wilderness times? What old things could God be using a new way? What things hitherto unimagined?

The ways our church is being called on to creatively adapt could well be stirring in the yearnings you may be having at this time related to God and Christian community - in your needs and your deeds and your dreams. So please share as you are led.

Your responses to our Church Life Survey certainly have been very helpful in our discernment of the ways forward. As a result of that, this fall will be season of trying out some new things.

We'll be having a bunch of small groups – some meeting online, some meeting in person outside with safe practice protocols we will soon formalize. Covenant groups. A Bible study group. A book group. Groups to work on the UCC's curriculum on racism and white privilege. We are close to hammering out all the details of when, where, and how. We will announce the details as we have them, so please look for them via email, on our website, Facebook, and Instagram sites, and the next Highlights. If you have yet to indicate your interest in one of these groups, let Gayle at the office know and we will be sure the facilitator reaches out.

I do know that starting September 13, I will be leading a weekly Bible study group on praying the Psalms. 1pm Sundays. This will be via Zoom video and phone conference. Information is later in this newsletter, and will be emailed.

Also on Sunday September 13 we will have a sacred experiment in safely distanced outdoor ritual:

Prayer Rock Labyrinth Walk Sunday Morning, September 13

The details that we have right now can be found later in the newsletter on pages 12 & 13. We will keep you all updated if anything changes.

Peace,
Pastor Nathaniel

Worship, Fellowship, Meeting, and Event Access Information



Drive-by Blessings -Sundays 10:00 am-10:45 am

by the Masked Reverend

This is how it will work:

I will be outside the parking lot entrance of First Congregational Church of Walla Walla, wearing a face mask.

[You can come by in your car.](#) Please wear face masks, travel only with family, and stay in your cars. As people come by I will offer you a blessing, at a safe social distance. It will be wonderful to see some of you.

Please **enter** via Alder Street and Marcus and **exit** via Palouse Street. This will keep a smooth flow East to West through the parking lot.

This idea is in keeping with guidelines from Governor Inslee, and in consultation with medical professionals. We are committed to doing church in a safe and responsible way. We are consulting with medical professionals and abiding by public health guidelines. Things will not return to normal for a good while yet. Churches pushing to reopen are acting irresponsibly.

Peace

Pastor Nathaniel

Virtual Coffee & Prayer Time - Sundays at 11:00 am

Chat & check in with you church friends. And pray together.

With computer, smartphone, or tablet

Go to this link:

<https://zoom.us/j/638358688>

You may be asked for this password: **586720**

With landline or cellphone

Dial (253) 215-2782

You may be asked for the meeting ID: **638 358 688** and password: **586720**

Weekly worship service videos on YouTube

Lovingly produced by our worship team

You can access them via the link on our church's website: www.firstchurchuccww.org

Or by going to Youtube.com, searching for:

“First Congregational Church of Walla Walla,” and clicking “Playlists.”

This link will also get you there: <https://bit.ly/36lN27m>

Please keep sending in photos of yourselves or your gardens or experiences in nature.

We use these for our music montages. It's a way for everyone to stay connected.

Sacred Silence Sitting Circle-Mondays 12:10 pm-12:45 pm

Our time of shared time of silent prayer is now online

Practice the ancient art of silent prayer with others from the comfort and safety of your home.

You can sign in or call in via Zoom:

With computer, smartphone, or tablet

Go to this link:

<https://zoom.us/j/638358688>

With landline or cellphone

Dial (253) 215-8782

You may be asked for the meeting ID: **868 0904 7475**



Moderator's Missive

Dear Church Family,

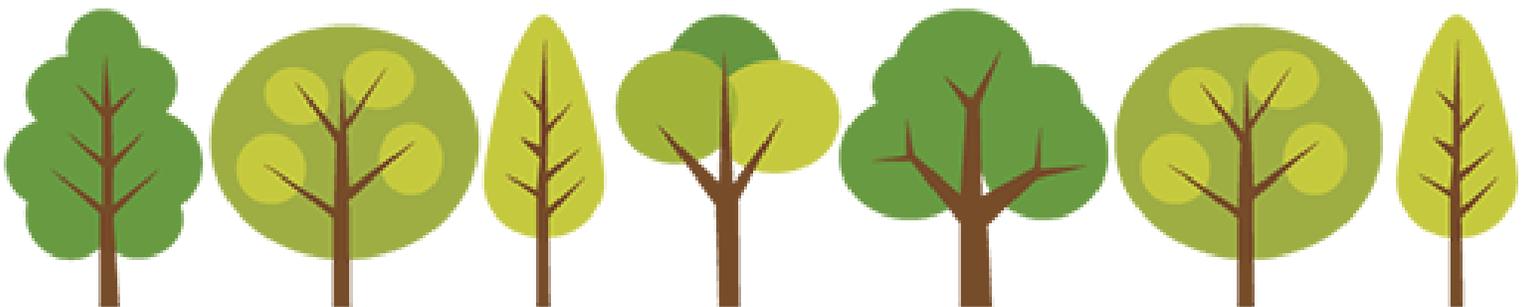
I trust this finds you well. We miss you. A lot of great effort is being spent on "doing church" in these difficult times. Even so, there is no substitute for being together in worship and fellowship on a regular basis.

Our church leaders continue to push forward to keep our beloved faith community on a solid foundation. At present, myriad plans are being made for things like stewardship drives, recognition of the 20th anniversary of our Open & Affirming declaration, careful re-opening (when it becomes appropriate), book groups on white privilege, covenant groups, production of our weekly worship services, budget planning, meal preparation (FCC & CAC), building maintenance, youth programming, and much more. I continue to be impressed by all of the wonderful folks who keep our wheels turning during this unprecedented time. You are all a blessing.

This month I want to call attention to this fall's stewardship drive. I have been working with Pastor Nathaniel, Jen Ross, and Cyndi Asmus in putting together this year's campaign. This task is challenging enough in a normal year, and the disruptions of Covid make it seemingly all the more difficult. Even so, our team -much like our faith community- is committed to the important role of our church in the world. And God provides...our members and friends continue to give their time, energy and treasure to keeping our church ready and relevant for this moment. We trust that all will continue to support us as they are able. In the coming weeks, we will be in touch with you. We want our stewardship efforts to mirror the need for connection that so many of us are feeling these days. As always, we are better...together.

Please take care and know that we will get through this, and that the other side of this will be glorious.

In peace,
JR





Greetings from your Deacons!

Pastor Nathaniel's Inquiry regarding our preferences for church activities has been most helpful. Many of us have shared our hope of joining together, in a variety of activities. See each other. Enjoy each other's company and a shared journey. Following the science, the church is proceeding to create more small group opportunities. Consider joining together in one of these engaging activities as they are made available. Whether it be a covenant group, book club, bible study, or a focus group on a particular topic, consider participating. It will be a joy to see you all back together in community. Watch for further details.

The Prayer Craft for All Ages is wonderful joining of prayer and craft. See the below and call if you need supplies. Note: even if we are unable to meet back in the church this year, your Prayer Chain can always be part of your own Christmas story.

Walk the Labyrinth on Sunday the 13th. Our Lord must know our need for prayer in these unusual times. Outdoors with masks and social distancing, we will create and place our Prayer Rocks. See your Highlights for further details.

We hope to see you at Coffee Hour and Prayers, usually every Sunday at 11 am via ZOOM. Watch your email for the invitation. (Check in spam or junk email if the church has your email address but you do not see the invitation on Sunday morning.)

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and give you peace.

Judy Chacon, Chair, Board of Deacons



~~Prayer Craft for All Ages~~

Our Church Family is joining together to share our praises and concerns during this time of isolation. We have prepared a kit for each household to create a paper chain of prayers, and will be contacting you to ask if you want one.

