

**This is October 11, 2020...the 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**



**Thank you for joining in this time of worship. Whether you were invited here by mail or email or phone call or word of mouth, 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!”

**We will begin with this Call to Worship**

Clowns and fools, even those who break the rules; thinkers and dreamers, plotters and schemers; quiet ones, rowdy ones and those full of talk; limpers and skippers and those who toddle when they walk; dancers and singers, poets and bell ringers... we all have been invited to come and worship!

The Scripture reading for this day is from the gospel of **Matthew 22:1-14**, NRSV  
*“The Parable of the Wedding Banquet”*

Once more, Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup>“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. <sup>3</sup>He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. <sup>4</sup>Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ <sup>5</sup>But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup>while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. <sup>7</sup>The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. <sup>8</sup>Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup>Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ <sup>10</sup>Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so, the wedding hall was filled with guests. <sup>11</sup>“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, <sup>12</sup>and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup>Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ <sup>14</sup>For many are called, but few are chosen.”

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Take a deep breath and let it out.

Pray with me: Welcoming God, you invite us to your table; you call us your friends; but, so easily, we look the other way and ignore your invitation. We say, “No one will miss me if I don’t show up.” What were we thinking when we told YOU that we had better things to do?! Let someone else be the forgiver. Let someone else protect the environment and care for the poor. Help us not to squander the opportunities that your invitations offer to us. Thanks for each blessing and each moment of grace... in Jesus’ name.  
Amen.

I am calling this message today, “RSVP”

The mail has just arrived. You sort through the junk mail and ads and set aside the newspaper. There, in your hand is a wedding invitation. You read the details. *What* goes through your mind?

It's at 1 o'clock?! We'd have to leave here at 7am... we can't attend.

The 14<sup>th</sup> of November...hmm, it's our grandson's birthday. We are unable to attend.

Ya' know, I really never liked the "church part" of weddings. And it is at *that* church.

Woah! I'm not going there.

I have to work that day and probably won't be able to get anyone to fill in for me. I am unable to attend.

You fill out the "reply" card with the "number of guests" being zero.

We are masters at the art of making excuses, aren't we? Was your last excuse a good one?

In his book "A Scent of Love," Keith Miller tells a true story about a mother who took her children to the *Animal Farm*, a place where they could pet animals that roam free and even ride an elephant. Not finding

a conventional parking space, the mother parked their red Volkswagen "Beetle" on a piece of pavement near

the ranger station. Then, they went out to see the animals. Realizing that it was getting late, and they were supposed to pick up Dad at the airport, the mother and her children rushed to the parking lot. When they got to their car, they discovered that the front end of the car was smashed in.

Furious, she stamped into the ranger station. Before she could speak, the man at the desk said, "I'll bet I know who you are. You're the owner of the red Volkswagen." He explained how the damage took place. It seems that Millie, the elephant, that takes children for rides, was trained in the circus to sit on a little red tub. "When Millie saw your car," explained the ranger trying to stifle a laugh, "She couldn't resist. But we **are** going to get it fixed for you."

Fortunately, with the motor in the back of a Volkswagen, the car could still be driven. But, now they were **really late** getting to the airport. Mom pulled the little "smashed" Volkswagen onto the freeway and drove as fast as she dared. All of a sudden, she came to a long line of backed-up traffic. There was an accident up ahead.

She sat there and waited for a while, but impatiently decided that the situation called for unusual measures.

She drove onto the shoulder of the freeway and started making her way around the line of cars.

Up front, near the wreck, there were two patrolmen on motorcycles. One of the officers looked up as the little red car zipped by, ran to his motorcycle and followed her with his siren screaming. When he pulled her over,

he said, "Don't you know it is against State law to leave the scene of an accident?" She replied, "I haven't been involved in any accident." He raised his eyebrows and looked at the front of her car and asked,

"Then what happened to your car?" She replied, "An elephant sat on it."

**This is how it is in God's kingdom: even those with good excuses are welcome.**

What has changed in human nature from the time of Moses until today? Different vehicles...different excuses.

In the book of Exodus, *the people gathered around Aaron and said to him, 'Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do*

*not know what has become of him.*” The people were becoming impatient. Moses had not come back down

the mountain fast enough for them. There was no *good excuse* for the response, but they gathered up all of the gold they could find and made a golden calf. They made their *own god* and offered sacrifice to it.

Meanwhile, Moses, convinces God not to bring wrath upon the people for their perverse ways. Scripture says *God changed his mind*...I am thinking, God might have been waiting for **Moses to change**. Moses, you remember, did not feel he was worthy to lead the people and NOW was pleading with God to remember his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Israel...he was pleading for forgiveness. <sup>14</sup>***And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.***

**This is how it is in God’s kingdom...even those who make stupid mistakes are welcome.**

We, too, store up our treasures as we wait for our futures, but we miss the simple things around us that need our attention. Different treasures, same excuses.

