



First Congregational Church Highlights Newsletter August 2020

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” –
Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew 18:20

Beloved community,

Our challenge, our creative opportunity, continues these days:

How may we safely gather and care for our needs for community and connection in the midst of a pandemic? What can gathering mean, such that we know the Spirit of Christ is present?

I am writing these words, prayerfully. You are reading them. Are we now two who are gathered? Is the Spirit of Christ present in this moment among us?

As we plan for September at the church we sincerely wish to have more ways for more people to connect safely in a meaningful way with each other and with God.

To help us decide how to go about doing that, we are mailing and emailing a “Church Life Survey.”

Please help us out by filling out the survey!

It assesses ideas and needs for what we could be doing differently as we continue to adapt in the fall.

We are considering small groups. We are considering making our online worship interactive. We are considering outdoor rituals. We will definitely have programming for adults, as well as, high school youth, middle school youth, and younger children.

Your ideas are important.

Your needs are important.

Your prayers are important.

Your call to leadership is important.

Thank you.

In faith,

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'll 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 us everyone to stay connected.

Sacred Silence Siting 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,

It's hard to believe that it is already August. Despite the rather slow crawl of life in the Covid area, it still feels like the latter part of summer has come quickly.

Our family is in the midst of a road trip that is taking us from Priest Lake (Idaho) across the plains to northern Minnesota. We are doing our best to plan some careful visits to special summer places and people while the weather still permits outdoor gathering. We will also take advantage of a couple rare benefits of life in a pandemic - YouTube church services and Zoom meetings with the church leadership.

Summer has traditionally been a time of recess for our church boards and committees. The last couple years seem to suggest this is less and less the case. As we look ahead to fall, there are numerous people who keep turning the gears of First Congregational Church. Folks are working to put together meeting groups to discuss matters of social justice, particularly for people of color; how to plan the 20th anniversary of our church's designation as "Open and Affirming" of our LGBTQ+ community; our annual stewardship campaign; discern how we might Re-Open with Care when that becomes appropriate; production of our weekly worship services; caring for our beloved church facility and grounds; and serving the people who continue to need us in these difficult times. Pastor Nathaniel has worked diligently with our leadership to prepare us for the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead.

I am so proud of all the people who are coming forward to help us continue God's call that we continue to love and serve one another. You are all dearly missed and our bond is strengthened through this important community that we share at this challenging time.

The loons join me in sending their love,
JR

We are one people; we are only family. And when we finally accept these truths, then we will be able to fulfill Dr. King's dream to build a beloved community, a nation, and a world at peace with itself.

~ John Lewis



Greetings from your Deacons!

Dear church family,

May these warm summer days bring you opportunities to connect to the birds, bees and other fascinating creatures, to explore our wonderful outdoor spaces, and to enjoy your garden's harvests.

May you also remember to connect to your community, safely.

We hope you enjoy participating in the Prayer Craft Project! See the insert in this Highlights. The deacons will not meet this month. We often take a break in August. We are still available to support the life of the church and care of our congregation. We continue to look for creative ways to help us all stay connected to our faith, encourage our spiritual journeys and nurture our community. Feel free to reach out to any of the deacons with your thoughts or concerns. If you are looking for a bit of soul uplifting, please consider connecting to the worship services, at your convenience! You will find wonderful music, sermons, children's sermons by so many of the people we know and love, familiar faces and families. You may be able to see the art and photography of our friends as well.

Please know that the deacons are wishing you well and asking the Lord's blessing upon each and every one of you.

In peace and love,

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.

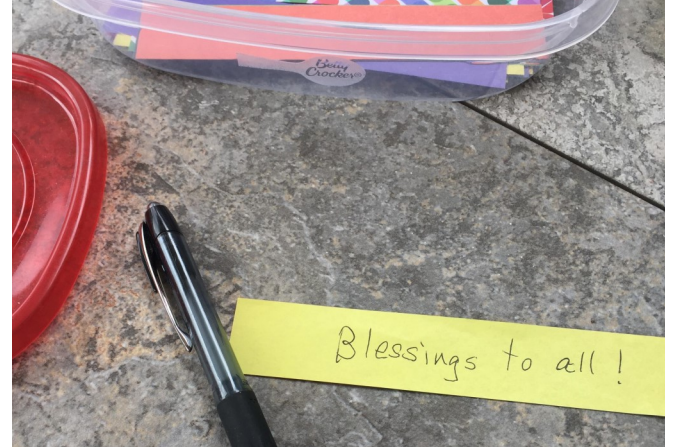
Between now and Advent, express your thoughts on each prayer strip, and feel free to get creative. We hope and pray that by Christmas we will be able to gather together and decorate the church with our paper stories.

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



Youth in Action

On the evening of Sunday, June 28th, families of our newly graduated 5th and 8th graders gathered to celebrate the path behind these youth, and mark with sacred ceremony their transition into the next realm of experience in their lives, families, schooling, the life of our church, our community, and our world.