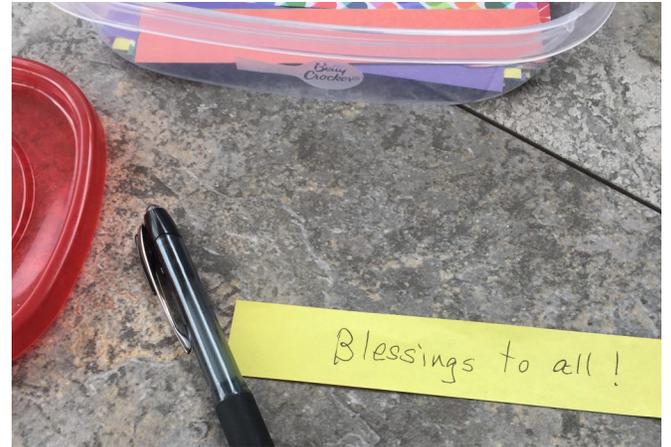
Between now and Advent, express your thoughts on each prayer strip, and feel free to get creative. We hope and pray that by Christmas we will be able to gather together and decorate the church with our paper stories.

For questions, more materials, or if you don't receive a call, contact Lucy Linker at 509-240-0918 or Judy Chacon at 509-525-6618.

How it Will Work



This is the kit you will receive. If you need more, just ask.

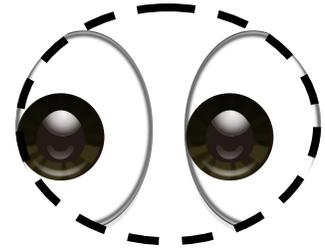


Write down your prayers or blessings.



Form your chain

What Have the Kids Been Up To??



Zoë Leonhard has become a foster mother! She volunteers at the Blue Mountain Humane Society by fostering litters of tiny orphan kittens until they weigh 32 ounces and are eligible for adoption. To get ready for this responsibility she learned about their care and nutrition needs. This included preparing by setting her alarm for 2 AM to be sure she'd be able to awaken when the babies needed to be fed.

Her foster kitties receive excellent socialization by being loved and entertained almost non-stop by Zoë, her sister Evie, and her parents.

She says the past Covid isolation has provided the opportunity for her to keep the schedule demanded by her orphan kittens. Because she plans to enroll in the Online option for school next semester she will be able to continue her commitment to future litters of tiny fur babies.

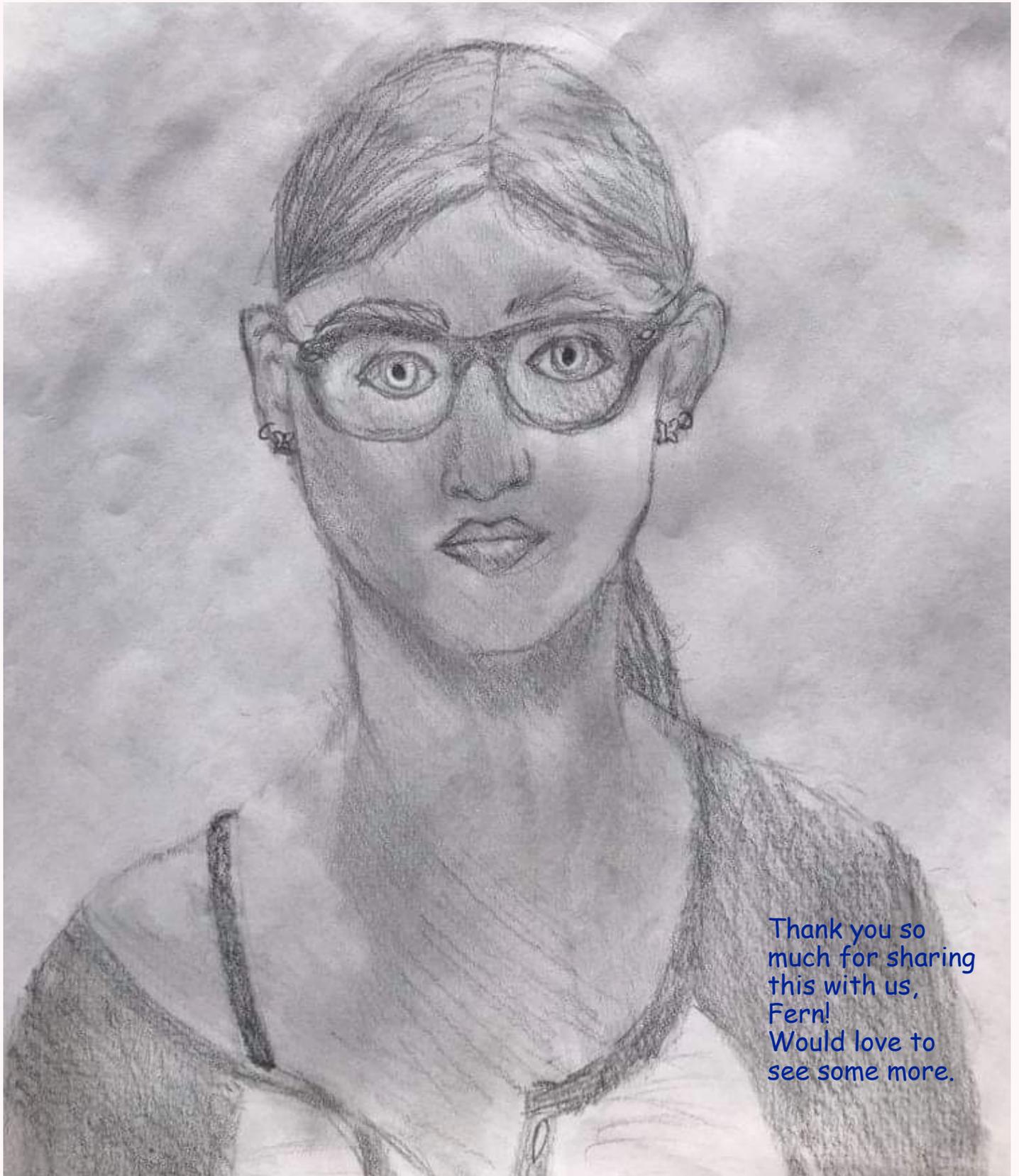
Zoë, this is awesome and you certainly have your hands full!!
What you're doing makes a big difference

Your fur babies are SO cute.



Self Portrait

By Fern Farnam



Thank you so
much for sharing
this with us,
Fern!
Would love to
see some more.

Christian Education



There are exciting changes afoot for the Sunday School Christian Ed, getting ready for when we can all get together again.

Fellowship of the Youth Underground, Year 2....We are growing! Programming in the works so far for the coming year includes:

High School Youth: White Privilege Workshops-September and October, we will participate as a group alongside adult members of our congregation, on-line. November through May - Rites of Passage/Confirmation.

Middle School Youth (7th/8th): Our Whole Lives sexuality education, which will happen only if we are able to meet in-person (outdoors, masked, and distanced). The trust and safety necessary for exploring this tender topic just isn't possible in a virtual setting. September - May.

Middle School Youth (6th): Seeing Jesus: Social Justice Activities for Today Based on Matthew 25 (Thank You Dorothy Knudson for this great curriculum!) September through May.

If you haven't had a chance to complete the Christian Education Survey, please take a minute to do so! Your input will help us solve our scheduling and formatting puzzle. Thank you so much to those of you who have offered your thoughts and comments so far. I am so looking forward to meeting together with our youth again in fellowship, service, and creative expressions of our faith!

Pre-K, K-2, and Intermediate (3-5): Learning and play around progressive Christian content, frequency and venue t.b.d.

Prayer Rock Painting

Create a prayer rock ahead of time, Now until September 13

You are invited between now and Sunday, September 13 to come by the prayer labyrinth on our overflow parking lot across Marcus Street. There you will find a basket of rocks. Take home one or two unpainted rocks. Then with paints or permanent markers, paint or write a blessing you would like to offer for the church community.



AND THEN

See Next Page.....

Prayer Rock Labyrinth Walk

Sunday Morning, September 13

On the morning of Sunday, September 13, you are invited to come by to walk the labyrinth and place your prayer rock in the middle. We will have prayerful music. You can see and greet the other people who come by when you're there.

If you did not paint a rock, there will be a place, as well as, time to do that.

Wear masks and keep at least 6 feet apart from others. Only one person will walk the labyrinth at a time.

To prevent too many people present at a time, we ask that if you can you come according to your last name:

A-G: 9:00 am-10:00 am

H-O: 10:00 am-11:00 am

P-Z: 11:00 am-12:00 pm

We will then find meaningful ways of sharing and displaying the prayer rocks we have all offered.





In Loving Memory

Dorothy Eubanks passed away peacefully yesterday, July 19. It was a blessing that her daughter was allowed to be with her the last few days. As you know there are unusual restrictions during this pandemic.

