

Worship – First Congregational UCC, Eagle River, WI
March 14, 2021
L. Gail Irwin, Interim Pastor

Prelude: “Hear Our Prayer” (Word and Music by George Whelpton) CCLI#60609
Hear our prayer, O Lord.
Hear our prayer, O Lord.
Incline Thine ear to us,
And grant us Thy peace. Amen

Announcements: Hello and welcome to worship at First Congregational UCC in Eagle River. This is the service for Sunday, March 14th, the Fourth Sunday of Lent. It’s Daylight Savings Sunday, but you don’t have to worry about being late or early this year, you’ve tuned in right on time.

This week we will have our fourth Lenten adult study on Tuesday night. You will find the Zoom link to the class in your Friday email. The students are meeting informally at 6:30 just to visit, and then class starts at 7 PM.

I have some updates about Holy Week.

Palm Sunday is March 28th - we will have a pre-recorded service as we’ve been doing. However, we will also be **gathering in person at 10 AM**, for a drive up Communion in your car; and a Drive By Palm Parade, also in our cars. Please wear a mask. We will have palms and Communion to hand out, using sanitized Communion juice and wafer sets.

This is a way of honoring

- 1) our need to have Communion together as a distanced but gathered group,
- 2) a chance to wave our palms to let people know we are followers of Jesus Christ above all other powers and principalities

Join us on March 28th at 10 AM for that!

Maundy Thursday is April 1st: We will have two worship services in the building with limited seating by reservation at 10 AM and 6 PM. We will allow for 25 people maximum at each service. The Council is working on protocols for how we can return to worship in the building when it is safe to do so. The Maundy Thursday services will be a way to experiment with worshiping in the building for a smaller group, masked and distanced. It will be a little different than worship you’re used to because of hygiene protocols. Those who want to come should call the church office in advance to reserve a spot and let us know exactly how many are coming.

We would like to include especially those people who have been unable to worship with us by computer, so if you know someone like that, please invite them.

Good Friday will be an on-line event with Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, featuring artist Paul Oman. Watch for a link to that service during Holy Week.

On Easter Sunday, April 4th, we will have an on-line service, featuring our virtual choir. If the weather permits, we will also hold a **9 AM outdoor sunrise service** at a special location. Watch for more news on that.

We are trying to offer different formats for worship during these holy days. They may not all work for you, but choose the ones that do, and I hope to see you.

Let's now begin worship with a **Prayer of Confession** (by Rev. Mindi):
Almighty God, You have set before us the path
but we have wandered on our own to try to find our way.
Sometimes we are like toddlers, and we hear Your call and come back.
Other times, we are children testing boundaries,
ignoring Your call until fear finally makes us look back.
And still other times we are full of youthful rebellion,
demanding to be cut loose and set free, not knowing how much we still need to seek Your
wisdom and guidance.
But most of all, too often we think we are adults
and have figured it all out and know our own way,
only to stumble and stray so far.
Remind us, parental God, that we are always Your children,
that we are never fully grown up in Your sight,
that we always have much to learn.
Help us to seek You every day, to acknowledge that we need Your wisdom and guidance, and
help us to return to the path and walk with You. Hear now our confessions in silence...
In the name of Christ, our companion on this journey of faith, we pray. **Amen.**

Words of Assurance: Remember that God did not send Christ to condemn the world, but in
order that the world might be saved. Trust God to save you, and continue in the ministry of
saving each other. Let the people at home say AMEN.

A Sermon for All Ages

- Do you know the Ten Commandments? See how many you can list on your own...
- One important one for kids is: ***honor your father and mother***
 - Honor means: pay attention; be respectful even if you don't agree; try to learn from them;
 - Honoring also goes for grandparents, aunt and uncles and friends
- One way you've been honoring older people lately is with mask wearing to prevent spreading sickness!
- In the last year, kids have spent all day at school in a mask; play sports in masks; ride bus in masks; they even manage to make it fun to wear a mask!
- Some parents tell me their kids don't complain much; they adjust easily and it's normal to them;
- Some grown ups only wear masks when they go to the store. But kids have to wear them all day long!
- I just want to give a shout out to all the kids making our community safer for older people by wearing masks all the time;
- Older people can get really sick from covid, whereas kids don't get sick as often;

- What does this have to do with “*honoring your father and mother*” in the commandment? A lot! To honor someone by keeping that mask on, even when you’re sweaty or hot, protecting them from sickness—that is honoring your elders and its really great.
- THANK YOU for honoring your parents and grandparents by wearing your masks!
- Before long, people will be together more, and it will be because YOU helped!