Pastor Nathaniel blessed our youth with a prayer for this unique and liminal moment in the lives of our beloved ones:

**“As you continue into this new stage of your life’s journey
May you know that God is working to guide you
Especially as you discover more and more about who you truly are
Who God has created you to be,
the gifts God has given you,
And how you can share those gifts with others.
Be blessed”**

For our Rising 6th graders — Kirby Rickard, Emeline Willis, Bella McQueen and Hazel Asmus — Intermediate Sunday School teacher JR Van Slyke, shepherded each one to the entrance of the labyrinth, sending them off with loving words to embark upon their prayerful rite of passage through the twists and turns — both inward and outward — of the labyrinth’s circle.

Contemplative music from Marelú Greco’s keyboard accompanied each step, and the dark clouds burst open with sign and significance to anoint us in our solemn witness.

And I, as these children’s new Youth Ministry Leader, greeted each one as they exited the labyrinth to welcome them into the Fellowship of the Youth Underground, and lead them back to their families.

In these physically distant times, we wanted to bless each of our beloved youth with a symbolic laying on of hands. Dot Willis, Marelú Greco, Heidi McFarley and I made garlands of hands, each inscribed with words of blessing and wisdom, which were wrapped about the shoulders of these initiates as they were reunited with their families around the outer circle of the labyrinth, as all gathered intoned: “Because of where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here!”

Our Rising 9th graders — Tess Bottoms, Libby Drabek and Turner Van Slyke — each embarked upon their own labyrinthine prayer, and exited as the founding members of our new High School Youth Group! We will work together to envision and create a spiritual home for the last years of these beloved young people’s growing, living, and learning in the nurturing and known shelter of childhood before they journey into an even greater unknown...

~Margaret Thomas

RISING CEREMONY





Christian Education



The Pacific Northwest Conference notified our church about two N-Sis-Sen camp-fire experiences and a craft event via Zoom in July.

My granddaughter, Emeline, and I participated in the craft event together, watching as Kaila showed how to make a print using a plastic bag. Then we learned how to craft a God's Eye using sticks and yarn. There was much chatter as some tried to craft this pretty art. Kaila demonstrated how to weave a basket with a wooden base and fiber. We hope our basket kit will arrive soon!

In the meantime Eme and I went to the park and found sticks for our God's Eyes. With a collection of yarn from my craft closet, an hour was spent happily producing art that added colorful feathers and string along with the yarn.

We appreciate everyone's effort to make events happen even if we are isolated from the normal!

Stay tuned for other events CE or the Pacific Northwest Conference is going to schedule, watch Midweek Moment and your email, and will hope to see lots of children on Zoom for storytime! ~ Dot Willis

TALES FROM CEDAR LAKE II

After a two month virtual drought, last Saturday evening we had another brief but violent thunderstorm. It was loud and windy, but brought little rain, and our placid, hot weather continued as normal. Unknown to any of us lightning had struck a tree in the woods a half mile from our land across the lake and was left smoldering. Sunday afternoon two pontoon planes appeared and began circling around our woods. Planes are rare in the Boundary Waters and often mean trouble. Soon we began to smell smoke and see several fire plumes nearby. Soon we began to smell smoke and see several fire plumes nearby. The planes, we discovered, were marking and mapping the fire spot. Within an hour, a Boeing Chinook helicopter arrived from Duluth with the capability of sucking up over 2000 gallons of water in under two minutes. It sprayed over 40 loads of water on the fire and within several hours the 1 ½ acre blaze was mostly contained. Fire fighter crews spent the next two days in the area until no coals were left. This fire was ignited deep in tinder-dry woods and without that Chinook could have destroyed our whole woods. We were lucky!!!

And then the rains began. We had seven inches in three days, lost power a few times and watched the lake level rise several inches ... and felt the stings of newly hatched mosquitoes.

Our balsam firs have suffered an infestation of moths, and over two summers most of them have died. However, they remain standing and are fire hazards and in a wind could fall on people or cabins. Over the last two weeks we have chain-sawed over forty trees, a few of them giants. My son-in-law, Pete, is skilled with the saw, but my daughters and grandkids all took their turns. And we brushed, carried, and burned for a week. It has truly been a group effort. Now the woods surrounding our cabin are healthy with cedar, spruce, white and red pine, maple, birch and aspen... but no dead balsam.

We have been fortunate to have some nesting birds nearby, and have watched waxwings, goldfinches, red eyed vireos, robins, and hummingbirds raise their young. Our daily companions are red breasted nuthatches, chickadees, white throated sparrows, eagles, herons, and a variety of woodpeckers ... and of course our ever present friends, the loons. We are fortunate to share their homes and listen to their serenades.

So far we are virus free here on Cedar Lake but wear masks when we venture into town. Even though some others are relaxing their guards, we value our health and those of others, and will continue to practice safety. I know you all are doing the same thing. First Congregational Church always sets a high standard for others!

Much love to you all,

Lee and Chip

Granddaughter Alex Falling Trees

Chinook Helicopter to the Rescue



Lee & Chip Taking a
Well-Earned Rest

Cedar Lake

After the work is done.....



