

## **This June 21st...the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 2020**

On behalf of our family of faith here at Community United Church of Christ in Medford, WI,  
welcome to this time of Worship! I am Pastor Mary Jo Laabs.

It is our mission here to serve, to pray, to love, and to hold true to these words:  
“No matter who you are or where you are on your life’s journey, you are welcome here.”

Our Church Council met last week in a Zoom meeting. The Council made the decision that we will continue to be worshipping together “**apart**” **online** and in paper copies of the Services each week. We will continue to hold all meetings by Zoom. These meetings include a Faith Formation Time with Children on Sundays at 9:30; Coffee and Conversation on Sunday mornings at 10; Five Practices Team Meetings, Bible Studies on Tuesday nights at 6:30; Page Turner Book Club and Church Council meetings. If you would like the links to join in any of these meetings online, call me at 715-351-0450.

Today is Father’s Day! To all the men we call our “fathers” and to those men who have nurtured, have lost, adopted, loved and taught, who care for and shelter, foster and befriend children. Happy Father’s Day! God’s blessings to all fathers and to all of us remembering our Fathers.

### **Today’s Scripture is from the Gospel of Matthew 10:24-39, New Revised Standard Version**

<sup>24</sup> “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; <sup>25</sup> it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

*Whom to Fear* <sup>26</sup> “So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. <sup>27</sup> What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. <sup>28</sup> Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

<sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> And even the hairs of your head are all counted. <sup>31</sup> So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

<sup>32</sup> “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

*Not Peace, but a Sword* <sup>34</sup> “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

<sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; <sup>36</sup> and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

<sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; <sup>38</sup> and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

### **The title of my message today is: “Little Birds”**

Pray with me: Holy One of many names, we are so small and this universe that you have created is so enormous! We offer you our praise and thanks today, as we gather in our various little corners of your world. Some of us are waiting for you to show up here, to wipe out the virus, to give a change of heart to those who make plans to exclude some of our siblings in faith from public places, from just treatment, from health care, from housing, from a better life. We pray together our best prayer that you will enable us to have a clear sense of what is right and what is good: what we can do and what we had better not try. Let this little light of ours shine for one another. For your help and in your holy name, we pray. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8mok6oWXYk>

**Sing-a long, with motions:** This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine...let it shine!

Hide it under a bushel...no! I’m gonna let it shine...let it shine!

Don’t let anyone (blow) blow it out, I’m gonna let it shine...let it shine!

All around the whole wide world, I’m gonna let it shine...let it shine!

The scripture today is "...about the radical choices that constitute the life of discipleship."

-Lance Pape, Asst. Prof. of Homiletics, Brite Divinity School, Fort Worth, TX)

I have decided not to take apart these 15 verses of scripture today, line by line, but, rather, point out the ones that stand out to me. We can only guess what Jesus might have had in mind after long days spent with his disciples, traveling by foot and by boat...healing people of all sorts of illnesses; teaching 100's of people, who had followed him along the way. This portion of the Gospel follows last week's scripture, where Jesus was sending the disciples out "into the harvest." He didn't say that their life of discipleship would be easy. What comes out of Jesus' mouth today might have rubbed you the wrong way, as is my guess it was then... as these same words fell upon the disciples' ears that day.

I read it over 2 times and was so disturbed that I had to look ahead to find out what came next! The good news, if you were hoping to hear some; the 3 verses that conclude this chapter, that weren't included in the lectionary for today are *these* words of Jesus: <sup>40-42</sup> *"We are intimately linked in this harvest work. Anyone who accepts what you do, accepts me, the One who sent you. Anyone who accepts what I do accepts my Father, who sent me. Accepting a messenger of God is as good as being God's messenger. Accepting someone's help is as good as giving someone help. This is a large work I've called you into, but don't be overwhelmed by it. It's best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won't lose out on a thing."* (The Message)

Ah...that's better, isn't it?

This week, I have been fighting with a robin who built her nest just outside my front door...on the light fixture, 10 inches above the mailbox. During these last few weeks, she has been guarding the nest. And now, there are baby robins poking their heads up...mouths wide open, waiting for their next snack. The mother robin doesn't like it when I open the door. And...she is not very happy about me putting my arm out and grabbing my mail. She is getting better at swooping in toward the door and swooping out, squawking all the while! Now, I have it timed just right for grabbing my mail and shutting the door.

Doesn't she know? I have *told her* that I am not going to harm her babies. I just want my mail.

Doesn't she know? God will protect those little birds! His eye is on them.

These are the words of Jesus as interpreted in The Message: **Matthew 10:29-31**

<sup>29-31</sup> "What's the price of a pet canary? Some loose change, right? And God cares what happens to it even more than you do. He pays even greater attention to you, down to the last detail—even numbering the hairs on your head! So, don't be intimidated by all this bully talk. You're worth more than a million canaries.

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This week, Rev Cameron Trimble wrote this: "I've spent nights walking the streets of Atlanta in protests in support of Black Lives Matter." (By the way, she and others went and formed a human barrier between protestors and the police.) "Night after night people gather," she wrote, "now with ragged signs, hoarse voices, and sore feet, to march once again for change. As I looked at the tired faces in the crowd as the march ended, I thought of an old story of a little sparrow. The story goes like this:

One day there was a knight riding on a forest path, decked out in shining armor and astride a mighty steed. He was all ready to right the wrong, save ladies in distress and slay dragons. Along the way he saw a small sparrow, lying on its back in the middle of the path, with its tiny legs sticking upright.

He slowed down and spoke to it: "O sparrow, why are you lying on your back in the middle of the path?"

The sparrow replied: "Good Sir knight, I was told that the heavens would fall today."

