

## SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

January 29, 2023

### WORDS OF WELCOME

Today, we gather together with the whole United Church of Christ in observing Health and Human Service Sunday. We bear witness to the tradition, and the history being made today, of how the UCC has embodied extravagant welcome through service. The UCC and its predecessor denominations, (Reformed, Evangelical, Congregational, and the only one that originated here in America, the Christian churches of America) courageously founded schools, hospitals, and orphanages during times of pandemic, war, and social upheaval. Now, there are more than 400 UCC affiliated health care centers, hospitals, affordable housing and retirement communities, transitional housing for those experiencing homelessness or domestic violence, and service centers for children, youth, families, and those with disabilities. These ministries continue to show up in the most challenging circumstances—and do so with a hope that has come alive. It is thus a day to celebrate how the life of the church is vibrant beyond our church walls and outreach ministries.

So, let us give thanks for this collective work of the Spirit. Let us uplift God’s healers and equity weavers, visionaries of freedom, and frontline responders—that together, we may create a just, caring, and compassionate world. Amen.

#### **INTROIT: v.v. 1 - 2 “All are Welcome”**

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#### **CALL TO WORSHIP:** ☪\*

L: O Foot Washing God, who bends down,

*C: who comes prepared with water and linens,*

L: who first loved us, so that we may know how to love,

*C: we gather here in your Spirit of service.*

L: You taught us how no one is greater than the other,

*C: no messenger outranks the sender.*

L: And so, we come to worship both as givers and receivers,

*C: the washers and the washed.*

L: We unite at the basin and the table, finding the grace only you can give,

*C: to embolden us to go and do likewise.*

L: On this Health and Human Service Sunday, let us wrap our towels around our waists,

*C: ready to partake in communal care.*

L: Let us root ourselves in ritual, steadying us for the Good News at hand,

*C: and the sprouts of healing yet to come. Amen*

#### **OPENING PRAYER:** ☪\*

L: Spirit of Extravagant Welcome, help us to invite all parts of ourselves into worship today.

Guide us to see no stranger within us or around us as we care for our world as the Body of Christ.

Help us to break down all barriers to belonging and the systems sustained by suffering and greed.

For, in discipleship there is abundance through togetherness and your acceptance of all we feel, carry, and desire.

*All: So, today, and on any given Sunday, use all that we come here with to build a sanctuary for you. Amen.*

#### **GATHERING HYMN: v.v. 1 - 3 “I Surrender All”** (Public Domain)

1. All to Jesus I surrender all to Him I freely give  
I will ever love and trust Him In His presence daily live

***Chorus: I surrender all, I surrender all. All to Thee my blessed Savior I surrender all.***

2. All to Jesus I surrender humbly at His feet I bow  
Worldly pleasures all forsaken take me Jesus take me now (Chorus)

3. All to Jesus I surrender make me Savior wholly Thine  
Let me feel the Holy Spirit truly know that Thou art mine (Chorus)

**PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE: ☪\***

L: In the beginning was the Word, but also the Conversation,

***All: a way of being through relating, through knowing, and witnessing.***

L: Made in your image, we come to confess, but even more so to converse—

***All: to bring you our woes and wrongdoings,  
our soul-searching and longing for understanding.***

L: Like Paul, we don't always do the things we want to do,  
but rather the things we hate.

***All: Help us to reflect on how we got to this moment  
and what might need healing in us.***

L: Ignite our hearts with the courage to apologize,  
to center the care of those we've caused harm.

***All: Sift through our ramblings on how to repair,  
to find methods of mending that honor complexity and boundaries.***

L: And journey alongside us as we change our ways,  
to make discipleship a practice,

***All: as we learn, and re-learn, through conversation with you. Amen.***

*Moment of Silent Confession, Listening to God &  
Reflection on God's Forgiveness. Redemption, and Restoration of our Lives*

**WORDS OF ASSURANCE BASED ON SCRIPTURE:**

L: God did not send Christ Jesus into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him. God freely offers us forgiveness so that we can remove the weight of the shame and guilt of our past and rise up into new life in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to live lives that will bring honor and glory to God and carry God's life-giving ways into the world.