A Perfect
Evening

Grandson
Jackson



Graduation 2020

By Daniel Taggart

I started at Walla Walla Community College in 2012. I did not know what I wanted to study or get out of going to college. It was a hard process understanding what classes to take and finding my way around the college. I also started working at the college bookstore. After a couple of years and with advice from my boss Amy, we figured out the best degree for me was a Business Administration degree. I worked with an advisor to help me pick what classes I needed to take for the degree I was working towards. They also helped me to get accommodations for my disability so I could be successful.

During my time at WWCC, I was also involved with the Student activities team. This was one of the highlights of my time there. I met a lot of cool people who became my friends. I also helped with or attended a lot of student activities.

After graduating in March 2020, I participated in the virtual graduation in June. My college days are done, but I am still working with my friends at the college bookstore. Working in the bookstore has taught me how to work with money, inventory, sorting books and working with customers.

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"I have known Daniel since he was in Pre School in College Place. We worked together when he was at Davis School and then continued as friends in the community all these years later. A highlight in my life was when Daniel honored me in 2010 when he asked me to be a part of his Initiation Celebration to become an Eagle Scout at FCC.

I have enjoyed interviewing Daniel for Highlights, celebrating his recent graduation from Walla Walla Community College. Congratulations Daniel!"

Linnea Keatts

Congratulations Daniel!



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

WORSHIP SERVICES

– **online videos and call-in video-conference meetings**

Contact Pastor Nathaniel with any questions! You don't need a computer to participate in some of our offerings.

EVERY SUNDAY

10:00 am - Video of the worship service will be available on our [YouTube channel](https://bit.ly/39M7pLa):
<https://bit.ly/39M7pLa>

11:00 am – Prayer and Fellowship meeting

With computer, smartphone, or tablet

Go to this link: <https://zoom.us/j/638358688>

You may be asked for this password: 589720

With landline or cell phone

Dial **(253) 215-8782**

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

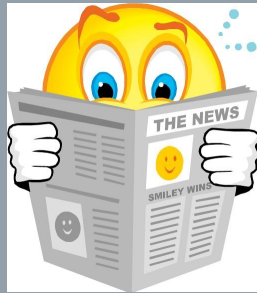
The connecting info does not change Sunday to Sunday

August 2020

Newsletter Deadline

Tuesday, August 18

Please have your submissions in by that date



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!

"Sometimes you find yourself in the middle of chaos, and sometimes in the middle of chaos, you find yourself." —

Boonaa Mohammed



Trustees Meeting

Thursday, August 20th, 6:00 pm

Council Meeting

Sunday, August 28th, 12:30 pm

Deacons Meeting

No August Meeting



Dear God:

Enlighten what's dark in me....

Strengthen what's weak in me....

Mend what's broken in me....

Bind what's bruised in me....

Heal what's sick in me....

and lastly,

Revive whatever peace and love has died in me....





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



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.



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	Dana Taggart
Mission/Social Concern	Heidi McFarley
Music	Open
... and Affirming	Open

Staff

Admin. Asst.	Gayle Kubrock
Bookkeeper	Kim Croft
Youth Leader	Margaret Thomas
Custodian	Art Davila
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

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

July 5th - July 26th



July 5, 2020

“God has made out of one blood all the People’s of the earth...I can’t breathe”

OPENING PRAYER

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 CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE Acts 17:26-28

[Paul is speaking to the people of Athens:]

“Out of one, God made all races on the earth’s surface - fixing a time their rise and fall, and the limits of their settlements – that they might search for God, if by any means they might feel their way to God and find God. And yet the Holy One is not really far from any one of us. For in God we live and move and have our being. To use the words of some of your own poets:

‘We are all God’s people.’”

SERMON “God has made out of one blood all the People’s of the earth...I can’t breathe”

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.

Our attention has been focused on the horrible day light murder of Mr. Floyd. This kind of killing was not new: Breanna Taylor, Ahmaud Aubrey, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Mike Brown, Trayvon Martin, Philando Castille and many more all these had been killed. So, what was different about this moment? Or was this moment different?

If George Floyd cannot breathe, can you? God has made out of one blood all the people’s of the earth. That includes George Floyd. Remember the story of creation in Genesis 2:7, after God created the human, God “breathed” into the clay the breath of life and the clay became human. When George Floyd, Erica Garner, Elijah McClain are crying out: “I can’t breathe”, it is that presence of the divine that was put in them from the beginning that is being taken out. Our breathing and not breathing is therefore a gift of God and not be taken away by any human or organization or the state. For it is the very essence of God in us. God breathed and the clay became human.

There was a 17-year-old woman, she was a witness observing and filming all that was happening to George Floyd. His killing by those who had been sworn to “protect and to serve”. She filmed the whole thing. This is how the world got to know about this murder. There was a witness. Just like on April 29, 1992 when George Holliday filmed the beating of Rodney King by LA police officers and that witness too caused the exposure of the brutality of the LAPD and a city-wide rebellion ensued for days. Holland was white and he was a witness. It was that witness in Minnesota, who broadcast the killing live on Facebook that dramatized the structures of injustice and caused outrage across the world. The largest social movement now ever known, came from the action of that witness. But she was not the only witness on the scene.

