

This is September 20, 2020...the 16th Sunday after Pentecost

Thank you for joining in this time of worship. Welcome!

It is our mission at Community United Church of Christ in Medford, WI,
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!”

Let’s begin with this *Call to Worship*:

O God, you summon the day to dawn, you teach the morning to waken the earth.

Great is your name, great is your love!

For you, the valleys shall sing for joy, the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Great is your name, great is your love!

For you, the leaders of the earth shall bow, the poor and persecuted shall shout for joy.

Great is your name, great is your love!

Your love and mercy shall last forever, fresh as the morning, sure as the sunrise.

Great is your name, great is your love!



Matthew 20:1-16, NRSV “A Story About Workers”

¹⁻²“God’s kingdom is like an estate manager who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. They agreed on a wage of a dollar a day and went to work. ³⁻⁵“Later, about nine o’clock, the manager saw some other men hanging around the town square unemployed. He told them to go to work in his vineyard and he would pay them a fair wage. They went.

⁵⁻⁶“He did the same thing at noon, and again at three o’clock. At five o’clock he went back and found still others standing around. He said, ‘Why are you standing around all day doing nothing?’

⁷“They said, ‘Because no one hired us.’ “He told them to go to work in his vineyard.

⁸“When the day’s work was over, the owner of the vineyard instructed his foreman, ‘Call the workers in and pay them their wages. Start with the last hired and go on to the first.’

⁹⁻¹²“Those hired at five o’clock came up and were each given a dollar. When those who were hired first saw that, they assumed they would get far more. But they got the same, each of them one dollar. Taking the dollar, they groused angrily to the manager, ‘These last workers put in only one easy hour, and you just made them equal to us, who slaved all day under a scorching sun.’

¹³⁻¹⁵“He replied to the one speaking for the rest, ‘Friend, I haven’t been unfair. We agreed on the wage of a dollar, didn’t we? So, take it and go. I decided to give to the one who came last the same as you. Can’t I do what I want with my own money? Are you going to get stingy because I am generous?’

¹⁶“**Here it is again, the Great Reversal: many of the first ending up last, and the last first.**”

The Message, © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson

The title of my message today is: “Enough”

Pray with me: Holy One, we have had enough of this! Calm our frustrations, please...lead us to ways that we might better nurture one another in faith and that we might see more clearly how to love one another and think of this new way of living that has surrounded us...as a blessing, not a curse.

Giving you thanks and praise, we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen

We have been working our way through these past 6 months. Is what you have in your hands and in your life right now... fair and good? Is it enough? Let’s take a few moments to place ourselves in the vineyard of this Gospel story. Do you identify with those who were hired first or those who showed up at day’s end?

Can’t imagine that? Then, picture this: Those who showed up early, helped set up and worked all day to be sure everyone in the Ruby’s Pantry food distribution line received their share of food, received a t-shirt for their sometimes “back-breaking” efforts. Those who arrived an hour before “closing time” also received a t-shirt for straightening up the space, and flattening a few boxes, after the food distribution was over.

How would you feel? Was it fair? Was what you received exactly what you expected?

Or, think of this: maybe you have a college degree framed and hanging on the wall in your office and are paid on a pay-scale that doesn't quite take into account your education and years of experience. Maybe you have a full-time job with no benefits. Maybe one day not so long ago, your position was eliminated; or your small business was forced to close for the safety of employees and customers. Maybe you need assistance paying for your groceries or other monthly bills. Maybe what you are paid for... whatever work you do is not a fair wage at all, because you are a woman or you are not white. How does that feel? I'm guessing that you get it now. It is not enough. It's not fair. It is not just.

And now, just WHAT IF the estate manager in the Gospel, or every employer in town would tell each person that was hired that they each would get a dollar or that they each would get the same wage, no matter what degree or experience they had or how many hours they worked? Imagine the uproar.

This Gospel story today and the recent events in the world around us have caused me to think about what we consider to be "enough." Yes, really. Enough activity. Enough interaction between family and friends. Enough space between shoppers. Enough clean air to breathe. Enough people wearing masks. Enough time spent in Worship. Enough mission outreach projects. Enough money to pay the bills. Enough Medical staff and EMTs. Enough beds in the hospital...enough vaccine for everyone.

Would you say that you are satisfied with what you have? Do you have enough? Are you doing all that you are able to do, keeping safety restrictions and you individual health in mind? It is mind-boggling, isn't it?

As a member or friend of a church community, are you satisfied? Do you have enough spiritual opportunities? Is "the Church" doing enough in this time of "closure"? (Oh, by the way, "the church" is you!)

I hear it very often. We are all yearning for the day when we can gather in the church building again. We miss gathering together in meetings and in social activities. We just plainly miss *seeing* each other. Some of us are thinking of how wonderful it will be when we can gather for Worship again in the Sanctuary and have a potluck dinner again.

Even though we are missing some things, some people, some events, God has blessed us with "enough" right here and right now, to be the church wherever we are. God is equipping us with opportunities that we may never in our lifetimes have had before. We still "belong" to the church, whichever one it may be. The structure of our activities has just changed. Massively, I agree.