***All: Thanks be to God! May we accept God's gift of forgiveness, shed the burdens of our past and rise up to new life in Christ.***

**HYMN OF RESPONSE: v.v. 4 & 5 "I Surrender All" (Public Domain)**

4. All to Jesus I surrender Lord I give myself to Thee  
Fill me with Thy love and power let Thy blessing fall on me

***Chorus: I surrender all, I surrender all. All to Thee my blessed Savior I surrender all.***

5. All to Jesus I surrender now I feel the sacred flame  
O the joy of full salvation. Glory, glory to His name

## **SCRIPTURE:**

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### **Micah 6:1-8 - God Challenges Israel**

**6** Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains,  
and let the hills hear your voice.

**2** Hear, you mountains, the case of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth,  
for the Lord has a case against his people, and he will contend with Israel.

**3** “O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

**4** For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery,  
and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

**5** O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,  
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,  
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,  
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.”

#### **What God Requires:**

**6** “With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

**7** Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the  
fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

**8** He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?

### **Matthew 5:1-12 –**

#### **The Beatitudes**

**5** When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. **2** And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

**3** “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**4** “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

**5** “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

**6** “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

**7** “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

**8** “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

**9** “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

**10** “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**11** “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. **12** Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

#### **TIME OF REFLECTION: “I Want You”**

How do you think it would feel to have God bring a case against you? That is exactly what is happening to the Israelites in today’s passage from Micah. What was happening that caused God to bring charges against them? Unfortunately, it was much of the same stuff that happens today. Rulers were plundering the innocent, wanting more territory, wanting more power. Judges were distorting justice for a fee, and prophets were preaching for a fee, not necessarily telling people what they needed to hear, but they wanted to hear. These people were great at participating in the religious rituals, but they did not let them impact their lives in the least. God was not visible because they did not allow to God to work in them and through them.

If a prophet were to come today what might be some of the conditions that would cause God to bring a case against the world, our nation or this state? What charges through the prophet, would God bring against this church? In the process of reflecting on this, don't belittle what ways you are walking with God, but as you seek a solution for a more consistent pastoral presence in this body of Christ, it is helpful to be aware of that which needs transforming by the love, power, and grace of God.

If a prophet were here today what might the prophet remind us of on God's behalf. You probably can think of many specific ways God has shown his care for this congregation over the years and that is a good thing to keep in mind, especially when times get rough, they are a reminder that God truly cares. I think in general the prophet would remind us of all the things Micah reminded the Israelites of and then go on to tell us that in Jesus, God entered the earthly realm both fully human and fully divine. God walked among us in the person of Jesus Christ physically displaying the depths of God's great love for us. Becoming human was not too lowly for God to reach out to those whom God created. Eating and spending time with sinners was not beneath him. Even stooping down and washing one's dirty and tired feet was not too lowly of a task to bring comfort and refreshment to another. That is why God came to us in Jesus Christ, to heal the sin sick soul, the soul that can't look beyond self, that we might live life differently, not to earn God's love; not just in response to God's great love for us, but allowing God's love to fill our lives and flow freely from our lives. In Jesus, God revealed to us that redemption would not happen through military force, but in transforming lives.

In John 17: 20-23, 26. Jesus had been praying for his disciples and then goes on to pray for us: "I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one as we are one, (did you hear that, God has given us glory not for status, not for power, but in order that we might all be one.) I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ... so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." What a beautiful prayer Christ has prayed for us. Just in reading this prayer I am drawn closer to God. This prayer truly shows the depth of God's love for us to have a better life by embracing the love that exists within the Trinity, not to be controlling but that the covenantal unconditional love might fill us and spill out into the world around us.

Front and center here today we have the symbols of God's grace, the cross, the baptismal font, the communion table, and foot washing and all of these things can truly draw us nearer to God when we participate in them in the way they were given to us as a means to have visible and tangible means to encounter the Divine. Even as I was writing this message about encountering the Divine, I experienced a literal burning within me. But even that burning within me means nothing if I don't let it impact the way I live my life.