What are you testifying to? **God made out of one blood the people’s of the earth...I can’t breathe!**

What were the other witnesses doing? There were at least 3 other police officers who stood by and assisted and abetted the murder. They too have to take account for their participation. So, what kind of witness are you? What kind of witnesses are we? What impact is our testimony having? Are we carrying out interventions on the side of justice? Are we drawing attention to the record of violence and brutality and causing a cloud of witnesses to run with us this race for justice that is set before us? (Hebrews 12:1).

It is this cloud of witnesses that are now in the streets for the last 8 weeks from Los Angeles to Lisbon and from Brooklyn to Berlin. There are no signs that these witnesses are going to stop their crying out for justice. We have seen state attempts at silencing these witnesses, at Lafayette Square in Washington DC for instance. But truth cannot be suppressed forever and injustice will not go unchallenged forever, as the teaching of Dr. King has guided us.

God made out of one blood all the peoples of the earth...I can’t breathe!

This why you see so many in the streets, they are black, brown, straight, gay, trans, rich, poor, documented and undocumented, indigenous, they understand what is being done in their name, and they are saying no more! These are the witnesses that understand that “they are all caught up in a network of mutuality, an injury to one is an injury to all, we can never be who we ought to be until you are what you should be” (Dr. King).

God has made out of one blood the people’s of the earth...I can’t breathe!

On this 4th of July week end, we are reminded of the words of Frederick Douglas at Seneca, speaking in 1852, his speech was entitled "What to the slave is the Fourth of July?"

"What, to the American slave, is the 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all the other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham: your boasted liberty, an unholy license: your national greatness, swelling vanity: your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery: your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour...You declare, before the world, and are understood by the world to declare, that you "hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal: and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights: and that among these are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness: and yet you hold in a bondage...."

Could these cries be heard by the founders? Is the present moment of public witness seeking to answer the queries that Frederick Douglass is raising here? The witnesses indicate that they hear Eric Garner, Breanna Taylor, Ahmed Aubrey, George Floyd, Elijah McClain, Sandra Bland and many more...

I can't breathe!

In that cry we see ourselves that if we are really one with others, that we too can't breathe if others are not allowed to breathe. We have to respond, not because of George Floyd, but because of us. If George Floyd cant breathe and we don't do anything about it, then we are also at risk of losing who we are and indeed what the scripture is teaching today:

Out of one blood, God made all the people's of the earth...I can't breathe

We know that our breathing is connected to the breathing of others. So, what is at stake in America is whether America can breathe or not. Whether it can continue on this path and still be intact. Indeed the prayer here is "What shall save the soul of America"? Can America breathe? Or is what we see the cry of a nation that can't breathe? The walking dead as it were: can we breathe? This why people of all races are in the streets. They don't want this carnage done in their name. This why the statues are coming down across the country and the world. Even congress is taking some actions on questions of policy, policing and community.

I can't breathe!!

This why we see in South Africa, Kenya, Italy people are in the streets calling for justice at American embassies. This moment can not be turned back. But we cannot be content, we have to keep on marching. The "moral arc of the universe is long, but it tends to bend towards justice" (Dr. King). But it doesn't bend by itself, it bends by our acts of witness. This why we must keep on fighting, keep on organizing, keep on voting, keep on bearing witness



July 12, 2020

"Still Waters Running Deep as the Storms Reveal What Needs to be Healed"

OPENING PRAYER

Inflame the light of our senses,
Pour love into our hearts,
The weakness of our bodies
Strengthen with lasting power.
Come, Holy Spirit,
And send out a ray
Of your heavenly light.
O most blessed light,
Fill the innermost hearts
Of those who believe in you.
Wash what is unclean
Water what is arid
Heal what is wounded
Bend what is stiff
Warm what is cold
Guide what has gone astray.

From Veni Creator, 9th cent. hymn, author unknown

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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Because of who you and where you are on life's journey,
You are welcome here.

READING FROM SCRIPTURE

Mark 4:35-41

Later in the day, when evening had come, Jesus says to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake."
After sending the crowd away, the disciples took him along in the boat where he had been sitting, and other boats accompanied him.
Then a great squall comes up and the waves begin to pound against the boat, so that the boat suddenly began to get swamped.

Jesus was in the stern sleeping on a cushion.

They wake him up and say to him, "Teacher! Don't you care that we are going to drown?!"

Then Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still."

The wind then died down. And there was a great calm.

He said to them, "Why are you so cowardly? You still don't trust, do you?"

They were awestruck and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

SERMON "Still Waters Running Deep as the Storms Reveal What Needs to be Healed"

Last weekend we had the opportunity to get out into Cascade mountains. One day we hiked to Hidden Lake, which is near Lake Wenatchee. It's a beautiful little lake in the fir and the hemlock and spruce, nestled there in the mountains.

The lake is so magical that the water shimmers from within.

Literally: there's mica suspended in the water, clouds of tiny crystal flakes that've sloughed off from the rocks.

So, you can see this glittery mineral movement to the flowing depths of the waters.

Our kid, of course, was playing in the mud right along the shore. She would pour water over this mud that was full of this mica and you could watch these shimmering patterns of turbulence unfurl as it flowed into the lake.

