

First Congregational United Church of Christ

*Empowered by the Holy Spirit and with the help of God,
we open our doors and hearts to all, in service and love as modeled by Jesus Christ.*



*Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

*The Lord's Day
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Nine o'clock in the Morning*

The Worship of God

Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of the conscience by God's holiness; the nourishment of the mind with God's truth; the purifying of the imagination by God's beauty; the opening of the heart to God's love; the surrender of the will to God's purpose—all of this gathered up in adoration.

~William Temple

The Prologue

With recent images revealing the agony of mass natural disasters, many questions have been raised by persons of faith, especially and particularly questions of theological import. Was God responsible for these horrific events? Does God manipulate the natural order? Does God hear and respond to our prayers in times of nature's fury? The ancient Hebrews believed that storms, complete with floods, earthquakes, and other natural phenomenon were a direct result of human behavior. In other words, God was either reacting or responding to the whims of a sinful humanity, exacting retributive justice, vengeance, and a painful ounce of flesh. It was once believed in a pre-scientific world that the nature of Providence was contingent upon human behavior. Does that mean God loves or cares for some more than others? What is the role of Providence regarding all our fates? Is it all just happenstance, luck of the draw? These are fair and relevant questions that must be raised and addressed in light of so much religious hyperbole. It is easy to banter about, tossing to and fro, easy answers, the kind of pablum that pious people need to mask their fear and anxiety, the insecurity that haunts them and their faith.

Gathering Music

The Call to Worship and Welcome

The Spirit of the still speaking God be with you.

And also with you.

The Music for Contemplation

The Lighting of the Altar Candles

The Gathering

Come one and all, for the Holy One has welcomed everyone this day to a time of worship! In these sacred moments, ponder all that is holy in our midst!

Surrounded with love as the faithful of God, we have gathered as one people, weak and strong in faith alike!

Honor the Holy One this day, giving thanks to God even as you receive the gifts we are offered here!

Let every knee bow and every tongue give praise to God!

Let us worship God!

The Choral Introit

You Are the Light David Steele; arr. Tom Fettke
Chancel Choir; Norma Yaeger, piano

The Collect

Let us pray to the Lord,

God of yesterday, today and tomorrow, as a worshipping church, we have gathered as strong and weak, diverse in every way, a welcoming and inclusive beloved faith community; we have assembled as one to sing praises to the Holy, rejoicing in the One who is our salvation; be with us in this sacred hour, that we might once again experience transcendence that only comes from you, the awe-inspiring wondrous mystery of God revealing the triumphal glory of our salvation; called as community to be in relationship with one another, we pray in this sacred hour that we would ever become a more forgiving and tolerant people, accepting and affirming in every way, giving thanks for the forgiveness that is our eternal gift from God; all this we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the holy and still speaking Spirit, one God now and forever.

Amen.

*The Opening Hymn, No. 215 *Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain* ST. KEVIN

*The Litany of Praise

Every person comprises the divine dimension that is the dominion of the Holy, all humanity a sanctuary without borders, none of us strangers in God's realm!

God liberates all who are in bondage, captive to anything that diminishes or threatens our humanity! All people are created in the divine image!

All nature declares the glory of God, telling of seas that roar, and of hills and mountains that skip in response to the Holy!

All creation bends and bows, fully displaying the movement of God's pervasive Spirit!

The earth trembles at the presence of the Holy, responding faithfully to the God of Jacob!

The Holy One turns rocks into water, stones into springs, lightening the burdens that weigh heavily upon all people! Praise the Lord!

*Glory to the Creator, and to the Christ, and to the Comforter!
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
World without end! Amen! Amen!*

The Call to Confession¹

Why is it so easy to pass judgment on our brothers and sisters? Why do we devolve into quarrels with those whose ways are different from our own? How can we despise another who is also a child of God? How can we ignore the suffering of other human beings? In the silence and stillness of these moments, let us confess before the Holy.