God gave us the sacraments, which are visible, concrete signs of God's loving relationship with us and desire to transform our lives through God's grace. The sacraments, Baptism and The Lord's Supper, as well as ceremonial rites like foot washing, the laying on of hands and anointing with oil for commissioning ordaining, or healing the sick are gifts given freely to us by God so that we might have visible tangible ways to experience encounters with the Almighty and know that God is with us and within us throughout our earthly journey. The words, music, oils, water, bread, wine or grape juice, and fragrances are ways for us to experience with our five senses encounters with the Divine and what God is doing within us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Participation in the rituals is just that, a ritual if we don't allow God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit to transform us and then spill out from us into God's creation. That's what Micah was telling the Israelites in this reading and is true for us still today. God is saying through Micah, I gave you these rituals for your benefit, not mine. I gave you tangible ways that you could experience my love and desire to be in relationship with you, but you've turned them into a bunch of empty acts. It is you that I want. I want to live in communion with you and for you to live in communion with us, with each other, and with the universe.

As Micah prophesied, "What does the Lord require as acceptable sacrifice and worship? Do Justice; be aware of how simple everyday decisions might be contributing to injustice, oppression, or careless use of the world's resources and

then be willing to do something about it. Maybe you aren't the one causing the injustice or harm, but sins of omission can be just as harmful and hurtful as sins of commission. Where is God asking us to be a voice for the voiceless? Next requirement, to love kindness. In other words, what God desires - is for us to reorder life into community of enduring relations of fidelity. Relations with God, with one another, and with the universe not just so we can please God, but for the ways it will bring God's reign here on earth as it is in heaven. And lastly, to walk humbly with God. Serve and be served. Treasure the religious rituals for what they were meant to be, a sacred encounter/a sacred relationship with the God who created us out of the overflowing love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, drawing us nearer to God, one another, and all of God's magnificent creation.

God help us to use the rituals and symbols you have given us not as a means to try and earn your love as a reward, but to truly be drawn into a relationship with you so that you may live in us, us in you that we may all be one with you, humanity and all of creation; that the love that is in you will be in us and flow out into the world so that others too may know the beauty of living in communion with you, one another and all of creation. May it be so!

### **MEDITATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH** 🌿\*

This like all other rituals is meant to draw you nearer to God; so you are invited to participate in this meditation to do just that. However I also acknowledge that God speaks to people in many different ways, so if you find this just an empty ritual, I invite you to spend this time in a way that does draw you nearer to God and to encounter the Divine presence in this time and place.

L: O Maker of the Moon, who embraces our ever-changing tides,

**C: *we come to your shores of living water.***

L: We are here not alone, but as the beloved community,

**C: *allowing the weight we bear to be held, as the mountains do for the sea.***

L: We call upon the Light of Christ, to illuminate the way of wellness,

**C: *through the rapids of shared struggle into the rivers of flow.***

L: The Apostle Paul assures us in Romans 8 that neither death nor life, angels or demons, the present or the future, nor any powers, height or depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Trusting in this assurance, I invite you immerse yourself in the Divine presence

as you place one hand on your head and the other on your lap, or to simply bring awareness to those places.

Now, imagine a ray of divine light coming into the top of your head,

traveling all the way down the length of your body—connecting you to the stars above and the ground below.

May the blessing of that length, grace the places in you that feel out of sorts, out of place, alone or abandoned.

Allow God to use that length of hope to tether your mind to God's imagination.

Next, place your hands on your hips, or simply bring awareness there.

Imagine divine light circling around the whole width of your body—surrounding you with the dignity of taking your place on this earth.

May the blessing of that width, grace the places in you that feel curled up, torn up, or fed up.

May that width of hope hold your mind in God's embrace.

Finally, place one hand in the other, or simply bring awareness there.

Imagine divine light radiating from the depth of your hand out to your whole body—spreading the truth that you are here, alive in space and time.

May the blessing of that depth, grace the places in you that feel two dimensional, too emotional, too unrelatable.

May the depth of hope envelop your mind in the heart of God.

And so, may this Divine blessing form its place in you.

May you both embrace this time of worship and when the time comes depart from this time of worship with an embodied awareness of the divine light within you. Amen.

## **BEATITUDES FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS** \*

L: Blessed are you on the frontlines, who have sustained risk, toil, and exhaustion.