It was mesmerizing, and, as you could imagine, very calming.

Someone in one of our recovery groups at the church has told me about a tool she uses to help manage her addiction. It's a bottle, a little clear bottle that she fills with water and a little dish detergent, and glitter. She keeps this with her.

When she's feeling anxious or upset or angry and she notices that she's gotten stirred up, she just takes that bottle out and shakes it up and sets it down. And she just takes some time to sit and watch the glitter settle. As the glitter settles, she settles. As the water clears, her mind clears, her heart clears.

You know, there's the old saying, "Still Waters Run Deep."

The more depth we allow in our souls, the more we open ourselves to the source of our being, the deep and inexhaustible Holy One, our God, the more we, by grace, receive an inner stillness.

Knowing this inner stillness doesn't mean that there isn't turbulence. Storms will come - storms in our own souls and storms from other people and from this often stormy world in which we get to experience what it's like to be alive.

But if we know something of our depths as souls that flow from and return to the Eternal and Transcendent God, perhaps we can meet the storms that come without getting too terribly stirred up.

Perhaps we can have enough stillness, curiosity, and strength and openness of heart to notice patterns in the turbulence, see what it has to teach us, name the reasons the storm has arisen, the wounds that give rise to the winds. Then we can respond in a clear and helpful way.

Now I for one can't stand here and make it seem to you that this is something I'm very good at.

We need help in this, and grace - from each other, from our faith, from God.

Jesus, here, can be our teacher and our guide, our healer, our savior, whom we can call on as a force of stillness and depth to help us through the storms.

Jesus' entire being was so open and unified with the great depths of the Source of All Being, that storms did not unsettle him in the least.

There's the story about the storm on the Lake of Galilee.

Jesus was out with his disciples in boats crossing this large desert lake, when, suddenly, a terrible storm arose, suddenly. The Lake of Galilee has these sheer cliffs that can channel the fierce winds of desert storms into really devastating squalls across the water.

When this storm came up, the waves were threatening to swamp and sink the boats, and the disciples were desperate and panicked.

Jesus was so calm, he was asleep. They had to wake him up.

He stood up in the winds, clear and calm. He looked into the storm, into the flashing patterns of its tumult. And Jesus spoke into the heart of it: "Peace! Be still."

The depths of this Christ-being just swallows the fury of the winds and the waves dissipate like minerals settling into the stillness of the deeps.

Jesus then turns to his disciples and says to them, "Why were you afraid? You obviously have yet to learn what it means to trust in God."

What happens next makes it very clear that all this isn't just nice sounding spiritual stuff.

According to the Gospel of Mark, immediately after the stilling of the storm is one of the most unsettling, and I think important, healing stories in the Gospels.

The way Mark tells it, Jesus stills the storm, the calm waters take the boat to the other side of the lake. And just as Jesus steps from the water to the shore, he encounters yet another storm, this time a storm of tremendous psychological, spiritual distress.

A man rushes out to meet Jesus. He has been living among the dead, we are told, in the tombs, howling, hitting himself with stones. He panics the people around him - the townspeople, we are told, are always trying to shackle him but he always breaks the chains. There is an untamable fury. But it doesn't seem like he's harming anyone but himself.

Jesus is calm and clear as he looks into the storm in this man's soul. Jesus speaks into the storm, "Peace! Be still." But it does not become still.

Instead Jesus must call on the demon to name itself. He must see and name the patterns of the psychic turmoil.

The answer is, "My name is Legion, for we are many."

Jesus now has the power to command that Legion of demons haunting this man to leave him and peace. He sends them into a herd of pigs - who for the Hebrew people represent what is unclean. These demon pigs then plunge off a cliff into the Lake of Galilee, where they die and settle and return to the eternal stillness of the deeps.

The storm has passed. The man is now returned to a state of stillness and sanity. Jesus has shared with him the peace that comes with knowing the depths of one's being as a child of the living God.

Now, there's a lot to unpack here. More than just a sermon's worth.

When I was in seminary I did a study of this healing story in terms of trauma due to violence, and how Jesus here is guiding this man through the process of recovering the wholeness of one's sense of self that so often can get shattered with traumatic violence.

I've had some experience working with combat veterans, helping to set up opportunities for them to share their stories with young folks, and working with them on how they tell their stories. So, I'm inclined to hear this healing story as being about war trauma.

And the key here is "Legion" – this man is possessed by a multitude of demons who name themselves "Legion." In Jesus' in these regions around Galilee there was an attempted uprising against the Roman occupation. And Legions of Roman soldiers had marched through and did the kinds of things that made the Roman army notorious. And a lot of people were left scarred and scared and angry.

When I was working on this story in seminary, and really thinking about how we are a nation that has known a lot of war in our short history, I just happened to strike up a conversation with a young man. He turned out to be a lay leader in a church in Harlem. He told me how he was doing a study of this story with a men's group at his church. I hadn't even brought up that I was working on this story, we were just talking about, you know, how church is going. He was so excited about this story and how they, as a group of Black men in Harlem, were having all these revelations about how this story spoke to their experience, and to the struggles of their people with the collective traumas that Black folks in America carry.

