

This is July 5th, 2020...the 5th Sunday after Pentecost, 2020

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

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.”

Please tell the children about our *Faith Formation Time with Children* on Sundays at 9:30am by Zoom.
And, join us for a time of *Coffee and Conversation* on Sundays at 10am by Zoom.

The good news for this week is that our refurbished stained-glass window has been re-installed by artist, Nathan Meyer! What a treasure! You can get a glimpse of it above the front doors as you ride by the church building.



As if this were the only time, and this the only place, and we the only people, Jesus Christ will meet us.
As if this were the only time and this the only place, and we the only people, let us worship God!

Today’s scripture is taken from the Gospel of Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

In the Message interpretation of the Bible. These are words were of Jesus, as he might have spoken them today: 16-19 “How can I account for this generation? The people have been like spoiled children whining to their parents, ‘We wanted to skip rope, and you were always too tired; we wanted to talk, but you were always too busy.’ John came fasting and they called him crazy. I came feasting and they called me a lush, a friend of the riffraff. Opinion polls don’t count for much, do they? The proof of the pudding is in the eating.”

25-26 And then, abruptly, Jesus broke into prayer: “Thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. You’ve concealed your ways from sophisticates and know-it-alls but spelled them out clearly to ordinary people. Yes, Father, that’s the way you like to work.”

27 Jesus resumed talking to the people, but now, tenderly. “The Father has given me all these things to do and say. This is a unique Father-Son operation, coming out of Father and Son intimacies and knowledge. No one knows the Son the way the Father does, nor the Father the way the Son does. But I’m not keeping it to myself; I’m ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen.

28-30 “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

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The title of my message today is: “Just Plain Tired?”

Pray with me: Holy God, we come before you hauling around all sorts of burdens...you are well-aware of the weight and discomfort of each one. Oh God, we admit that we do not ask for the help we need. Lighten us, if even just a little bit, let our worries be lessened...let your light shine before us as we look out from our individual tunnels! I think I am starting to see it. Thanks!

When you take a vacation, how many suitcases do you take along? Are they stuffed full...so heavy that you can hardly lift them into the car? I remember one family vacation when my children were younger. We borrowed my mother's large Samsonite, molded, pristine, never-been-used suitcase. At one point on the trip, when we were packing up to leave the motel in the morning, one of my sons sat on the suitcase, so that it would close. I snapped the latches shut, and he jumped off. Much to our surprise, the top re-opened and all of the rivets popped apart. It looked like something you might see in a cartoon. We laughed so hard we were crying! Not only had we trashed my mother's suitcase, we still had another week or so of travel ahead of us. The burden of carrying that suitcase was now heavier and more awkward than before.

Just how much baggage do we carry? I'm not talking about jam-packed suitcases now, but other kinds of burdens. Sickness. Pain. Worries. Fears. Uncertainties. Sent me a note this week or call. Let's talk about this quote: God won't give us more than we can handle. You won't find it in the Bible. The suitcase is packed, now... carry it.

(c2020 Dayspring, (in)courage) In a Dayspring devotional, Kristen Welch writes this:

“I sat across from a woman with dark eyes that told her dark story. As her hands wrapped around her cup of coffee, her eyes became pools of pain and I had to look away. She didn't speak a word of English, but the translator didn't need to tell me that she had suffered in this life and now carried the weight of the world. I could feel the heaviness.

A missionary arranged our unlikely meeting—me, a mom and writer—she, a middle eastern woman who had escaped oppression. We were joined together by the desire to help women in her country. As I listened to the violence she had endured, I couldn't help but think of the saying I grew up believing,

“God won't give you more than you can handle.”

I've heard the words my entire life. I may have even said them a time or two. And I've believed a lie.

These words sound ridiculous to a mom who has buried her child and to a teen girl who has traded sex for food and to the woman who sat before me who could be killed because she follows Jesus.

That's more than anyone can handle. Yes, sometimes we are given more than we can handle.

But all the time, we have One who can handle anything.”

For us, these words might make us want to run out the door screaming...our own personal suitcase is over loaded! The yoke's unbalanced. Truth is, if we could handle all of the grief, sickness, pain, suffering, poverty, injustice, financial woes, parenting struggles, gut-wrenching hard times in life, we wouldn't need Jesus. These are the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John 16:33 “In me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he wrote to people in the early Church who were being persecuted for their faith. He writes, (2 Cor 1:8-9:) “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.

But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who **raises the dead.**”

That is the answer, isn't it? When we are weak and heavy-burdened, when we feel as though can't do it any longer; when we are fed up; when **it** has become too much; when we are running on empty; when it is beyond our capability to deal with...our grief, our loneliness, our anger, our loss, our...fill in the blank... in that moment, the strength of the *God of resurrection* will be realized. “It has been with us all along!” How do we know? Well, until we get to that point, we rely on **ourselves**, thinking we've got this. Sure do! What we've got is anxiety and sleepless nights. What we've got is a focus on ourselves and our own misfortune, and are *just plain tired* of it all. We get argumentative. Even the dog starts barking at us! The cat runs away. We decide to pack up that old suitcase, pack it all in and get away ourselves.