The Silent Confession

The Response, No. 49 (*Chalice Praise*) *Sanctuary* John Thompson and Randy Scruggs

The Corporate Confession²

Let us pray to the Lord,

God of Egyptians and Israelites, all of us and everybody else, we bow before your judgment seat. We have a propensity to rank our sisters and brothers by the faulty standards determined by the narrow measure of our society, deciding who is worthy of our attention. It is far too easy for us to reject those whom we dislike and to be harsh, abrasive with those who do not measure up to our specifications. We have been more than willing to overlook our own faults as we look down on others. Show us a better, a more excellent way. Save us from the pain we cause ourselves and inflict on others. Help us discover the blessing of forgiveness and grace.

The Assurance of Pardon³

Beloved faith community, hear the good news! God has pity on us and releases us from the debts we have accumulated. In the great design of the universe, we are equipped to receive this forgiveness even as we freely extend it to others. Jesus points us toward an unlimited willingness to forgive, the infinity of seventy times seven. How amazing is God's love for us and God's expectation of us!

Thanks be to God!

The Time for the Children

The Witness from the Hebrew Bible

EXODUS 14:19-31

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so, the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night. One did not come near the other all night. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their

right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the morning watch the LORD, in the pillar of fire and cloud, looked down on the Egyptian army and threw the Egyptian army into a panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." So, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea. Not one of them remained! But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. Thus, the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So, the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

Listen to what the Spirit of the still speaking God is saying!

Thanks be to God!

The Singing Response, No. 663; EXODUS 15:1b-11, 20-21 African-American Spiritual
(Congregation joining with the refrain)

Go Down, Moses

The Witness from the Gospels

MATTHEW 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times. For this reason, the realm of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him, and, as he could not pay, the lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions and payment to be made. So, the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe!' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you!' But he refused! Then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me! Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So, my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

The Gospel for today!

Thanks be to God!

The Sermon

An Allowing God!

Rev. Jill Christopherson

The Anthem *Ancient Words with How Firm a Foundation* Lynn DeShazo; arr. Mark Hayes
Chancel Choir; Norma Yaeger, piano

The Concerns of the Church

The Pastoral Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and
forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever!
Amen.**

The Receiving of Our Gifts

The Offertory

*The Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!
Praise Christ all creatures here below!
Praise Holy Spirit, evermore!
Praise triune God whom we adore!*

*The Prayer of Thanksgiving

*The Closing Hymn, No. 453 *Called as Partners in Christ's Service*

BEECHER

*The Procession of the Light

*The Benediction and Blessing

To our guests! At your choosing, we invite you to join us in a long-standing tradition at First Congregational United Church of Christ as we form a circle as one, joining hands and singing together our Fellowship Song.

*The Fellowship Song *Let There Be Peace on Earth*

WORLD PEACE

*Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.
With every step I take, let this be my joyous creed.
To take each moment and live each moment in peace, eternally!
Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.*

The Music for Reflection

*You are invited to stand as you are able.

Lector: Ursula Charaf

Ushers: Miriam Chenault and Susan Krivichi

*The flowers adorning the Chancel for worship today are given by Barb Flaherty
who wishes the congregation a successful church year.*

The color for the Season after Pentecost is Green, symbolizing the growth and development of the Church. Various symbols of the Trinity, such as the Trefoil and Triangle designs are frequently used to remind us of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the Triune nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; Parent, Child, Advocate, Comforter, and Holy Companion; our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

Ordinary Time refers to that part of the Church Year that does not fall within one of the major seasons and does not observe any specific aspect of the Mystery of Christ. It consists of thirty-four Sundays in the liturgical year and emphasizes personal faith development and nurture, and the growth and enhancement of the Church and the churches. Ordinary Time begins with Baptism of the Lord and encompasses the Sundays after Epiphany including Transfiguration and the Sundays after Pentecost including Reign of Christ. An interesting bit of liturgical trivia is that Baptism of the Lord is counted but is not named as the first Sunday in Ordinary Time.

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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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First Congregational UCC - Eagle River, WI

September 17, 2023