This week, the WI Conference United Church of Christ posted this question on Facebook: *While we've all been doing a lot of things differently these past few months, not all changes are bad! What have you enjoyed about the new things your church is doing? Tell us where we can join you!* These are some of the answers to that question from all around WI:

A woman wrote this: "While many people hate not being able to gather in person, for some people with social anxiety, remote offerings have allowed them to be more comfortable in joining group events. I hope that when we are able to return to in person worship, study groups, meetings, etc. that churches will consider more of a universal design approach in all church opportunities and continue to offer remote options as well as in-person opportunities. Offering remote options benefits not only those with social anxiety, but also those who are out of town for work, who have childcare conflicts and who don't like to drive after dark." (Joanna Martin Menolasino)

Another wrote this: "Being able to attend online services alongside the congregation I grew up with, even though I live hours away now, has been a really nice bit of *familiar* in an otherwise unfamiliar situation." (Katie Kvam)

And this: "I really enjoy how I can pop into different churches all around my community now without having to drive. It's made church a lot more accessible for my disability, if I'm being perfectly honest. I hope the UCC will continue to stream live services after the pandemic in the spirit of accessibility for all." (Kieran Windsor)

Also: “Being able to have a Zoom bible study with the Pastor on Wednesday mornings, which is easy for me to attend because I am working from home (but otherwise would basically be impossible), has been great!” (Peter Wall)

Can you identify with those responses? What have you enjoyed about the new things that our church is doing? Think about it or talk about it for a bit today.

Here is what members and friends of our church have already been saying:

“I love being able to join in a Bible study with one people from all over Wisconsin” without driving anywhere.”

“I was never able to attend Worship on Sundays because I work on Sundays. Now, I can attend!”

“I like the audio version of the Sunday services. I can sit with my coffee and relax... close my eyes and listen.”

“I enjoy receiving the paper copies of the sermons in the mail. I feel like I am getting it better, (sorry, Pastor,) than when I’m ‘in church.’ And, I can read it again and again if I want to.”

And from a 97-year old member: “I read every word of the Sunday message. Don’t stop sending it.”

“Sunday morning Faith Formation time with children has been fun...in the comfort of our home.”

“I wish I would have known about Zoom before!”

“Now, we can have online services in the winter, instead of canceling when there is a blizzard!”

“It is so good to “check in” on Sunday mornings and talk to friends from our church for Zoom coffee hour.”

“Did you notice that our Church Council meetings are more concise on Zoom?
Not much more than an hour now.”

“It is so good to watch the video-services.”

Well, is it enough? To each of us, enough is different.

Some people think that, because our church building doors are closed right now and will be until it is safer to gather together, that we are doing nothing. Some have chosen not to make a donation or look at or listen to or read the Sunday Worship services until they be back inside the church building. Some think it is not fair that we are the only church in town that is not “open” for *business* as usual.

On the other hand, some are thinking up new ways that we can serve one another: like starting a “prayer” collection in order to pray for one another; like calling our bible/book studies a time of “Cerebration”! So, you’re wondering what that is. (Well, it’s an enjoyable, social activity like a “celebration” in which we use the front part of our brain - the “cerebrum” - to develop and share our thoughts, perspectives and insights on chapters of a short contemporary spiritual works. Look for more information about it in the newsletter and the weekly email.) Some are sharing copies of the sermons with one another and forwarding the weekly You-Tube links to their friends. Some are calling one another by phone to check more than ever before. Some are sending notes and cards in the mail.

What stands out to me in today’s Gospel is this verse: NRSV: Matthew 20: 6 And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ In the Message Interpretation: At five o’clock he went back and found still others standing around. He said, ‘Why are you standing around all day doing nothing?’

Temporarily absent from home, Captain Webster left Daniel and his brother Ezekiel with specific instructions as to the work they were to do that day.

On his return he found the task still unperformed, and questioned them about their idleness.

“What have you been doing, Ezekiel?” he asked. “Nothing, sir.”

“Well, Daniel, what have you been doing?” “Helping Zeke, sir.”

My friends in Christ, let it not be said about us that we are standing around doing nothing during these days of COVID, during these days of quarantine. It is up to each of us to do our best to be the church, even though we are not gathering inside these walls. The scripture today points us, in these difficult and unprecedented times to look at what we are doing. Are we doing enough? Or are we just coasting? Charles Campbell, Professor of Homiletics at Duke University writes this: “Through the odd and unsettling story, Jesus both envisions the order of God and unmask the deadly spirits of the old order.” *Unmasks!*

I am starting to feel as though we have come to the precipice of something wonderfully different...from what I hear from you and from others that I talk to on the phone and at Zoom meetings, it just feels as though these changes that we have been grumbling about, are actually blessings in disguise. God is definitely up to something. God’s new vision for us all is taking place perhaps, without us even realizing it.

The United Church of Christ’s “Three Great Loves” Campaign has been one way that we have been reminded of the opportunities to work together to address the inequities in our current world by loving our neighbor, loving the children and loving creation. It is up to us to decide what is enough and what is not and then to work together in justice for all.