There's so much here, with the attempts to shackle this man and him breaking the chains, but still caught in cycles of violence; with the ways that "Legion" can name the collective forces of organized violence in our country and our history ... but that's not my story to tell.

I just love how the Gospel can speak to us – whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey, when we approach the stories of Jesus in a sincere way, we can hear the ways they speak to our story, and speak a healing word.

So, please let me know how *you* hear these stories speak to you and how you hear them speaking to us.

We are passing through stormy times these days. We need divine help. And divine help is there, is here, to keep us connected to those still waters that run so deep, that peace that surpasses understanding, that can allow us to see within the storms the healing that we need.

For this I give thanks to God.

BENEDICTION

May the same mind which was in Christ abide in you:
May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding
Keep strong in your hearts
With the sure knowledge of God's power, love, and mercy.
May the blessings of the Almighty:
Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer
Be among you and remain with you always.
Amen



July 19th, 2020

"Even Jesus Had to Confront His Own Racism"

OPENING PRAYER

Most gracious God,
For our salvation you were born and manifested in a human body.
Help us see your likeness in people of all nations, races, and cultures,
That we may rejoice in our diversity and live together as one.
In the name of your child, our Savior Jesus Christ
Amen

By Rev. Elisabeth Rankin Geitz, based on a prayer by St. Athanasius

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 at First Congregational Church
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.

FIRST READING Mark 7:24-30

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

SECOND READING Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

In both Mark and Matthew, this incident takes place after Jesus spars with the Pharisees about uncleanliness. "Whatever comes into someone from outside does not defile them. It is what comes out of their mouth that defiles them"

Even Jesus Had to Confront His Own Racism

FIRST READING Paul's Letter to the Galatians 3:24-28

In effect, then, the law served as our disciplinarian until God's Anointed came, so that we would become acceptable to God on the basis of our complete confidence in God. Now that this mature confidence in God can be ours, we no longer have need for a disciplinarian. Indeed, you are all now God's adult offspring through the kind of confidence exemplified by God's Anointed, Jesus. So, every one of you who has been baptized into solidarity with God's Anointed has become invested with the status of God's Anointed.

You are no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or freeborn, no longer male or female. Instead, you all have the same status in the service of God's Anointed, Jesus.

SECOND READING Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon."

But he did not answer her at all.

And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."

He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."

And her daughter was healed instantly.

SERMON "Even Jesus Had to Confront His Own Racism"

For me, as for so many other people, the Christian teachings about grace - and more importantly the actual *experience* of divine grace - has been so life-giving and life-changing.

One of the ways I've been helped by knowing God's grace for me and for all people, is in becoming just much more comfortable about being honest about my own flaws and shortcomings, as well as the flaws and shortcomings of others.

Grace takes the sting out of those tough moments when we have to admit something about ourselves that we'd rather not. Grace takes away the sting of judgment that we can dish out on ourselves, the judgment we can dish out on other people, the judgment we fear from others and fear from God, the judgment that can make us so reactive and defensive that we can be in denial about what's all staring at us in the mirror.

Grace frees us from all that. Grace frees us so we can see ourselves and see other people more clearly and honestly, see our flaws and our shortcomings, as well as the things we are happy about, all by the light of all of our belovedness before God.

The freedom here come from knowing we are loved unconditionally. God's love is simply there for all who realize they need it and want it. We are each and all beloved – in our limitations - as children of God.

We cause problems for ourselves when we fight against that unconditional divine love, when we either try to pretend we don't need it, or we deny ourselves of it, or we try to hoard it for ourselves and pretend like it isn't for others too.

Now, we say we like to say we're beloved as "children" of God, but God's love challenges us to mature beyond childhood. And grace helps with that, helps us grow up, helps us grow into the more ethical and gracious and courageous ways of being to which the reality God truly does call us.

Now, I'm starting out by saying all this about grace because, well, first of all, it's my job: My job is to keep reminding us of the Good News of God's grace.

But also, I start this way because I'm going to next have us explore some human flaws and shortcomings, by the light of God's grace.

We'll do that with an uncomfortable story about Jesus. It can be an uncomfortable story because in it, Jesus does not seem to be the perfect moral exemplar we want him to be.

Now, some preachers do all kinds of gymnastics with this Bible story to make it out so that Jesus is the unfailing, flawless authority here. But for me the failings and the flaws of this ragtag holy fool of a Messiah are part of the whole point.

Jesus is so poignantly human. That's what makes his divinity so startling and captivating. That's what makes Jesus such a powerful manifestation of salvation by grace. Through his humanity is how God's grace gets through to *all* humanity.

So, here's the story:

Jesus is in the thick of his ministry, going from place to place, teaching and healing, when he is approached by a woman who, we are told, is a Canaanite. Now, I'll talk more in a minute about what that means. First, let me just go through the story. This is the according to Gospel Matthew. There's a similar story in Mark.

This Canaanite woman calls to Jesus and says, "Take pity on me, Master, son of David. My daughter is grievously possessed by a demon." Now, this sort of thing has been happening since the word got out that Jesus is a healer - people have been coming to him with their healing needs.