She has been living in the Vancouver area, with her daughter, for several years. She was laid to rest next to her husband, Bob.

For those of you who knew her, you know that Study Club was a very important part of her life.

If you wish to send a card and message of memories of Dorothy to her daughter, the address is:

Rick and Kathy Stellfox
3320 NE 161st St
Ridgefield WA. 98642



Carroll Adams passed away on August 13 at the age of 104, just 54 days shy of his 105th birthday. Carroll was a long time member of our church family, joining in the 1950s.

Carroll was the owner of Carroll Adams Tractor Company and was, in his lifetime, an active presence in our community.

Carroll is survived by his three children, Robert Adams of Walla Walla, Carolyn Adams Krudwig Adams (David) of Murrysville, PA and Richard Adams (Sheri) of Gig Harbor, Washington. His wife of nearly eleven years, Helen Roloff Adams also survives him as well as one brother Gordon Adams (Suzanne) of Walla Walla, eight grandchildren, five great-grandchildren, numerous step-children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren as well as nieces and nephews too numerous to mention.

In view of the Covid restrictions there was a family service on Thursday August 20, 2020 Herring Groseclose Funeral Home. A celebration of Carroll's life will be held at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to the YWCA through Herring Groseclose Funeral Home, 315 W. Alder St. Walla Walla, WA 99362.

TALES FROM CEDAR LAKE III

Just now I looked out at our hummingbird feeder hanging on a Saskatoon tree, marching up the curved trunk was a male yellow-bellied sapsucker. His red throat and head patch caught a sunbeam, and I was transfixed by his beauty. A few days ago a somewhat rare bird was perched on another feeder tree trunk: a black-backed woodpecker, and a few minutes ago a white-throated sparrow appeared with a little bit larger bird that was tan all over, they seemed to be friends. They came down together three times and even touched beaks. The new bird was a baby cow bird whose egg must have been laid in the sparrow's nest. The white-throat must have been glad to get rid of it, but was showing great hospitality. Most of the birds at the feeders will leave for warmer climates soon, but the little chickadees and nuthatches stay here for the long, cold winters. They need to eat lots now and to stash some seeds away for the below-zero days to come.

Thunderstorms are rare in Walla Walla, but not in the Midwest. Last night we had a loud scary one that came with little warning. At twilight I had been swimming in calm waters and suddenly spotted some very threatening fast-moving clouds, by the time I reached land and headed for the cabin, the lake was turbulent and lightning was flashing. I gathered Chip, dried us both off, and huddled in the cabin to watch the storm. Chip puts on a good show as a brave, fierce little dog, but loud thunder turns her into a real chicken, so I wrapped her in a blanket, tried to slow her heartbeat, moved away from the window, and settled in to watch nature's fireworks. After several hours the thunder quieted and we ventured out into a drenched world with puddles everywhere, but looked up into a beautiful starry sky.

Every morning I pull a kayak into the water, climb in and invite Chip to jump into her spot in the bow. We look at the wind, usually head into it, and set out for a long paddling adventure. We've explored every bay, paddled around every island, and watched loons fishing for their breakfasts every morning. We often see eagles and herons, kingfishers and sandpipers, coots and a variety of ducks. When the summer ends, Chip and I will miss our morning kayaks most of all.

Wilderness cabins almost always have their share of resident house mice, our bunkhouse is no exception. Now, I am respectful of most all the critters we live among and try to be a guest who leaves no trace ... but I consider mice to be in a different category, so I'll share my record. In the last two weeks I have trapped and killed 17 mice..... and counting. One morning there were TWO in the same trap. Mouse-catching is not a sport for the faint of heart. (Perhaps we need a CAT!)

Since the virus has prevented us from having open-water camps this summer, our woods and waterways have been more quiet, however, we have had a steady stream of friends, former guides, and family join us for days or weeks. The pace has been wonderful for three months and we always wish to stay longer. But as the days shorten, the winds grow chilly, and the leaves begin to turn, the summer is almost at an end. We plan to head west shortly after Labor Day.

Much love to you all.

Lee

And her brave little dog Chip

Cedar Lake



Chip, the Swimmer

Lee & Chip

Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker

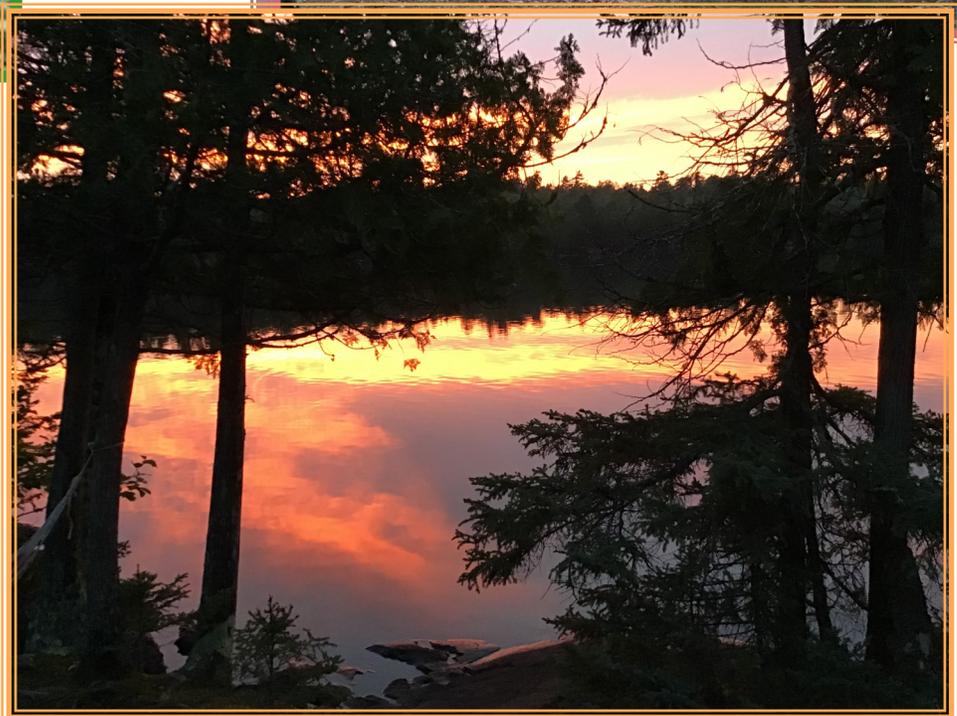


After the work is done.....

The Cabin Home Away From Home



Another stunning Sunset at Cedar Lake



Phone Tree

Stay Connected With Each Other

Want to call others in our church community? Want to receive calls?

Becky Kirtley and Jan Eyestone have worked with Pastor Nathaniel and our Church Council to set up people to call each other. If you want to call or receive calls, give us a call!

Becky at 509-301-0583

Or

Contact the Office at 525-8753 {leave a message} or office@fcchurch.net

Or

Pastor Nathaniel at 608-469-1406 or pastornathanielmahlberg@gmail.com

Starting Sunday September 13

Bible Study: Praying the Psalms

Sundays at 1:00 pm on Zoom

Join the Zoom Meeting through the internet by going to this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86431427696>

Or on your phone by dialing:

253-215-8782

You may be asked to give
Meeting ID: 864 3142 7696
Passcode: 326590



September 2020



Trustees Meeting

Thursday, September 17th, 6:00 pm

Council Meeting

Sunday, September 20th, 12:30 pm

Deacons Meeting

Wednesday, September 9th, 6:30 pm



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

VOUCHERS

Please have your vouchers turned in by the dates indicated above.

Thanks!



#separatetogether

Newsletter Deadline

Tuesday, September 22

Please have your submissions in by that date



Filled With Life

I come to you, O great One, seeking renewal of my weary and worried spirit. Let me rest in you for a while and feel you surrounding me in safety and love. Then let that rest in you call forth new strength in me.

For others who are weary, I pray for comfort and peace. For others who are worried, I pray for solace and reassurance. For the desperate, I pray for relief and hope. O God, may we be filled with your life once again on this earth, even during days of darkness.