Like the workers in the vineyard, we have different tasks to perform, with different time frames, energy levels and abilities. This story does not tell us that we should be ok with being cheated out of our own fair pay for a days’ work. I see it as an example of how, in our lives, we do too much complaining and not enough doing.

Max Lucado says; “If you look hard enough, you will find something to complain about.” Adam and Eve did: Surrounded by all they needed, they set their eyes on the one thing they couldn’t have.

The followers of Moses did...they could have focused on the Red Sea, fire escorting them by night and a cloud by day...manna in the wilderness...but, they whined that they were hungry.

The workers in the vineyard did...they had a job, they got paid...but, whined that someone else got more than they deserved.

What about us...what are we looking at? The one fruit we can’t eat? Or the many that we can. The manna or the misery, or God’s plan?

"When Leonardo da Vinci was painting 'The Last Supper' in the little Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, he spent a good deal of time in apparent idleness out in the cloister, much to the annoyance of the monks who were paying for his services. For a time, nothing was said, but finally a delegation went to the artist and complained that the church was not getting its money's worth. Leonardo heard them out, then explained simply, 'When I pause the longest, I make the most telling strokes with my brush.'" --Story told by Roy Ashford, *Take it easy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 6.

We have had a lot of time to think. Is God giving us a new direction? Or are we sitting back, saying, “O God, I have been cheated again.” Pay attention to the stories of families helping families with necessities and lodging out West; Fire fighters converging on the Western states from all over the country and risking their lives each day; Red Cross volunteers converging on cities in Louisiana and Alabama; School districts and Universities taking every precaution to keep students safe; scientists and medical technicians working day and night in order to find a vaccine. It would be impossible to list the more than enough acts of kindness occurring at this very moment. It could be entitled, “God’s Unfolding Plan of Exactly *Enough*.”

No matter how insignificant or glorious our tasks in life, in God’s loving eyes, we are all equal. In the church, we are co-workers. And we all receive exactly what is right, from a God who’s extravagantly generous with “tips! We call it “grace.”

The prophet Jeremiah sums it up...in Ch 29:11(Message) “I know what I am doing, says the Lord. I have it all planned out. Plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you hope and a future...”

Enough said. Amen.

Let's spend a few moments in silence.

Let us pray: Compassionate and merciful God, we confess that we sometimes ignore our responsibilities to you and to humanity. If ever we trample on the rights of others while asserting our own right: **God forgive.**

If ever, by our example and deed, we hurt little ones or cause them to do wrong: **God, forgive.**

If ever we are sitting on the sidelines, doing nothing, but criticizing those who *do*: **God forgive.**

The following prayer was shared by Rev Cameron Trimble who is suffering with the COVID virus:

O Lord, in the silence of this day, which is now beginning, I come to ask you for peace, wisdom, and strength. Today I want to look upon the world with eyes full of love; to be patient, understanding, humble, calm, and good. Today I want to see beyond the appearances of your children, to see them as you yourself see them and so to be able to appreciate the goodness of each person. Close my ears to all murmuring; guard my tongue from all evil speech, so that only those thoughts that bless may remain in me. Today I want to be so well-intentioned and just that all those who approach me may feel your presence. Clothe me with your goodness, O Lord, and grant that, during this day I may reflect you. (Amen.)

Morning Prayer by by Fr. Ignacio Larrañaga, S.J. Translated from the Spanish by Fr. Mark Stengel, O.S.B.

Open our eyes, dear God and let us see what is possible as you forgive us and enable us once again to start over in the name of Jesus. **Inhale the possibilities in the future. Exhale the past.**

We lift our thanks and praise to you in the silence of our hearts ... in the name and in the words that Jesus taught us, we pray: **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**

This is our time of intention and thanks

God's blessings rain down on us like manna from heaven. Sometimes we recognize them and sometimes we don't. Keeping in mind the way sin which God has provided for our needs, I invite you now to consider what gifts you will give this week. Many thanks for all that you have given.

Let us pray: Loving God, receive our offerings and unite us into a community of mutual caring, where the light of your love shines through each of our efforts to share of our time, talents and treasures. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Benediction:

I wish you enough sun to keep your attitude bright, no matter how gray the day may appear.

I wish you enough rain to appreciate the sun even more.

I wish you enough happiness to keep your spirit alive and everlasting.

I wish you enough pain so that even the smallest of joys in life may appear bigger.

I wish you enough gain to satisfy your wanting.

I wish you enough loss to appreciate all that you possess.

I wish you enough hellos to get you through the final good- bye. ~Unknown Author

Go now! Take the love of Jesus Christ into our world...

And please, do not place a period where God has placed a comma.

The blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Comforter is with us.

This time of worship has ended, let our service never stop... for any reason.

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>CUCC webpage: uccmedford.org For video-recorded Worship, click: "media"

"Like" us on Facebook: Community United Church of Christ, Medford, WI

Listen and sing along to "Bring Many Names" ~by Brian Wren on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aj7Ms2Z35Tc&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3gou-Yb-tc365207vSre845QCBBeU4eA8r4Sw1jRjWYRYjdWKQXeh6NU9E>