But Jesus at first won't even respond to this woman, he gives her the cold shoulder. And his disciples complain to him about how much she's bugging them. They want Jesus to tell her to get lost.

Jesus tells them, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Alright?

Meaning, not to other tribes of people, like Canaanites.

But she persists in a strong but humble way. She comes up to Jesus and kneels and says again, "Master, help me."

Jesus answers, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

To that she replies, "Yes, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

This causes Jesus to have a change of heart. He says to her basically, "Wow, your faith really is strong. It will be as you wish."

And her daughter is healed.

This Canaanite woman calls to Jesus and says, "Take pity on me, Master, son of David. My daughter is grievously possessed by a demon." Now, this sort of thing has been happening since the word got out that Jesus is a healer - people have been coming to him with their healing needs.

Now I imagine many of you who hear this story will feel at least a little uncomfortable about the fact that Jesus here, our dear Jesus, basically calls a woman a "dog" because of her ethnicity. At first, he doesn't even dignify her with his attention. But she manages to get a response from him, he basically says, "You dogs don't get the good things God has to give."

Now, Jesus here is behaving like any Hebrew man in authority would at the time if approached by a Canaanite woman with a request for help. There's both ethnic and gender prejudice and privilege at play here.

So let's talk about the Canaanites.

The Canaanites are the broad category of people who were basically the tribes who were indigenous to the Holy Land. Many generations before Jesus, when Moses led the Hebrew people out of bondage from Egypt and they wandered through the desert led by God's promise of a promised homeland for them, and when the generation after Moses the people entered that promised land and claimed it as their own, that promised land was not uninhabited. There were plenty of other people already living there enjoying that milk and honey who were not inclined to give any of it over to these people who just showed up.

Those are the Canaanites.

They then become the mortal enemies of the Hebrew people who set about conquering them. The books of Joshua and Judges in the Bible tell the story of that conquest, and it involves a lot of slaughter and dispossession and political maneuvering, all, they say, ordained by God.

Now, in our history in North America, many of the European Christians in the first several generations of conquest in this land saw themselves as the new Israel, they saw this continent as the new promised land, and they saw the various tribes of Native Americans who have been living here for countless generations, as the new Canaanites. We hear a lot about Canaanites from early American preachers who are conjuring up justification for the slaughter and dispossession the Native Americans. These were the same preachers were also very creative in their use of the Bible to justify enslaving people from Africa.

Anyhow, back to Jesus and his times.

The Canaanites still very much were around and in the mix. They were never exterminated, just like the Native Americans are still very much a part of the life of our country, and actually I think the Canaanites were never quite as decisively conquered. The Holy Land has always been a complex mix of many different kinds of folks – the whole fraught and creative life of a cosmopolitan multicultural world is nothing new.

Anyhow, I hope you've got a sense of the tension at play in this first century encounter between a Canaanite woman and a Jewish Rabbi who had been taught that the Canaanites were an especially accursed and wicked race (Wisdom of Solomon 12:10-11).

It's also breaking proper protocol at the time for her, as a woman of any ethnicity, to approach a male authority, with a request about her family. A man is supposed to do that.

Jesus' initial reaction to all this is the socially conditioned response. She's being rude and she's from a lesser race. She doesn't deserve God's grace. God's grace is for the chosen people, who come from the right stock and know how to behave properly.

But she won't accept that.

She answers back to Jesus. She answers by saying: God's grace is for all who need it and want it.

Now, she doesn't challenge the racism, she stays within the racist image in her response to Jesus, but she does it in such a way – it's clever - to challenge the very premise of the prejudice. She says, basically, "C'mon, we both know that God's grace spills over the boundaries that humans set. It's for anyone who needs it and wants it. Who are you to hoard it?"

This is how she changes Jesus' heart, with her boldness and persistence, her quick wittedness, and with her clear understanding that the sustaining bread of God's grace is for all people. He admits she's right.

It's telling that the next story in both Matthew and Mark is the miracle of the loaves and the fishes. It goes from a woman talking Jesus into giving up some crumbs from the table, to in this awesome display of loaves upon loaves upon loaves pouring out for any and all who need it and want it.

See? Jesus was willing to grow through this tense encounter that exposed his prejudice and his privilege, he was willing to grow into a being a more open vessel for the boundless abundance of God's grace.

And I hope this is encouraging to us, in our own engagement as American Christians with the realities of racism in our country and in ourselves.

Even Jesus had to be confronted with his own racism. This was key to him letting go of the boundaries set by human prejudice and power, and allowing God's boundless grace to abound. May it be so for us.

Thanks be to God.

BENEDICTION

May the blessing of God
Whose breath gives life
Be with you always.

May the blessing of God
Whose love is forgiving
Set you free from guilt and despair

May the blessing of God
Who sanctifies your living
Be with you this day,
To lead you to a new life
Of Hope, peace, love, and service

May God be praised and glorified through your lives,
Now and forever
Amen

-by Rev. Dr. Vienna Cobb Anderson



July 26th, 2020
"Grief & the Fullness of Life"

OPENING PRAYER

Holy Holy Holy
Wellspring of all being
Source of our Souls
You are One
And in You we are whole
Lead us, we pray, into your radiance,
That we may worship you in fullness and glory.
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.