Please hear my prayers and grant me your peace, in the name of Jesus, O Lord.
Amen



In order to protect the privacy of our members and friends, we do not display personal information in the web version



First Congregational Church United Church of Christ

Ministerial Leadership

Minister Rev. Nathaniel Mahlberg

2020 Church Officers

Moderator	J. R. Van Slyke
Vice Moderator	Jennifer Rickard
Clerk	Larry Frank
Treasurer	Kim Croft
Financial Sec.	Bernie Newman
Asst. Fin. Sec.	Jonathan Webster
Head Usher	Galen Unruh
Diaconate	Judy Chacon
Christian Ed	Dot Willis
Trustees	Emily Asmus
Mission/Social Concern	Heidi McFarley
Music	Open
... and Affirming	Open

Staff

Admin. Asst.	Gayle Kubrock
Bookkeeper	Kim Croft
Youth Leader	Margaret Thomas
Custodian	
Pianist	Jackie Wood
Choir Director	Julie Jones
Webmaster	Izzy Sherwood-Reid

Church Office Hours

Monday- Friday
9 am - 2 pm

Pastoral Assistance

Church Office 525-8753
Rev. Nathaniel Mahlberg
(608) 469-1406

You can read Pastor Nathaniel' s sermons in his online blog at:
<https://thedandelionwayblog.wordpress.com>
Or hear them on our website at:
www.firstchurchuccww.org.

We celebrate our diversity as an expression of God's Creative love. We welcome persons of all age, race, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, and

Worship Services

August 2nd - August 30th



August 2, 2020

To honor John Lewis-the living legacy of Christian nonviolent action
“The Legacy of Creative & Courageous Christian Confrontation with Violence”

OPENING PRAYER

O Holy Spirit, love within:

Kindle within us the flame of your burning passion

That we may work without ceasing for justice and peace on earth

And at length may attain to your love that never ends

In the name of the Source, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen

Rev. Elizabeth Rankin Geitz

WELCOME

We welcome you in peace.

May you enter this place knowing God has made you good and worthy of love.

May you feel safe to bring your light and your love and your messiness.

Use them to bless our sacred gathering.

May you in turn be blessed here in the presence of the Holy One our God.

STATEMENT OF IDENTITY

We are a congregation of diverse Christian believers empowered by love and guided by the Holy Spirit.

It is our mission to enable personal Spiritual growth, collective outreach to the community and stewardship of God’s creation.

We are an open and affirming church.

Because of who you and where you are on life's journey,

You are welcome here.

READING FROM EARLY CHRISTIAN WISDOM

From “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,” an early Christian manual summarizing what it means to be a follower of Jesus:

“There are two Ways: A Way of Life and a Way of Death. The difference between these two Ways is great.

The Way of Life is this:

You shall love first the Holy One your Creator, and secondly your neighbor as yourself.

And you shall do nothing to anyone that you would not wish done to yourself.

What you may learn from these words is to bless them that curse you, to pray for your enemies, and to fast for your persecutors ...

You must resist any temptation to hypocrisy, spitefulness, or superiority. You are to have no

malicious designs on a neighbor. You are to cherish no feelings of hatred for anybody; some you are to gently correct, some to pray for, and some again to love more than your own life."

We stand at a moment in the history of this country in which we are at an intersection of a variety of forces and events at play. We see the country and indeed the world ravaged with the pandemic called Covid 19, with a disproportionate number of people of color and low wage high risk workers being disproportionality impacted, We also see in the streets of cities across the world, a massive rebellion of the people as demonstrations express outrage at the police sanctioned murder of black people. We also yesterday celebrated the independence of this country from British colonialist oppression, in which part of the foundational documents of this republic state: "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal, with the right to pursue life, liberty and happiness and these are endowed by their creator". It is in this juncture that we are here standing today.

SERMON

"The Legacy of Creative & Courageous Christian Confrontation with Violence"

With the recent passing into glory of John Lewis, the great Christian civil rights leader, I want to honor the living legacy of nonviolent action, which Rep. Lewis embodied and inspired.

John Lewis was one of the great elders, and we still have a few with us, who can teach us what it takes to have a life-long commitment to creative and courageous nonviolent resistance to violence, injustice, and oppression.

Let's hear some of his words:

"When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have a moral obligation to do something about it."

"You must be bold, brave, and courageous and find a way... to get in the way ... Get into good trouble."

"You never become bitter, you never become hostile, you never demean your opposition."

"Never give up. Never give in. But never become hostile... Hate is too big a burden to bear."

"Before we went on any protest, whether it was sit-ins or the freedom rides or any march, we prepared ourselves, and we were disciplined. We were committed to the way of peace - the way of non-violence - the way of love - the way of life as the way of living."

This commitment was for Lewis, and can be for us, a deeply Christian commitment.

Part of our Baptism vows are

"Do you promise, by the grace of God, to be Christ's disciple,
to follow in the way of our Savior,
to resist oppression and evil,
to show love and justice,
and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ
as best you are able?"

We need models and teachers and heroes in how to live out those promises, especially in times of turmoil and trouble.

Now, I'll remind us that it's not how well we live out those baptism promises that proves our worthiness or unworthiness before God.

We are saved by grace. Period.

So when we commit to trying to follow the way of Jesus, we do that not out of guilt or fear, but out of our sincere response to the truth and reality of the living God, as it speaks to us amidst the urgencies of our time. The way of Jesus guides us into a fuller and deeper realization of divine truth. That does not at all mean it's easy – grace is free but it isn't cheap – we are challenged to die to our small selves, and its fear and pettiness, and mature into who God would shape us to be, for each other and for this time.

Here's John Lewis again,

"First of all, you have to grow. It's just not something that is natural. You have to be taught the way of peace, the way of love, the way of nonviolence."

It's a religious discipline guided by religious insight.

Here's Lewis again,

"In the religious sense, in the moral sense, you can say in the bosom of every human being, there is a spark of the divine. So you don't have a right as a human to abuse that spark of the divine in your fellow human being.

We, from time to time, would discuss if you see someone attacking you, beating you, spitting on you, you have to think of that person, you know, years ago that person was an innocent child, innocent little baby. And so what happened? Something go wrong? Did the environment, did someone teach that person to hate, to abuse others? So you try to appeal to the goodness of every human being and you don't give up. You never give up on anyone."

This is straight of the Gospel, right?

Jesus, the Apostles all taught this and lived this, as did the saints through the ages, whom John Lewis now joins, who form a cloud of witnesses.

Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do not return evil for evil...

This prevents us from becoming like the evil that we oppose. Violence and hate and falsehood are contagious. The contagion of evil is something the sowers of discord use to their benefit – you've been seeing that play out lately? - and something Christians should be inoculated against, because of the blood of Christ.

Now, the gospel challenge to love our enemies should not be an excuse for cowardice. Jesus was assuming we'd have enemies – the challenge was to love those enemies. The point is not to avoid conflict or prevent people from being mad at us. The point is not to let our enemies get their way.

Jesus obviously was not a passive person. He flipped over a few tables in his time, and got into a whole lot of what John Lewis called "good trouble."

The other big misunderstanding to clear up is that the teachings of Jesus do not mean we should just put up with abuse.

Too often they've been used that way, for sure. There's definitely a double standard in who gets told "blessed are the meek, turn the other cheek" and who gets blessed for battle. Those of us who have some privilege in society need to be very careful about this. Do we require some people to be nonviolent while we ourselves enjoy the fruits of violence done in our name?

"Turn the other cheek" is one of the most misunderstood teachings of Jesus.

This is from the sermon on the mount, Matthew chapter 5 (38-39)

'As you know, we were once told, "An eye for an eye," and "A tooth for a tooth." But I tell you: Don't react violently to the one who is evil. When someone hits you on the right cheek, turn the other as well.'

First, it's usually translated, "Resist not the evildoer." But the Greek word here usually means in particular *violent* resistance.

"Don't *react violently* to one who is evil."

What should you do instead?

Turning the other cheek is *not* non-resistance. It's in fact a startling form of resistance.

Do you notice just how specific Jesus is?

"When someone hits you on the *right* cheek, turn the other as well."

Why the *right* cheek?

Jesus here isn't going out of his way to council people about how to box against a south-paw. And, anyway, in that culture, people don't touch other people with their left hand, it's unclean.

Jesus is talking about a situation where someone is being slapped, backhanded.

Jesus is talking to people like women, people like slaves or servants, who know very well what it's like for their right cheek to sting as they cower in fear and humiliation.