Just then, Jesus speaks the words that offer us the blessed assurance that we need: Matthew 11:28-30 "Are you tired? Worn out? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

There is a wonderful legend concerning the *quiet* years of Jesus, the years prior to his public ministry. The legend claims that Jesus, the carpenter, was one of the master "yoke-makers" in the Nazareth area. People came from miles around for a yoke, hand carved and crafted by Jesus, son of Joseph. When customers arrived with their team of oxen, the legend has it that Jesus would spend considerable time measuring the team: their height, the width, the space between them, and the size of their shoulders. Within a week, the team would be brought back and he would carefully place the newly made yoke over their shoulders, watching for rough places, smoothing out the edges and fitting it perfectly to this particular team of oxen.

In the last few weeks, we have been following the stories of Jesus as he commissioned his Apostles to proclaim the good news, cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. He warns them that as they go along, they will be persecuted: "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so, be wise as serpents and innocent as doves," he says. He encourages them with the words: "Do not fear." He tells them to welcome one another and BE welcomed in his name.

Have you ever noticed that Jesus never says: "NOW, GO...I WILL SIT BACK AND SUPERVISE." He fits us with a yoke that is made exactly to fit our lives and our hearts. The yoke he invites us to wear fits us well, does not rub us wrong, nor does it cause us to develop **sore spirits**. It is specially designed for TWO, and he is our yoke partner.

Jesus said that he would help carry our burdens... we can trust that to be true.

Jesus tells us to go and do likewise...to help carry one another's burdens. We can trust him to be with us.

There are some among us who hold inside the grief of losing loved ones. Help someone carry that burden today....and then, check in on them occasionally. There are those that are hurting and healing and feeling a desperate need for the caring words of a friend or family member. Help lift that burden today.

There are those who are hungry and need clothing and need help finding a job or a place to lay their heads. Let's, together, look for ways, as a church family, in which we can help lift some of those burdens. There have a couple this week, who has called the "Community Mission with Jesus" asking for help with purchasing a portable a/c unit and another who needs help meeting medical bills following hospitalization with the virus. We, who join with the local churches in this community mission effort, helped to meet those needs. The budget of our joint mission effort is run totally on donations and is being stretched thin during this time of pandemic. Think about it. We have money in the bank. Those who ask for help from us do not. We can be sure that Jesus is urging us at Community UCC to do what we can to help lift one another's burdens.

The scripture today is not just about **us** being just plain tired. It is about us and *for us* to take seriously the cost and joy of discipleship as we serve one another. Looking ahead to the day when there will be a just world for all, it is clear today, July 5, 2020, that the yoke is more than uneven. We might be at least a little guilty of letting Jesus carry his side, with us, on the other side, dragging our feet and letting him do all of the work.

I am here to remind you today that when you have wearied yourself with your burdens, and do not know which way to turn. remember that we are yoked with Jesus. He stands beside us and is there helping to lift our burdens, and is beside us as we, in turn, reach out to help lift the burdens of others. Think on these words: "Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

How much will we insist to pack and drag along on our own? How much will hand over to Jesus? "Just plain tired" will no longer be an accurate description of you!

Ask Alexa to play some meditative music.)

Let us spend a few moments in silence looking back in our minds at the days of this past week. What burdens have we carried? Breathe in Sabbath rest. Breathe out your weariness.

Holy God, help us to feel your presence here as we lift our burdens and the burdens of this weary world to you. Help us to continue to serve one another in your name. Unburden us, dear God. Let us say together: You are God and we are NOT. You are God and we are NOT

Gracious one we give you thanks and praise this day and every day...whether we remember to say thanks or not. Pause now and give thanks for your many blessings...and hear these words of thanks, written by Rachel Hackenberg:

The tree shall whisper thanks for the wind by which it dances though its roots cannot be moved.

The dove shall coo thanks for the small nourishing seed that has blown so far from flower.

The rock shall be still in thanks for the quiet stream pooling past it & softening its hardest points & edges.

The violet shall radiate thanks for the taller grasses that shelter it from the harsh noonday sun.

The seagull shall clamor thanks for the tide that bears salty morsels and swells the breeze for flight.

The field shall murmur thanks for the summer rain that gently bends the hay and soaks the earth.

And I shall collapse in thanks (not weariness!) for all good gifts of creation & all sweet joys of love in life.

Breathe in thanks. Breathe out distress.

We lift to you those whose lives have been changed because of earthquakes and storms...illness and death...bring generous and caring hands to help us recovery and rebuilding, not only the physical structures that shelter us, but, the flesh and bone and soul that we are entrusted with. We are a world of people shaken in many different ways, help us as we pray for one another...

For those who are recovering from surgery and accident; those who face medical testing, rehabilitation, and therapies. We lift our prayers to you for those who are on our hearts this day: our families and friends, those mourning the loss of loved ones, especially the family of Rev. Bart Bartholomew; those who are mourning racial injustice.