The knight gave a good laugh, saying: "And you mean to hold the heavens up with your spindly little legs?" But the sparrow just let a deep sigh: "One does what one can, Sir knight, one does what one can."

The little sparrow seemed to know what could be possible doing what "one can."  
She seemed to know that God would help her! His eye is on them!

And haven't we heard that it is possible to do what we can, even if it feels insignificant? God's eye is on us. God will make it enough.

God is with us, as we protest, even if we only protest in our hearts. God is with the "Black Lives Matter" protestors, the ones lying down in the streets, the essential workers, the leaders of our State and our Nation, the Center for Disease Control, the Police officers, the prisoners, those no longer welcome here, the leaders of Nations, the people of the world, the robins and the sparrows, our friends and families...every one of every race or creed. God cares about each one of us, right down to the hungry mouths and the spindly legs.

Like the robin, some of us flap our wings and cackle a warning. Some of us get angry. Some of us join in the protesting. Some of us, like the sparrow, do what can be done, right where we are. By faith we do our best amidst these unsettling times, to be strong and courageous, to believe that *good is God's vision* for the year 2020; that change will come about and a cure will be found for the virus around us and a cure will come about for the racism upon which our country was born.

Listen again to Matthew 10: 26 and 28:

<sup>26</sup> "So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.

<sup>28</sup> Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Don't we know? God loves us.

No matter how much complaining we do. No matter how we lose our tempers when we hear the news and turn to see our loved ones in pain and danger, don't we know...that God has his eyes on us, too? The scriptures today remind us to turn to God, no matter how insignificant we might feel in the grand scheme of things. Our loving Creator is waiting to hear from us; waiting for us to do what we can do. Let's take a break and give thanks, ask for forgiveness for those things we have left undone and those things we have done that we regret. Let's offer our prayers of praise. And let's find ways to share God's extravagant love with one another if only bit by bit..

We, like the sparrow in the road, need to trust unswervingly that we can make a difference by doing what we can do. We, like the baby robins need to trust steadily as we turn our faces to God.

Take a lesson from the scripture today. Start small. If these *little birds* can do it, so shall we.

(Ask Alexa to play meditative music.)

### ***Pray with me:***

This morning's prayer has been taken from the book, "*Out of the Ordinary*" c 2000, 2001 by Joyce Rupp.

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Let us turn our hearts to prayer.... **Take a deep breath. Let it out.**

(1) Jeremiah 29:11-13

For surely, I know the plans I have in mind for you, says God, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then, when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says God...

O God, we seek you with all our heart. The longing for you is planted deep within our hearts. Hear our cry for you. Help us to welcome you in all of life. Pause...

(2) Psalm 112:7-8

They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in God.

Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid.

We place our trust in you, Loving Companion, for you are here in the most difficult of times. We praise and thank you for the gift of your compassionate love, which encourages and strengthens us. Pause...

(3) Philomen1:7 I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you...

Thank you, Heart of Love, for those people who have come into our lives and refreshed us, for all those

people who have given us new hope on our journey, especially in our weary moments. Pause...

(4) Ezekiel 11:9 I will remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh....

Forgive us, Merciful One, for those times when our hearts were hard and unwilling to forgive or to offer understanding. Forgive us for our impatience with our own growth or with that of others. Pause...

(5) Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Come into those corners of our hearts where we still have not discovered the treasure of you, God. Purify us of all the stuff that distracts us and fools us and gets us off course from our inner journey with you. Pause...

(6) Deuteronomy 10:6 (also, Mark 12:30) You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...

Teach us what it means to love you with all our heart. Guide and direct us to make good decisions each day so that we will grow ever more fully in love with you, God. Pause...

(7) Jeremiah 4:7 I will give them a heart to know that I am their God...

for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

How wonderful you are, God of love, to continually draw us into your embrace. You yearn for us to know you more fully. You call us to return to you with the fullness of our love. Receive our prayer this day which we offer to you with trust and with a deep desire to be more one with you.

**Take a deep breath. And let it out.**

We give you thanks gracious and loving God, for sheltering us and for whispering to us words of assurance. We lift our prayers to you for those who are on our hearts this day: our families and friends, those who are recovering from surgery and those awaiting surgeries; those mourning the loss of loved ones and those who are mourning racial injustice. Let justice begin with us, O God. Lead us and guide us in the words we speak and in the changes we wish will come about, as you would have it be. Inspire us as we minister to one another as best we can. We pray now in your words:

**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 sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but, deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen**

**Offertory:** The message today, encourages us to continue this risky business of being the church in every little way that we can think of. Let us not ignore the God-nudges to be generous. We are once again reminded that we, as members and friends of this church family, have committed to minister to one another and to the world around us. Thank you to all of you whose various gifts have enabled Community United Church of Christ to faithfully carry on!

\*Benediction: Go now...Do not be dismayed by the brokenness in the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the **light that is you.**

—L.R. Knost, posted on [pilgrimwr.unitingchurch.org.au](http://pilgrimwr.unitingchurch.org.au), September 4, 2011.

>>New links, as of June 14: **Please join us for Sunday coffee hour on Zoom at 10 am each week.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83105711931?pwd=MGMYSdJGZzJydDZUSUpheTloYmJIUT09>

Meeting ID: 831 0571 1931 Password: 275883 Or by phone: 1 312 626 6799

>>**Tell the children about the Faith Formation Time with Children on Sundays at 9:30 am**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84072750591?pwd=dWk4aS9SSXpSeXd0TS9BTDVWVWM5QT09>

Meeting ID: 840 7275 0591 Password: 315870 Or, by phone: 1 312 626 6799

If you know someone who would appreciate receiving a paper copy of the weekly messages, please call me at 715-351-0450 or email me: [believe417@gmail.com](mailto:believe417@gmail.com) God bless us one and all.