And in *that* situation, what does it mean to stand up and turn their left cheek? What's that say? It's saying "No, you don't slap me. You punch me like an equal."

And where would that leave the abusive husband or slavemaster?

This is about asserting one's dignity in a way that throws the rug out from under the person who wields the violent power.

It's sitting down at a segregated lunch counter and saying, "You serve me like an equal. And if you think that's illegal, then you go ahead and arrest me, and I'll be back again tomorrow."

This is about creative and courageous intervention that unmask the lies that underlie the unjust situation.

Walter Wink, who was part of the civil rights movement and later became a biblical scholar, talks about Jesus' Third Way:

Between violence on the one hand and victimhood on the other, there is a third way, "in which evil can be opposed without being mirrored." This is the way of Jesus

Between violence on the one hand and victimhood on the other, there is a third way, "in which evil can be opposed without being mirrored." This is the way of Jesus

Here's how Wink sums up this Third Way:

"Seize the moral imperative

Find a creative alternative to violence

Meet force with ridicule or humor

Break the cycle of humiliation

Refuse to submit or to accept the inferior position

Expose the injustice of the system

Take control of the power dynamic

Shame the oppressor into repentance

Stand your ground

Force the Powers to make decisions for which they are not prepared

Recognize your own power

Be willing to suffer rather than retaliate

Cause the oppressor to see you in a new light

Deprive the oppressor of a situation where a show of force is effective

Be willing to undergo the penalty for breaking unjust laws

Die to fear of the old order and its rules."

-Jesus & Nonviolence: A Third Way, pgs. 27-28

There is great power and potential to this Third Way of Jesus. The masterminds of organized nonviolent social change have used this in effective and strategic ways. And it is rooted in deep spiritual truths about God and humanity.

I pray that we do our part to keep this legacy effective and alive.

Thanks be to God.

BENEDICTION

Go forth in peace;

be of good courage

hold fast to that which is good;

Render to no one evil for evil even as you resist evil

honor the dignity of all

show love and justice

witness to the word and the way of Jesus

love and serve the Lord our God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; and may the

blessing of God Almighty, the Source, Son, and Spirit, be with you always. Amen.



August 9, 2020

"Walking in the Shade of the Tree of Life"

OPENING PRAYER

O God, all-powerful, true and incomparable
Present in all things, yet limited by none,
Holy One,
Untouched by place,
Unaged by time,
Unhurried by the years
You are beyond all change
You are by nature immutable
Living in light that none can approach
Invisible, yet made known to us
Manifest in the glories of creation
You are found by all who seek You with sincere heart
And so, we seek you now, O God,
In our adoration, in our yearning, in our reverent awe
And we attend
To You.
In the Name of the Name beyond names we pray
Amen

WELCOME

We welcome you in peace.
May you enter this place knowing God has made you good and worthy of love.
May you feel safe to bring your light and your love and your messiness.
Use them to bless our sacred gathering.
May you in turn be blessed here in the presence of the Holy One our God.

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It is our mission to enable personal Spiritual growth, collective outreach to the community and stewardship of God's creation.
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Because of who you and where you are on life's journey,
You are welcome here.

READING FROM SCRIPTURE Revelations 21:1-4; 22:1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

God will dwell with them;

they will be God’s peoples,

and God themselves will be with them,

wiping every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

...

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.

On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and God’s servants will worship God. They will see God’s face, and God’s name will be on their foreheads.

And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

SERMON "Walking in the Shade of the Tree of Life"

What’s been helping you cope these days? (*If you’ve been coping at all – it’s understandable if we haven’t.*) But have you found a little sanity project? You know, some project or practice that’s helped you keep it grounded, keep it real in the bigger reality of things.

I’d love to hear from you about this, I’d love for us to share with each other what project or practice has been helping us in these challenging times. It can be something explicitly spiritual or religious – religious practice can be key for times like these – but often times it isn’t explicitly spiritual, though it may well be deeply good for the soul.

When we get anxious or scared or angry, that can give us tunnel vision. So, for example, if we’re outraged about something that someone is doing or saying or *not* doing or saying, we can then easily get into a state of mind where we *only* see the people who are acting terribly, and we don’t manage to notice everyone else and everything else, that’s encouraging and affirming and life-giving.

When we're anxious or overwhelmed or scared or angry or desperate, we get reactive, always going for the knee jerk reactions to what flashes up in front of us. We can then act in ways that stray from our values as followers of Jesus.

It can really help to have practices or projects that keep reminding us of a bigger view of what's real and what's possible than what's jumping out to our attention in the moment. Regular practice and turning to this can help us be more responsible in how we respond.

Now, of course, if I'm talking about a bigger view of things that may be what we feel like we want to avoid: A big view of things these days can be upsetting – we *are* after all in the midst of historic level problems and crises. I won't be a part of denying that.

But a *bigger* big view - a view, a vision, that scopes out to what is not only ancient but even eternal – this is the kind of big view can indeed bring comfort and courage.

My little sanity project these days, for what it's worth – and I'm not claiming that I'm altogether keeping myself together - my little attempt at a sanity project has been to hang out with trees more. I've just endeavored to become a little better acquainted with the trees in my neighborhood.

So, most mornings now I go on a little walk, oftentimes I take my prayer beads to just remind me to be in a prayerful way, and I just let myself be curious about the trees I come across. What can I notice about them? Each day I just pick one to look at. What do I notice about the leaves or needles, and seeds and bark and trunk and branches?

Then when I go home I take a minute to look through my tree book and try to figure out what kind of tree it is. And then I try to remember that the next day.

That's it. I don't have a lot of time; I'm not trying to become an expert; I started this knowing next to nothing about trees; I'm not making this a big deal. It's just something to enjoy.

One reason this has been helpful to me is simply being in the open air with this spirit of openness and curiosity.

Curiosity is the antidote to anxiety, after all.

But more than that, it's also a nice break from humans (God bless us. God help us).

It just feels good to hang out with a tree, right?

Just sit up against a trunk of big old cottonwood and slow down,
root down,

ground out

and ease into a longer, slower, more stable rhythm of life.

And just sit and listen as the wind blows through the leaves,

And feel how the tree moves in its limber and strong way with the forces around it.

And then settle as the wind settles

And be quiet and still.

It is good to connect with a more-than-human rhythm and scope of things.

Trees are beings that often live a lot longer than people do, when they're left alone – 100 years, 200 years, sometimes even 2/3/4,000 years. There are trees alive today that were already old when Moses came along. And there are species of trees still going strong these days that have been around since before the dinosaurs.

Trees are ancient beings that have survived and thrived with forest ecosystems through tremendous changes – times of plenty, times of want, through fires, floods, cataclysms, mass extinctions, and awesome outpourings of new and abundant life.

Maybe trees have some things to teach us, especially as we humans face some species wide challenges.

It's not a mistake that at both the beginning and the end of the Bible we encounter the Tree of Life.

The Tree of Life is at the center of the Garden of Eden. It is at the center of the harmonious abundance of Creation, as it is envisioned before the first wounds.

And the Tree of Life rises again at the end of the Bible, at the completion of the Biblical testimonies about humanity's fall from and return to unity with our Creator.

The book of Revelation is this dreamlike, at times nightmarish vision that unveils the self-destructiveness of human pride, which denies God, denies our place within the order of God's creation, and instead lives by human might & violence & exploitation.

All this passes away, at the end of the book of Revelation, to a new heaven and a new earth, renewed and re-united, through the cosmic Christ.

In the center of this vision is the Tree of Life:

"Then the angel showed me River of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ...

On either side of the river is the Tree of Life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." (Revelations 22:1-2)

"The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."

Biologists have discovered that most trees are part of this whole underground gift economy – literally underground. Through their roots, trees swap all kinds of nutrients with fungi and with other trees, even across species. They'll send out signals about threats, so other trees in the forest can prepare defenses against infesting insects.

When an elder tree is going to die, it sends out this big mineral dump through its roots to its neighbors, basically giving away its inheritance. Then of course when a tree falls and rots it provides life for countless species of plants and fungi and bacteria and insects and animals, for countless years.

Now, trees compete with each other, for sure. But big picture they cooperate in enlightened self-interest - it is in giving away that they receive. They thrive through providing for a vibrant forest ecosystem.

Trees are just water and minerals and sunlight and gas. But they are the toughest, gnarliest lifeforms. Trees know how to survive.