Dear God, we’re dreaming of a world where everyone will honor each other and follow your commandments. We pray that this time apart is teaching everyone to take good care of each other. Amen.

Hebrew Scripture Reading: Exodus 20: 8-17

⁸Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

¹²Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³You shall not murder.

¹⁴You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵You shall not steal.

¹⁶You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Sermon:

- I. The rules are rapidly changing!
 - a. So many people are getting vaccinated now!
 - b. This week the CDC came out with new guidelines for people who have been fully vaccinated: in short, you can have a dinner party or a tea party at your house with other vaccinated people and take off your mask. And you can visit your grandchildren if they’re not immune-compromised!
 - c. Some guidelines have not changed, such as for groups in buildings
- II. Council has also begun drafting some new rules/protocols for returning to worship in person;
 - a. We will base our opening on several factors in our area, including vaccination rates; so if you get vaccinated, you will help us all get back to church sooner!

- b. But also, we need to stay vigilant: our sister church in St. Germaine had an outbreak recently; please keep them in your prayers. Covid is still active.
- III. The WHEN of coming back together is still an open question. The other part is HOW. That's what Covid 19 protocols are for: they are essentially rules we agree on about how we will be together:
 - a. And because Covid19 is a fluid, changing thing, we have to have more than one set of rules;
 - b. Schools have been dealing with this all year; the rules keep changing!
- IV. Meanwhile, the spring weather has made some of us feel more hopeful and daring!
 - a. While some are still feeling cautious and uncertain;
 - b. we're in this suspended state of freedom/caution about which rules to follow
 - c. for Christians, we need to be mindful of the reasons why we set up these protocols in the first place:
 - a. Our mandate to love – to do no harm to others; to nurture health and wholeness; and especially the most vulnerable
- V. So what does this have to do with the scripture reading for today?
 - a. The Ten Commandments are the list of protocols Moses received from God about how God's people should live with each other and with God;
 - b. I talked last week about the 10 Commandments, focusing on the first couple;
 - c. They address our relationship with God:
 - a. worshiping only one God,
 - b. not making idols,
 - c. not using the Lord's name in vain;
 - d. Then there's a pivotal commandment about Sabbath: giving God a whole day in your week; it's about paying attention to God, resting while God runs the world
 - e. but Sabbath commandment also addresses how we treat people: families get Sabbath time; our slaves/workers get sabbath, aliens/strangers, even animals!
 - f. After the sabbath commandment, the others are protocols about how we live together in human community: honoring parents, not killing people or committing adultery or stealing from each other, or lying, or even coveting what our neighbors have;
 - g. These were the basic rules of engagement Yahweh taught the Hebrews:
 - h. They needed these so they could start building trust with each other in the wilderness; and gradually become a cohesive new nation; trusting each other and God;
- VI. But, over time, in all cultures, most rules and protocols change! And this can be confusing and controversial.
 - a. By the time Jesus lived, there were lots of laws; and Jesus messed with some of them:
 - a. he was criticized for healing someone on the Sabbath, and questioned why that was against the law;

- b. He touched untouchable lepers and questioned the stoning of an adulterous woman.
 - c. But he didn't just soften laws; he made some more challenging:
 - 1. To a rich young man, who wanted to know what to do because he already kept the ten commandments, Jesus suggested selling all he had to follow!
- VII. Throughout history, people of faith have argued about the rules:
 - a. In the early Church they argued about whether Christians should continue to practice Jewish dietary laws and circumcision;
 - b. We've seen rules change related to slave ownership, divorce, and abortion
 - c. In our own era, in the UCC, we've seen big changes in how we treat LGBTQ people, whether they are sinners; whether they can be ordained and married;
 - d. Changing the rules is uncomfortable;
 - 1. why is the change needed? What's wrong with the old rules? Are we just becoming morally lazy?
 - 2. And these days: *Why can't I just make up my own rules?*
- VIII. Why do communities need to agree on some rules of engagement? One answer, I think, comes from the Five Purposes of the Church we're studying in the adult class.
 - a. One purpose of the Church is to build *koinonia*. You may have heard this word: it translates loosely to *fellowship, cooperation for a common purpose; sharing resources*.
 - b. In order to enjoy *koinonia*, we need to trust each other; and trust is built from shared rules of engagement. So rules/protocols are important!
- IX. BUT rules can also become a barrier to building *koinonia*
 - a. in Jesus' time there were Jewish laws against Gentiles and Jews meeting together; these had to be broken by Christians who wanted to build *koinonia* with Gentiles
 - b. after the Civil War, many states passed Jim Crow laws to keep black and white people apart; this prevented the building of *koinonia* across racial lines for many decades.
 - c. This year, we have a heightened awareness of what long term racism has done to prevent *koinonia* in our country.
 - 1. For example, we're learning how some policing practices and legal processes have led to much higher incarceration rates for black and brown people than white people.
 - 2. We've seen how much greater the threat of police brutality is against people of color;
 - 3. We've seen how the rules allow police to go back to work even after they've engaged in misconduct
 - 4. We don't know yet how the case with Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis will turn out.