In our Gospel today, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a king whose son was getting married. The king sent out his servants to gather up the people who were invited to the wedding. In those days, weddings were huge events that could last a week or longer. Parents saved up for years in order to throw a lavish celebration and a wedding invitation represented an enormous investment. But many who were invited to **this wedding** only responded to the invitation with excuses of why they were unable to attend.

The king was upset. He told his servants to go out invite anyone they could find in the streets and to bring them to the wedding feast. Imagine this: a wedding attended by the homeless and the rejected in the community, those who had just come in from the fields. And there it was: a great party, attended by anyone who would say “yes” to the invitation.

“The kingdom of heaven is like that, says Jesus.” All who will come are invited. No one is left out. The wedding banquet is a metaphor for salvation.... freely given, mercy-driven, and grace-based. God is saying “Be my guest!”

**How will we write on that RSVP note? We often don’t have one logical excuse for refusing God’s gracious offers. But notice that God’s invitation extends to all, even the “good” and even “the bad.”**

Everyone is offered wedding garments to wear before entering the hall. Scholars tell us that in Jesus’ time, kings often supplied their guests with fine robes to wear when they were invited in. Evidently, though, there was one guest in who came to the feast but didn’t feel that it was necessary to accept the king’s offer of fine robes.

**He was there but had chosen to stay in his own common clothes.**

And so, it is with us. We want to enjoy the feast. Today, there is no dress code at weddings. However, if we fit ourselves in this metaphor, we also and very often do not want to put on the new garment God gives

to us. We expect to attend this affair with the rags that we have in our closets: the tattered and torn clothes of self-importance, of conceit and of selfishness. We need to rethink what “wedding clothes” we will be wearing.

Let’s put on the garment of new purpose; the garment of love for all people; the garment of hope; the garment of a new walk with God. Let’s think about what God might want us to “wear” right here and right now.

These days, you and I have been invited to experience life as we have never experienced it before, but, still with joy and exhilaration and love. **This is how it is in God’s kingdom.**

I believe that there is more to the wedding feast story...it is not only about all of us receiving an invitation from God and making sure that we are dressed properly. It is about reading between the lines in this not-so-clearly written and sometimes tricky-to-read invitation. It is also about us being invited to **invite one another in.**

Be creative in our invitations is all a part of the living of these liminal days. Let's raise the joy level!

Rethink the ways in which you will respond to the card that you hold in your hand and how you will send out invitations of your own. Here are some ideas to get you started:

You are invited to make phone calls to friends and members of our church family that you miss the most.

You are invited to share your printed copies of the Sunday Services with someone each week

You are invited to watch our video services with another member of your "bubble" or save the service

link on your Kindle and then share it to some who has no internet connection.

You are invited to help one another in compassionate and caring ways.

While you are impatiently waiting on the highway or waiting for God to speak...think of more ways that you have been invited. God is still calling us to be guests. We would be wise to show up in as many ways

and on as many days as possible!

**Let's spend a few moments in silent prayer. Take a deep breath. And breath it out.**

**Our prayer collection** today continues to overflow! If you would like to add your prayer requests, please call/email me. Let us pray: We lift to you, Loving God, these, our brothers and sisters: Those who are living with the tragedy of fire and hurricane and violence; the leaders in local and national government. We lift our prayers of concern for Matt, Teresa, Vicki, Mallory, Jasmine and Nick, Shirley, Cami, Dustin, Maggie, Ashley, Maizy's teacher's wife, Barry and Jane, Phil and Cathy, Randy and Barb, Pastor Jacoba and her mother; President and Melania Trump and those newly diagnosed with the COVID virus; all those who are suffering quarantine restrictions; those who are separated from their families; for each one of us, for our health and safety; for the children and teachers engaged in learning online and in-person; those who must travel for work or leisure; for all the pastors and congregations in our communities; for those who have lost their jobs; those who are searching for a home and for their next meal; for those who live with mental illnesses.

Gracious God we do not know words that would be fitting enough to offer our gratitude for the blessings of each day, but we do know the wondrous, warm, loved feeling that comes from your grace. In the silence of our hearts receive our thanks...in the name and in the words that Jesus taught us:

**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:**

Sometimes God's blessings come masked in many disguises. Sometimes we recognize them and sometimes

we don't. I invite you now to consider what gifts you will share this week.

Thank you for each and every gift you have given.

**Let us pray:** Receive our gifts, O God, as we rise from this time of Worship and go into our day. We embrace your call to put others first today; to resist the urge to find a spotlight and to allow the light of your love to shine brightly, even boldly, through us...in the name of Jesus. Amen. (d365, 9-25-2020, edited)

### **Benediction**

Ephesians 3:20-21 New Revised Standard Version

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Go in peace to love one another in the name of Jesus.

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

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>CUCC webpage: [uccmedford.org](http://uccmedford.org) For video-recorded Worship, click: "media"

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