You ever see a sawed-off stump with these scrawny branches and little leaves sticking out like a ring around it? That tree is still alive. Those roots are still churning, it's still putting out leaves to gather in the sun.

“A shoot will sprout from the stump of Jesse” – that’s the prophet Isaiah (11:1), singing the divine vision about how his people can survive the destruction wrought by their hubris, Survive and thrive in a new way, a holy way, in alignment with our God, Guided by the spirit, Isaiah says, “of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of council and might, the spirit of knowledge and reverence for the Holy One Beyond Name.” (Isaiah 11:2).

Our ancestors knew that the ancient way of trees are models for life, especially in times of upheaval:

Be Strong; be limber; be tough; be generous; tend to the health of the ecosystem around you.

That’s wisdom we need to heed right now.

But as much as we can learn and be encouraged and comforted from ancient beings such as trees, they are themselves limited creations.

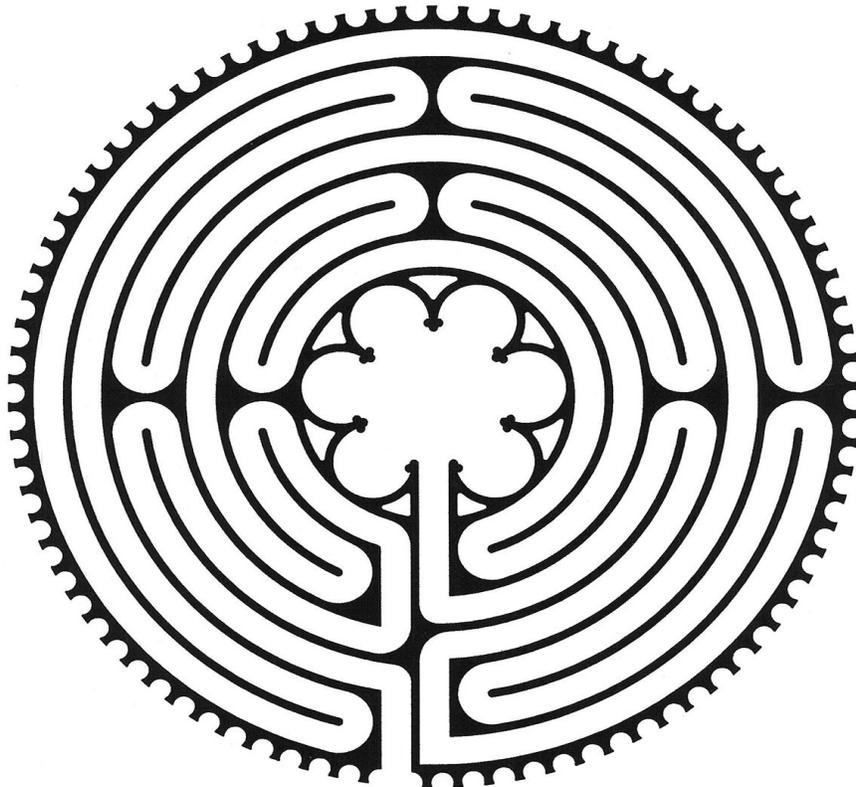
So, let us also be led beyond to the boundless abundant realms of God, the Creator
“all-powerful, true and incomparable
Present in all things, yet limited by none,
Untouched by place,
Unaged by time,
Unhurried by the years.
beyond all change
immutable
Invisible, yet made known to us
Manifest in the glories of creation
You, O God, are found by all who seek with sincere heart
And so, we seek you now, O God,
In our adoration, in our yearning, in our reverent awe.
Amen.”

BENEDICTION

By Mary Luti

Our worship has ended,
But its gifts remain:
Tuck its praise inside you.
Take its goodness with you.
Drink from its wells of lasting peace.
Live by its lift, its courage and grace,
And don’t be afraid.
Seek to serve.
In plenty or want,

Find ways to share.
Discern the truth and tell it,
Resist all wrong,
And don't be afraid.
Regard all people as your people.
In hard times and good,
Take care of yourself,
Take care of your people,
And don't be afraid.
And may the blessing of God, our life,
The friendship of Christ, our healer,
And the daring of the Spirit, our truth,
Be ours today, and every day to come.
Amen.



August 16th, 2020
"Healing the Healers"

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord, let our souls rise up to meet you
As the day rises to meet the sun.
Draw us into your love
Deliver us from fear
Unfetter us to freely bloom in the glory of your Holy Presence.
In our lives, in our prayers, in our time of worship
My your Kin-dom come, your will be done.
Glory to the Creator, and to the Christ, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.
Amen.

WELCOME

We welcome you in peace.
May you enter this place knowing God has made you
good and worthy of love.
May you feel safe to bring your light and your love and
your messiness. Use them to bless our sacred gathering.
May you in turn be blessed here in the presence of the
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FIRST READING Mark 6:30-34

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they

hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

SECOND READING Matthew 11:28-29

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

SERMON "Healing the Healers"

The healers and the helpers, the caregivers, the caretakers always have been essential to the survival of communities.

We need our healers.

Just like we need the growers, the warriors, the weavers, the artisans, the builders, the traders, the teachers, the story tellers, the mystagogues, the music makers, the leaders ...

There are central roles that any community needs. We need to have good people and groups of people serving in these different ways to be able to survive and thrive as a community. When things get out of balance, and some roles are not honored or supported in the ways they need to be able to take care of the needs they address in society, there can be some real problems.

As we now are going through the stresses of this pandemic and all the disruptions and changes we're going through, it's helped us to appreciate more what roles we need people to play in our lives together. What work is essential work? It's also exposed the ways that many of these essential workers are not supported or honored in their roles. Think of the folks in the meatpacking plants having to fight to get minimal safeguards while the virus tears through their ranks.

And think of the tremendous, overwhelming stresses on our health care providers.

The healers and the helpers, the caregivers, the caretakers always have been essential to the survival of communities. That's urgently true now – and it's very important they are getting the support *they* need.

My preaching the past several weeks has mostly focused on healing, exploring how Jesus' healing stories and other themes of healing in the Bible speak to the needs of our times.

Today I feel led to speak to the healing needs of our healers.

Recently someone I was talking with about the healing stories in the Bible pointed out that Jesus sometimes seems overburdened with the constant demands on him to heal everyone. I've talked some here about those moments when Jesus is really quite human. This is something this person I was talking to was glad to be able to relate to with Jesus. They're a front-line healthcare provider way too often overburdened with the demands of caring for patients

patients in a system that does not give providers the time or resources they need, even before the pandemic.

Jesus was a healer.

And as a healer, he was very much in demand.

When Jesus healed people he often told them not to tell anyone about it. But, of course, that's exactly what they went off and did. So, wherever Jesus went, crowds of people with all kinds of hurts and ailments would seek him out.

Jesus was a healer, and he taught and empowered his disciples to be healers.

And there's something to learn from looking at what happened the first time Jesus sent his disciples off on their own to bring healing to the sick, and freedom to those haunted by their demons, to bring peace to the troubled.

When the disciples came back from this first foray into their lives as healers, we're told they had been so busy they hadn't had time to eat.

How many nurses, doctors, EMTs can relate to this?

So, Jesus said to them, "Let's have you all come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile."

Jesus often liked to go off in the desert to pray, to be alone with the presence of God. And we know Sabbath is central to Jewish life (and should be central to Christian life, and central to the lives of everyone, let alone those who are doing healing work) - regular time of rest and renewal, centered in prayer. Jesus was teaching his disciples the importance of this, as they stepped into their work as healers.

But just as they went off to get some rest, people caught sight of where they were going and headed them off, so when they arrived there was a crowd waiting for them.

Just as they were going to clock out ... and how many caregivers, healthcare workers, healers, helpers can relate to this?

Now, Jesus was moved by compassion when he saw this crowd of people in their need and he settled in and taught the folks who had gathered there.

This is the set-up for the famous loaves and fishes miracle.

We're talking about thousands of people who are now way out beyond the outskirts of town. They've just listened to Jesus teach, probably for good while. And now they're now hungry. The disciples want to send them all away to fend for themselves for supper. They came out here to get a break from everyone in the first place - they themselves still haven't eaten.

But, Jesus tells them to take the little food they have and give it away.

