

**This is October 25, 2020...the 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**Thank you for joining in this time of worship. Whether you have been invited here by mail or email or phone call or word of mouth, welcome! Welcoming is harder now than it was in January 2020. Still, you are welcome here, even though we are physically separated.**

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!”

You are welcome to check out our website: [uccmedford.org](http://uccmedford.org) You are welcome to join in our Zoom coffee hours on Sundays at 10. Your children and grandchildren are welcome to pop in to our Zoom “Faith Formation” time on Sundays at 9:30. You are welcome to “take out” or “add to” the non-perishable food items in our Blessing Box. You are welcome to ask for a copy of our newsletters. You are welcome to join in our book study and our “Page Turners” book club. You are welcome to pop in for Zoom office hours Thursdays from 10-12.

You are welcome to pray with us for the health and safety of friends and family and to ask us to pray for you.

You are welcome to join us in the safe practices of wearing masks, staying physically distanced and staying home as much as you possibly can. You are welcome to find creative ways to stay in touch with one another.

Let’s pause now and welcome ourselves into this time of worship.

### **Call to Worship**

You, O God, know our hearts. (Repeat after me) Guide our hearts, O God.

You, O God, see our ways. (Repeat after me) Shape our ways, O God.

You, O God, call our spirits. (Repeat after me) Call us now, O God, as we call on you.

### **Confession**

Happy are those who turn away from the counsel of the wicked. But oh, that counsel can be so seductive – it draws us in, distracts our priorities and obstructs our capacity to love.

But we seek no obstructions, we reject wicked counsel. We welcome God’s embrace.

For whatever ways we don’t, we confess. In whichever ways we sin, we repent.

Hear our prayers, O God, as, before you, we seek wholeness. *A time of silence*

**Let us pray a prayer of confession:** God of mercy and grace, we are sorry for so much.

But you know our hearts. We ask that you relieve us of our burdens, bind our hearts to you; so that, in all ways, we may live in the joy of your salvation and in the delight of your loving embrace. Amen.

### **Hear this Assurance of Pardon and Grace**

Happy are we, when we walk in the ways of our God.

Happy are we, beloved ones, as we receive God’s forgiveness.

(Repeat after me) Happy are we, God’s own, because we are made whole, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Our Scripture comes from the Gospel of Matthew 22:34-40, The Message interpretation:**

*“The Most Important Command”*

<sup>34-36</sup> When the Pharisees heard how Jesus had bested the Sadducees, they gathered their forces for an assault. One of their religion scholars spoke for them, posing a question they hoped would show him up:

“Teacher, which command in God’s Law is the most important?”

<sup>37-40</sup> Jesus said, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.’ This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ **These two commands are pegs;** everything in God’s Law and the Prophets hangs from them.”

"Scripture taken from The Message. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002.

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**Please pray with me:** Loving God, whisper again into our ears words of love. Tell us what to say. Let us be the best “lovers” that we can be. No matter what we hear or what we are tempted to say or do, let our new way of *being* be one of loving you and loving our neighbor. In the name of Jesus who has showed us the way. Amen.

## My message today is entitled, “Two Pegs”

Can you imagine being so loving, that when people hear your name, they already know all about you? “*Yeah, I’ve heard about him or her! He or she’s such a loving person!*” Name one loving person, then. Is it your grandmother? your spouse? your friend? Do you know any famous **lovers**, other than Romeo and Juliet? IS there any way to tell if someone is a loving person just by looking at them?

Children were asked, “What does love mean?” Here are some of the answers they gave:

'When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over to paint her toenails anymore...

So, my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love.'

'When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different.

You just know that your name is safe in their mouth.'

'Love is what makes you smile when you're tired.'

'Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it every day.'

'Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day.'

And...there was a four-year old child whose next-door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man crying, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed up into his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, 'Nothing, I just helped him cry.' That's love.