STATEMENT OF IDENTITY

We at First Congregational Church 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 are and where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

READING John 11:1-6, 17-44

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."

But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was...

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the people of Judea had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Judeans who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Judeans who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

He said, "Where have you laid him?"

They said to him, "Lord, come and see."

Jesus began to weep.

So the Judeans said, "See how he loved him!"

But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."

Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

So they took away the stone.

And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."

When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth.

Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

SERMON "Grief & the Fullness of Life"

There is so much to grieve these days, so much loss and sorrow and sadness - as well as upheaval and anger and uncertainty *and* all of the delightful things of life -

But today, beloved church community, I feel moved to attend to the heart that is sad.

Grief is nothing to deny or hide away or hide from.

Grief can be a gateway to grace.

Heartbreak can break open a hard heart.

And we need our hearts open for there to be healing

So, let's listen to our bodies. Are we feeling sadness in our bodies? If so, let's allow ourselves to just be sad, and to allow the tears, the weeping, the moans.

Now, if you're feeling light and delighted right now, then by all means don't this get you down. Go ahead and dance! For the love of God, dance!

But I know there's a lot of sadness these days. And it's not being named and honored very well, as far as I can tell. So, I need to keep doing that.

We're in the middle of a pandemic. The loss of life is staggering. We've had 144,000 people die in our country in a matter of months. Worldwide, 626,000 dearly beloved souls have suffered and died of Covid. The situation in war torn areas is horrific - Yemen is wracked by cholera as well as Covid. There is so much to grieve. (<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>)

Then there's loss and sadness due to social isolation.

And loss and sadness because of lost jobs and closed businesses.

But somehow there is not weeping to be heard in the air.

Now there have been big public expressions of grief and outrage led by Black communities.

But overall there have not been the kinds of public expressions of grief in our country that we need in these grief-stricken times.

Social distancing of course is a big factor. There haven't been proper funerals and even just group hugs.

But there's also just been an astonishing level of denial of the fact that there's so much pain throughout our communities.

Now, I don't know about you, but in the culture I was brought up in - upper Midwest, Scandinavian folks forged by farm life - you don't do much crying, especially if you're a man. You take a tough-minded approach to the realities of pain and loss in life.

Alcohol and anger are outlets, of course.

As well as a certain kind of religious view. The promises of heaven take away our fear of death, right? But that somehow also means we should not grieve too openly when death comes to those we love.

"They're in a better place." "God wanted another angel." "You have to stay strong for your family."

I know I'm not just speaking for myself here.

When I was a chaplain in hospitals I encountered all kinds of ways that people believe that having a strong faith somehow means that you shouldn't feel sad and helpless and sacred when that is what you're feeling because you're going through something truly terrible.

But the testimonies of our faith are full of tears. The Bible is full of tears.
And full of examples of what I opened by saying:
Grief can be a gateway to grace.

"The Holy One is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit" – Psalm 34:18

"The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not scorn." – Psalm 51:17

Heartbreak can break open a hard heart. And we need an open heart for there to be the possibility of healing.

Our healing story for today is about just that.

It's the famous story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, from the Gospel of John.

Now, the way the Gospel of John tells the story of Jesus's life overall really emphasizes Jesus' divinity.

The healing story from last week emphasized Jesus' humanity – that was from the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. There's always this fascinating interplay you can see between divine and human nature in Jesus.

In the story about the healing of Lazarus, in John, Jesus at first seems really aloof to what the people he cares about are going through. His perspective is so much in the Realm of Heaven and he's so clear that death is not the end and so assured that he will heal Lazarus, that Jesus doesn't rush to help out when he learns that Lazarus is deathly ill.

He takes his time and doesn't arrive until Lazarus has been dead for four days.

When Jesus does arrive, Mary – this is a different Mary from Jesus' mother, Mary a follower of Jesus, whose brother is Lazarus, that Mary comes up to Jesus, upset with him:

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

He said, "Where have you laid him?"

They said to him, "Lord, come and see."

And:

Jesus wept.

That's the shortest sentence in the Bible: "Jesus wept."

And it's the key that unlocks Jesus' healing power in this story.

His divine serenity must meet with the anguish of his humanity for his healing power to be unleashed in the face of death. And Lazarus lives again.

So I encourage us to look to Jesus for that kind of healing balance between the view from the realm of heaven and the view from the realm of earth.

In the face of all these crises, with the overwhelming reality of catastrophic loss, we can find peace in the transcendent reality of the spiritual realm, peace in the glimpses we get of the God's-eye-view of the cycles of life and death and new life under the light of heaven. Yet that must not become an escape, a spiritual bypass.

Instead, the Way of Jesus is about bringing that realm of heaven into the heartbreaking realities, as well as the heart delighting realities, of this realm of earth. That is where compassion is born. That is where we find fullness of life, even in view of death.

Thanks be to God.

BENEDICTION

Go forth into the world in peace;
be of good courage;
hold fast that which is good;
render to no one evil for evil;
honor the dignity of everyone
receive and share strength amidst afflict
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.