In the breaking and giving of that bread and the fish, the food doesn't diminish - it multiplies. And everyone is fed.

And what happens after that?

Jesus sends *everyone* away, including the disciples, and goes up the mountain to get his alone time and pray.

In our lives of service, we need to rely on a Higher Power.

We can't become more Christ-like without relying more on Christ.

If it's just up to us, we can't do it, and we definitely can't *keep* doing it. How great the world's heart-break. How great the world's wound. How great the world's hunger.

But if our reliance is on God, what's possible is greater than we can imagine.

God can provide. We at our best are vessels for the love and life that God is pouring out with such abandon through the world.

Many healers are wounded healers:

Folks who know hurt and know heartbreak and have found that part of *their* healing is the work of helping others to heal. In their woundedness and strength they have become open vessels.

Many healers *become* wounded healers, even if they didn't start out that way. Their work has brought them so close to hurt and heart-break. They then go through the struggle and growth of learning to rely on God so that it is in breaking and giving we can multiply and receive.

What all this means is that healers need healers. Caregivers need care given to them.

Especially now with the, at times, overwhelming need, we need to be supporting our healers and caregivers in the ways we can – spiritually, socially, financially, systemically.

But, above all, in all of this, may we all know that our ultimate support and our ultimate healing is in the Creator, the Sustainer, and the Redeemer of all life.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

- Matthew 11:28-29

Thanks be to God.

BENEDICTION

Dear kindred workers of the Kin-dom of God:

May the peace of Christ go with you,

wherever God may send you

May God guide you through the wilderness,

protect you through the storm

As you follow the way of abundant life

May God bring you home rejoicing

at the wonders you have been shown

Amen



August 23rd, 2020
"Awake my Soul!"

OPENING PRAYER

Adopted from the Lorica of St. Patrick

Holy God, We arise today
Through the strength of heaven:
Light of sun,
Radiance of moon,
Splendor of fire,
Speed of lightning,
Swiftness of wind,
Depth of sea,
Stability of earth,
Firmness of rock.
Holy God,
We arise today
And join in worshipping you,
Through Your strength to pilot us:
Your might to uphold us,
Your wisdom to guide us,
Your eye to look before us,
Your ear to hear us,
Your word to speak for us,
Your hand to guard us,
Your way to lie before us,
Your shield to protect us,
Your host to save us
From snare of devils,
From temptations of vices,
From everyone who shall wish us ill,
Afar and anear,
Alone and in a multitude
...
Holy God, we arise today and join in worshipping you,
We invoke
Christ with us, Christ before us, Christ behind us,
Christ in us, Christ beneath us, Christ above us,
Christ on our right, Christ on our left,
Christ when we lie down, Christ when we sit down, Christ when we arise,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of us,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of us,
Christ in every eye that sees us,
Christ in every ear that hears us.
Amen.

WELCOME

We welcome you in peace. May you enter this place knowing God has made you good and worthy of love. May you feel safe to bring your light and your love and your messiness. Use them to bless our sacred gathering. May you in turn be blessed here in the presence of the Holy One our God.

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SCRIPTURE Psalm 108: 1-6

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and make melody.
Awake, my soul!
Awake, O harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn.
I will give thanks to you, O Holy Mystery, among the peoples,
and I will sing praises to you among the nations.
For your steadfast love is higher than the heavens,
and your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens,
and let your glory be over all the earth.
Give victory with your right hand, and answer me,
so that those whom you love may be rescued.

SERMON "Awake my Soul!"

The act of blessing one another can be very powerful. There is healing power to it, a way of praying for one another that calls on our deepest wishes for one another and calls us to be aware of the presence of God in those deepest wishes.

The act of blessing is an embodied way of praying. If you're giving someone a blessing or receiving a blessing, don't you just naturally want to put your hand on your heart?

Feel that warmth. Blessing calls us to feel the union of body and soul, the communion between heaven and earth, in this act of being present in this moment of communion between two people.

The act of blessing is a good way to get out of being self-absorbed. If we're invited to bless one another it calls on our better selves, it calls on us to see more deeply into the true needs of the person we're blessing.

What do you really truly wish for this person?

Of course, we could say to someone, "Beloved of God, may you become less annoying."

But even there, there's an invitation to go deeper: do they have some unmet needs that give rise to whatever it is we find annoying? Is there something about ourselves that could change so that we no longer react in annoyance. Be careful what you pray for, right? It may come true. If we pray for someone to become less annoying, God may use that to change us so that we find them less annoying. The act of blessing, even if we don't do it so well, the act of blessing increases the activity of divine love in our hearts.

This is why Jesus and his disciples and the apostle Paul direct us to bless those who curse us. The call to bless begins to free us from hurt and hate.

Now, we can give a kind of blessing like,

"May you be blessed with long life in a home that is always full of happy bedbugs."

"May your belly always be full and your stomach acids always rise into your esophagus."

There's a whole tradition of these kinds of "blessings" that are actually curses, in Yiddish culture. Clever. Wicked. It's worth looking up.

Anyway, the challenge to bless our enemies, to actually *bless* them, is a very wise practice. Yes, we may feel like we wish for our enemies to spontaneously combust, or at the very least to go crawl back under the rock they came from - whatever will get them out of our lives. But when we invite God into the mix, which happens when we are challenged to bless, we can see that there can be a deeper wish we can have for our enemies, which in no way makes us a long-suffering push over. This is not blessing them for victory in their evil pursuits. This is truly praying for their transformation, their repentance and embrace of grace, for the sake of the wellness of their souls.

If they become free of the meanness that has gripped their hearts, then we would become free of the meanness they direct at us. And in fact, we can become free of the effects of that meanness on us, in simply the act of imagining them receiving what they *truly* need for the wellness of their souls, and praying for that.

Blessing our enemies is the advanced course.

Start with blessing those whom we care about, and to allow ourselves to receive blessings. Even: what blessing could you give yourself?

So, let me give you some homework:

In the course of this week, find at least one person in your life to offer a blessing to. Pray on what that blessing could be, that expresses your deepest wishes for them, for the wellness of their souls. And then find a way to give them that blessing. Whether that's in a letter, or a message, or over the phone, or safely in person. Or maybe circumstances are that you can only pray that blessing for them between you and God.

Let's all endeavor to do this at least once this week. And then notice what happens. We may find we want to keep doing it. We find more people to bless, more ways to bless them. We can pray on what blessings we would wish for ourselves. We may then experiment with blessing our enemies.

Alright? Let me know how that practice goes for you.

Now, all that said, allow me, if you like, to offer you a blessing:

Beloved of God

May you know, more and more, your beloved-ness before your Creator

May you grow in knowing the beloved-ness of each and all, before the Eternal Source of all Life

Beloved of God

May you grow in knowing the blessing you have to offer others

May you grow in your openness to receive the blessings that others have to give you.

May the cycles of these blessings free your heart, and strengthen it.

Beloved of God

May you know that is not by your virtue that you are saved or by its lack that you are condemned

But that you are surrounded and filled at all times by the abundant Grace God freely offers.

May you say Yes to this Grace, and keep saying Yes. May your moments of No not deter you from always returning to the eternal invitation. And as you return and return to your true home in the embrace of God's Grace, may those voices of "No" diminish in their power over you. May you become free from the judgment you suffer, and the judgment you inflict.

Beloved of God

May your souls awaken

May you arise as embodied souls

Embracing the powers and potentials to which God has entrusted you

Harkening to your Call to use those powers and potentials in whatever station of life you are in, in your special role in our beloved community tasked with serving and uplifting all on behalf of the Realm of God.