Can others see this kind of love in you? Today's scripture lesson begins with the Pharisees and the Sadducees trying to trap Jesus once again, and Jesus contends with the last test.

Over the past weeks, we have heard Jesus telling stories. One was the parable of two sons who were asked to work in their father's vineyard: one did and one didn't. WE learned to look around, assess each choice *we make* and with the help of God, to not be afraid to choose, just as the father chose love.

The next parable was about the workers in the vineyard. Each one was hired and started working at different times during the day. In the end, they were each paid the same amount. This story taught US that no matter how insignificant or glorious our tasks in life may be, in God's loving eyes, we are all equal, as the manager chose to love each one the same as the other.

Then Jesus told the parable of the wedding banquet where many were invited but gave excuses why they couldn't come. WE could clearly see that it was about God calling us to be his guests and how we'd be wise to show up, as the King chose to lovingly invite anyone who came by.

When the Pharisees continued their plot to entrap Jesus, they asked the *tax* question: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?” They were astounded by the answer Jesus gives: “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's.” WE learned that even though we pay taxes, we also are called to give to God our talents, our time and our treasures as an act of love.

The Pharisees and Sadducees, who still hadn't figured out that these stories were lessons and that Jesus was loving them with each story...are about to be caught in their own trap when they pose one last question:  
<sup>36</sup>“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

Jesus whittles down the over 600 laws of the Levitical Code and quotes two of the positive, "thou shalt," commandments as recorded in Deuteronomy 6:5, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” And the second commandment, even though he was only asked for one, from Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Everything, not only in the Law **but in life itself**, revolves around the commandment, "You shall love..."

I was reminded by a Confirmand (Alexander) several years ago of the “world's shortest sermon.” It was delivered by an Episcopalian minister somewhere up in Michigan and it is certified in the Guinness Book of World Records as a “one-word sermon.” When it was time for his message, he stood up and spoke the single word: "**Love.**" That was all he uttered, and he sat down.

When Jesus spoke that day, the listeners were rendered “speechless.” When we hear his words, we are reminded once again that it’s up to each of us to love as best we can. One word can’t describe how. “Love is patient and kind,” writes Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. (1 Cor. 13:4-8a) “Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup> Love never ends. “

Can you tell if you are a loving person? Or is the love in your life still *clinging* to those two pegs? Love isn’t love until you give it away, you know. Even quite a few songs have told us! So then, what are you waiting for? Take it off the peg and bless one another with a little love today. Thanks be to God for loving us. Amen.

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

Let us pray: Holy God, you are deserving of the very best we have to offer — the devotion of our hearts, the place of honor in our priorities. Help us to see beyond what we call our “limits” and those that others impose upon us. Help us to trust in you even more when our world appears dark and our needs are many.

We lift to you those who serve our country in near and far away places; those who seek public office and for all those who vote for what is best for the common good of all the people. We lift to you, Loving God, those who are sick and recovering: Matt and Nevada, Jasmine and Nick, Amber, Barry and Jane. Hear our prayers for the ONA Coalition and for the successes of their efforts. Let each one of us be enabled to do our best to help keep one another safe. We lift our prayers for the children and teachers engaged in online and in-person classes; and for our own special needs, that we lift to you in silence.

Help us to align our priorities, O God. Guide us to follow the paths of justice and compassion in a world that does not make that an easy task. Nudge us to be more loving and caring companions to those with whom we share our homes, our offices, our membership in civic organizations, our place in line at the grocery store, or wherever our daily journey leads us.

Let us pray together now 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:**

Anyone who has ever loved, knows that to love is to give –to give joyfully and from our hearts.  
Let us pray: Gracious God, receive our gifts of time, talent and treasure as our love offerings to you,  
With thanks for your many blessings and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Benediction:**

Go now in peace to love and serve one another.  
This time of worship has ended, let our service lovingly continue.

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**webpage: [uccmedford.org](http://uccmedford.org)** “Like” us on Facebook: Community United Church of Christ, Medford, WI