We give you thanks gracious and loving God, for giving us the wisdom we need as we strive to be your disciples as best we can. By faith, we promise to do our best amidst these unsettling times, to believe that *your vision* for the year 2020 is of good and not that which will harm us. Let the changes come about that are necessary to find a cure for the virus around us and a cure for the racism upon which our country was born. Holy God, we come before you today with concerns and cares, with joys and sorrows...these things already known to you!

Ease our burdens, merciful God, and give us courage to face the coming days.

We pray in your words and in your holy name:

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

The Sacrament of Holy Communion

- Gifts in Open Hands, by Maren

Come to a table not defined by wood or stone but by what rests upon it --which is the "me" of Christ.

Come unto me because any burden is heavy to the one who is under it.

Come unto me with the burden of a crowded life or a lonely one.

Come unto me, with a child's burden of frustration or hunger, of abuse or embarrassment.

Come unto me with a burden of grief --for the death of a beloved person or a companion animal, for an ability you have no longer, or a relationship needing reconciliation.

Come unto me with the burden of a disappointment, even one that doesn't seem significant enough, or a fear deeper than words.

Come unto the “me” of Christ with any burden --for here is rest for the weary, lightening of suffering, gentleness, and guidelines for becoming gentle. Here is a yoke of responsibility that can be lifted because of a small piece of bread and a sip of the cup of hope.

This is the prayer of consecration

Jesus noticed that often people ignore both the celebration of those who are dancing with joy, and the sorrow of those who are weeping in pain or loss when those feelings are not their own. We come to this table rejoicing with those who laugh and sharing the tears of the grieving. We are God’s children in wonder and loss, dispersed and gathered at the same time.

In your many living spaces, rest your hands lightly upon the elements which you set aside today to be a sacrament. We ask God’s blessing on them and on all of us and on all those who are in our prayers today.

O God of the open hand and the gentle yoke, send your Spirit of love, of power and blessing upon your children in every “house of worship” this day, so that this bread may be broken and this cup may be shared with joy. Risen Christ, live in us, that we may live and love as your faithful followers. Breathe in us, that we may breathe in you and continue to serve others as your disciples. Amen.

Hear now these words of remembering:

We remember the Creator blessed all creatures and all human beings with plants of the ground and fruit of the trees. We remember that Rebekah’s hospitality was proven because she remembered to give water not just to people but to camels, and that her compassion shone when she gave more than was asked or expected.

Communion is always more than expected, so we remember leftover baskets of bread and fish, so many parables everyone finds a heart-touching story, an invitation to children, tax collectors, and even thieves, hand-washed feet rather than a DIY basin, a holy Pentecost translation-app, never the insistence that we use special words.

We remember the Jerusalem Passover as Jesus expanded the menu to include himself, a miracle breakfast on the beach with fish that could feed a village, and tables in houses that became church when unconditional love was set on the table.

Remembering is good but not enough. Communion is most holy not in the past, but today and tomorrow. Jesus said, “Do this now. Don’t talk. Eat and Drink. Be blessed. Go forth.”

Please take a moment now to prepare your table with a piece of bread or a cracker; a cup of juice or wine.

Let us at our many tables receive the gift of God, the Bread of Heaven.

Please repeat these words: **We come unto Christ** **in the Bread we share.** (eat it now)

Let us in many places receive the gift of God, the Cup of Blessing.

Please repeat these words: **We come unto Christ** **in the Cup we share.** (drink it now)

Let us give thanks: In thanksgiving for this meal of grace and in the holy dispersion of virtual worship, we claim that the risen Christ’s love and gentle yoke are found in all houses of worship.

We pray: O Holy One, we have come unto you with our weariness and we have let go of all in our lives that is heavy. We thank you for the rest and strength of this communion so now we can lift up all that is light and gentle, humble and easy, and learn from you how to change the world. Amen

Offertory: The message today encourages us to lift one another’s burdens as Jesus lifts ours.

Let us not ignore God’s nudges to be kinder and more 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. That ministering looks different now but, it still being carried on. Thank you to all of you whose various gifts have enabled Community United Church of Christ to faithfully serve

Benediction from “The Dismissal Blessing” by William Sloane Coffin, an American Christian clergyman and long-time peace activist. He was ordained in the Presbyterian Church, and later received ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ. June 1, 1924- April 12, 2006:

**May God give you Grace never to sell yourself short!
Grace to risk something big for something good!
Grace to remember that the world is too dangerous for anything but truth
and too small for anything but Love!**

I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created. Romans 8:38-39

>>>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=MGM5SDJGZzJydDZUSUpheTloYmJlUT09>
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 God bless us one and all.

**Someone has said, "Spiritual journeys can be like the exercise equipment we buy and leave in the closet. Without coaches and workout partners, most of us won't stick with it."
We need to keep reminding ourselves of that.**

Write your thoughts here, concerning these words: "God won't give you more than you can handle."

Life is fragile, handle with prayer!