You who have ridden every wave of this crisis  
and know its depths in ways others never will. Blessed are you,

***C: for the kin-dom of God is yours.***

L: Blessed are you donned in PPE,  
who have protected, sweated, and explained it a thousand times over.

You who have stayed firm for the sake of life. Blessed are you,

***C: for the kin-dom of God is yours.***

L: Blessed are the understaffed,  
who have shown up, reached out, and adjusted beyond measure.

You who make a way out of no way. Blessed are you,

***C: for the kin-dom of God yours.***

L: Blessed are you who deescalate,  
who have stepped in, listened, and navigated through winds of tension.

You who know the eye of the hurricane. Blessed are you,

***C: for the kin-dom of God is yours.***

L: Blessings be upon your trauma, your grief, shock, and disappointment.

Yours is the experience of prophets and healers  
who have gone before you. Holy are you,

***C: for the kin-dom of God is in you.***

L: Blessed are you on a mission,  
who seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

You whose care is an expression of your faith. Holy are you,

***C: for the kin-dom of God is in you.***

L: Blessed are the inspired,  
who found new ways to care, collaborate, and solve the seemingly impossible.

You whose service is an expression of the Creator. Holy are you,

***C: for the kin-dom of God is in you.***

L: Blessed is the work, yes, but holy are you, too.

***C: for God no longer calls us servants, but friends.***

L: Let us remember our essential belovedness

***All: as we work for the kin-dom of God together. Amen.***

## **INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:** \*

L: In 1858, one of our UCC forebears, Pastor Louis Edward Nollau, appealed to his congregation, now known as St. Peter's United Church of Christ in St. Louis, for money to build a home to support young children orphaned by a great cholera epidemic. Later, one member chastised Nollau, insisting the church did not have enough funds for such an ambitious project. To this, the pastor replied: "No, ... But we have the children." Today, Pastor Nollau's vision, Evangelical Children's Home, is more than 150 years old and has always evolved and adapted to meet the changing needs of children. Now referred to as "Every Child's Hope," ECH has nearly 200 employees across Missouri, dedicated to preventing child abuse, treating emotional trauma and mental health issues, and providing critical services to 1,400 youth and children annually — in our name, as members of the United Church of Christ. Pastor Nollau's dream — and the dream of the generous people of St. Peter's Church — lives on.

... Today, as you present your offering, I invite you to do so believing that great things are possible for those who see great human need as a call to advance the love and compassion of the church of Jesus Christ. Let us be that kind of church, as our forebears have taught us.

**OFFERING PRAYER:** \*

L: The friendship of Christ be with you!

*C: And also with you!*

L: Let us present our acts of service as an offering to our God.

*C: Just as we have freely received, we freely and joyfully give of our resources.*

One: O Spirit of Fellowship,

*C: in you may our offering be fruitful.*

One: Through the basin and towel you show us the Gospel.

*C: Through the bread and the cup you feed us the Good News.*

One: In the waters of baptism, you raise us up into new life.

*All: May all that we offer come from a real desire to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with you O God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.*

**SUMM-IT UP:**

Sparks, Bible Study, Combined Ash Wednesday, Lenten Devotional

**SENDING HYMN: #81 v.v. 1 – 3** (No Chorus) *“God Be with You”* (Public Domain)

1. God be with you till we meet again; by good counsel guide, uphold you,  
With a shepherd’s care enfold you: God be with you till we meet again.
2. God be with you till we meet again; wings of shelter safely hide you,  
Daily manna still provide you: God be with you till we meet again.
3. God be with you till we meet again; when life’s perils thick confound you,  
put unfailling arms around you: God be with you till we meet again.

**THE LORD’S PRAYER:**

**CHARGE & BENECTION:** \*

L: Friends, may you be blessed with the growing edge of the Spirit,  
where hope emerges alive and dissipates all despair.

Let us forage for such grace in the most forgotten places.

Let us find in relationship all we thought we had lost.

And as we go forth from this sacred time together,  
may we take with us the medicines of compassion and service  
to make the world a more just place for all.

*All: With the help of God, we will!*

L: May God bless and keep you,

May God’s face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May God look upon you kindly and grant you the peace God alone can give.

**POSTLUDE: “Go Now in Peace”**

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