- d. So if the rules we establish aren't leading us to building healthier community/koinonia; if they are actually making us trust each other less, maybe the rules need to change;
- X. Since last summer's demonstrations, cities around the country, and The House of Representatives, are working on new policies/protocols/training and legislation about police practices that will hopefully rebuild trust between police and communities.
- a. It's going to be painfully slow, but we have to keep building.
 - b. If police and communities cannot trust each other, there is no hope for peace and cooperation; and the mistrust runs both ways.
- XI. There are other questions we need to ask ourselves about the rules we follow, the choices and attitudes we live by:
- a. which rules benefit us and hurt others?
 - b. Which rules are hurting our community, our earth?
 - c. Which rules do we quietly break without getting punished?
 - d. If we've learned anything in a pandemic, we should learn that you can't legislate *koinonia* and cooperation in America; we can't force other people to wear masks or get a vaccine or be kind to their neighbors.
 - e. But maybe we can build *koinonia* in ways that others see from a distance when they look at Christian communities:
 - 1. You may be building koinonia personally: I know from hearing your stories that some of you have built koinonia with people who are greatly different from you, but with whom you found some common ground and trust. How do you keep building on those kinds of relationships now, adding new ones?
 - 2. In your Church? Can you practice ways of creating a church where the circle is always open to newcomers; even people with opposing viewpoints; or who don't want to meet you in person yet;
 - 3. In the community: What can we be doing to bring left and right together in local work on projects that aren't partisan issues so that we begin to trust each other again?
- XII. We all need rules to provide boundaries and safety and accountability to each other; but those rules should lead us to trust each other more, cooperate for the common good.
- a. Ultimately, we should be building and dreaming of a day when we won't need rules and protocols anymore. The Law will be written on our hearts and we will all know how God wants us to treat each other. Amen.

Music: "The Gift of Love" (Words: Hal Hopson; Tune: O Waly Waly) ccli #67327
Pianist: Norma Yaeger; Vocals: Bernie Hupperts and Mary Ann Hansen

Pastoral Prayer and The Lord's Prayer

O Yahweh God, you have given us a good law to live by:

A focus on you and your will above all things;

To set aside time for rest, regard for others;

To live generously and lovingly, avoiding greed or self-serving behavior. To reach out in love to the vulnerable and the stranger.

Our lives are so much better when we focus on the laws of love.

Teach us and others in our world to seek our guidance from you.

We pray for the building of trust in our world

Between rich and poor, black and white, old and young, and across nations. Break our hearts open to those who align with other parties and races, so we can recognize their full humanity, and see Christ in each other's faces.

Hear our prayers for those in this community who need your protective care...Including those living at Frederick Place who are fed and housed by the kindness of strangers

For Helena in her new home and all our elders who are isolated now...

For our sister church in St. Germaine as their members
and all who are recovering from Covid...

for the people of Minneapolis and around the country
discerning the way to justice and mutual trust...

Hear all our prayers of gratitude and concern in silence...

Write your loving words on our hearts, O Lord, until the day we live it completely.

These things we pray in the name of Christ, saying

The Lord's Prayer

An Invitation to Offering (OGHS) Today is the day we are formally calling on members to gather up our One Great Hour of Sharing offerings. This offering is an ecumenical effort by many different denominations who distribute gifts to areas of need including...

While this offering has always been important, it's become increasingly so in years of natural disaster and as we see human migration around the world accelerating. This year with Covid 19, so many vulnerable communities have been made more vulnerable, and giving is more difficult when we're not sitting in our pews with our checkbooks. Please take upon yourself the spiritual discipline of giving by using the special envelope sent in your newsletter and sending it to the church, OR by giving on line at www.ucc.org/oghs. Your gifts really matter! Make God happy by sharing what you can today. Thanks you!

Blessing/Benediction: And now, let God write the protocols of conduct on your heart. Listen to the Law of love...you will know what to do. Go in peace! Amen.

Postlude: "Let There Be Peace on Earth" (By Sy Miller and Jill Jackson) CCLI #1562668

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.

Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.

To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally!

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me!