Beloved of God,

May you be blessed, head to toe,

body to soul,

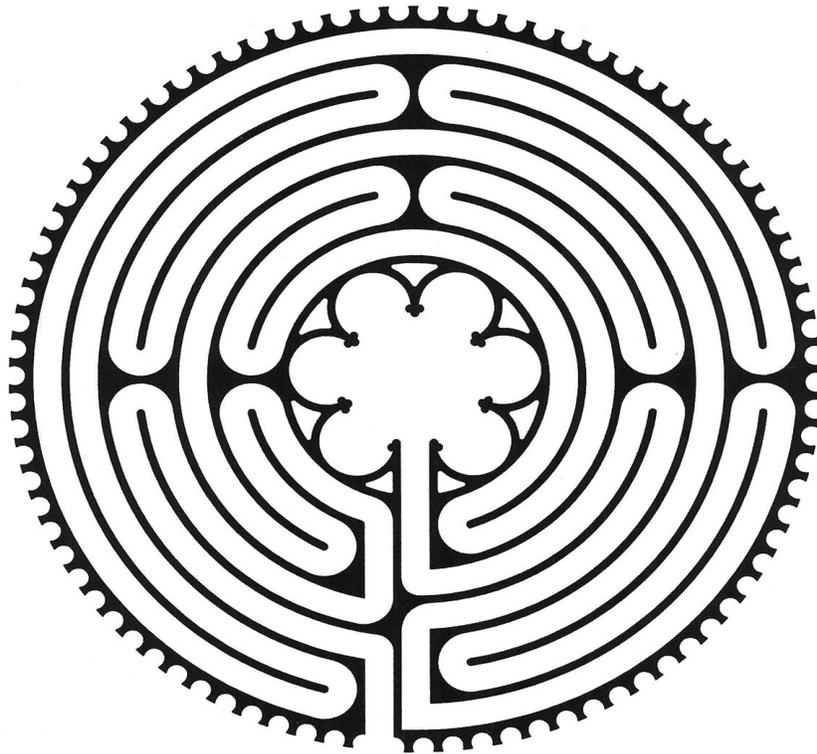
In the Name of the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit,

To Whom I give thanks and praise:

Amen.

BENEDICTION

May God, who is present in sunrise and nightfall
And in the crossing of the sea,
Guide your feet as you go.
May God, who is with you when you sit
And when you stand,
Encompass you with love,
And lead you by the hand.
May God, who knows your path
And the places where you rest,
Be with you in your waiting,
Be your good news for sharing,
And lead you in the Way that is everlasting.
Amen.



August 30, 2020
“Community as Healing”
Izzy Sherwood-Reid

OPENING PRAYER

Holy One, we express gratitude to you, for your love which preserves beyond our times of worship.

In your love, grant us perseverance, to hold steadfast to our convictions.

In your love, grant us wisdom to know the difference between perseverance and stubbornness.

In your love, grant us strength to persistently respond to the needs of our world, to give a kind word, a healing touch, a drive for justice.

All this we pray in your many holy names, and the spirit of your truth in Jesus.

Amen.

WELCOME

We welcome you in peace.

May you enter this place knowing God has made you good and worthy of love.

May you feel safe to bring your light and your love and your messiness. Use them to bless our sacred gathering.

May you in turn be blessed here in the presence of the Holy One our God

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FIRST READING Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

SECOND READING Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

SERMON "Community as Healing."

This Sunday, I am going to continue on our current trend of speaking about Jesus' healing ministry during these times where, perhaps more than usual, we could stand to be reminded that in the midst of suffering and pandemic and alienation, that Jesus is our healer and our teacher in the *all* ways of healing.

Dean Kazi Joshua just shared the incredible story of Jesus healing ten people sick with leprosy— at once. Sure, Jesus has healed individuals before, the paralytic lowered through his roof, the man possessed by legions, the man who waited by the well, but to heal ten people at once is awe-astounding. How better to illustrate the overflowing, abundant, redeeming power of our God than by heaping miracles upon miracles, feeding, sustaining and healing not just individuals who come to ask him for help and for wisdom, but whole groups and communities!

Often times, the emphasis of this bountiful healing story is on the Samaritan, the one who comes back to thank Jesus, which is worthy of attention and inquiry, however I want to focus on a different part of what happens here, something that shows us a bit more about the nature of healing.

At the outset, we are told Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, sharing parables and teaching with those who he is traveling with. Somewhere along their way, a small group of people call out to him, taking care to keep their distance, aware that due to their likely physically evident condition, they are not welcome among groups or camps of people. Leprosy, the disease this group of people were said to have been afflicted with, was a bit of a catch-all for skin

conditions, notably anything with symptoms regarding scaly or dry skin. According the Jewish Levitical law of the time, this who had leprous diseases were to wear torn clothes, vocally declare their ritual impurity—[impurity]— and live alone beyond the edges of the camp or town. So, we can presume that this group of people were unable to live with their families in the camp, or participate in religious activities or services, a condition perhaps more painful than whatever physical ailment they had. They call out, "Jesus, Teacher, have mercy on us!" Have mercy. Help us. Heal us. A cry Jesus, and his disciples, as we heard about last week, are very familiar with. And Jesus responds to them, these people who are supposed to live and *be* alone, he tells them to go into the place of worship where they, in their condition, are not welcome, to re-enter the very society that cast them out— he tells them to go before the priests as of yet, entirely unhealed. Yet, they go, willing to trust him, willing to have faith in this vague instruction. This must have required massive amounts of bravery, as we read other tales of lepers being cast out, being denied proximity to places of worship. And yet they go.

As they make their way to the priests, the unthinkable happens— it is along their journey that they are healed. "As they went, they were made clean." It is in their return that they are healed, it is in their being welcomed home that they are made welcome-able.

And what happens to the Samaritan, the foreigner, the outsider? It is important, here, to recall this station of the Samaritan in the ancient world— throughout the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, there are instances showing the political and religious rift between the Jewish people and the Samaritan people. To the point where, in the Book of Ezra, Samaritans are prevented from rebuilding and entering the Temple in Jerusalem! This led to centuries of war, and destruction, and suffering between these two peoples. Thus, the Samaritan would not have been welcomed in before the priests regardless of his condition. They have made it clear that they are not his priests, this is not his home. So he returns to Jesus, to thank him, and to praise this incredible God that Jesus embodies, the God that saw fit to heal him, an outside, too. Because isn't Jesus, in some way, 'home' for us all? The outcasts, the enemies, the agents of the state, the sex workers, all of these people are radically welcomed into Jesus' ragtag band of travelers. You are radically welcomed into this band too.

Understanding the dissolution of the created boundaries of 'us' and 'them' between Jesus, the Judean messiah, and the Samaritan leper brings us to another element of this story, and what makes it so amazing. After this despised foreigner returns to Jesus, Jesus then sends him on his way. This band is a place of welcome, always, but never a place of stagnancy. Taking our faith with us, wherever our ways may lead, and pouring out that welcome upon all those who cry out from a distance, who call to us from the margins, *have mercy*. This is the transformation of faith, it calls to us to the fringes, to the edges of social acceptability and says will you have mercy?

Healing is not exclusive to the body. While these people are sick with a devastating disease, the root of that illness, and the way to its cure, is that it was an illness that cast people out. This healing is by way of welcome, by way of reentry, by way of being sent home.

In this time of not only viral pandemic, but social pandemic, where hate, oppression, and exclusion run rampant as COVID-19, we are reminded, as the living legacy of that Jesus' ragtag band, that welcome is a way of healing. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans that the mark of a true Christian is that of love and welcome. Extend hospitality to strangers, he says, rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Our church has a strong history of living this radical welcome, of healing our community by telling folks that they are welcome to show themselves here, their true selves, their messy selves, their authentic selves. We have rejoiced with every bit of progress made, and wept for every loss, every time someone is told their very being makes them unwelcome. Yet I encourage and challenge each of us to not rest in our legacy. We are celebrating 20 years of being open and affirming this year, which is worthy of celebration, and joy— but work remains to be done. There are still many in our community, the ill, the lonely, those people who are homeless, those people who are actively oppressed by a government intended to protect them, those whose native land is taken from them, the lowly— those who we see along the way crying out *have mercy*. This miraculous story of healing tells us that our welcome can be healing, creating space for those who have been excluded to return to their physical or spiritual homes can provide that depth of recovery. Let us be reminded of our power as people of a Living God, let us recognize that our ability to welcome is a holy and a transformational thing. Let us challenge ourselves to carry that faith with us on whatever ways we go, and to hear and have mercy on those who cry out to us.

And above all, let us give thanks to God.

BENEDICTION

Holy One, we express gratitude to you, for your love which preserves beyond our times of worship.

In your love, grant us perseverance, to hold steadfast to our convictions.

In your love, grant us wisdom to know the difference between perseverance and stubbornness.

In your love, grant us strength to persistently respond to the needs of our world, to give a kind word, a healing touch, a drive for justice.

All this we pray in your many holy names, and the spirit of your truth in Jesus.

Amen.

