

This is November 1, 2020...the 22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Thank you for joining in this time of worship.

It is our mission here 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!”

Today, we will share Holy Communion. Please prepare a slice of bread, a tortilla, rice cake or cracker and a cup of juice, or wine, or water. Because it is All Saints Day you may want to set your Communion on a special cloth that reminds you of a saint in your lifetime. Place photographs to honor beloved ones and small precious objects beside the sacramental elements on your table.

Hymn: “*The Church’s One Foundation*” vs. 1&5, Hymn #544 (Public Domain)

1. The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is his new creation by water and the Word.
From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.
5. Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One,
and mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we
like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with thee.

Let us pray a prayer of confession:

For the times when we have let complacency about our own circumstances
take the place of advocacy for a just world for all, **Lord, have mercy.**

For the times when we have let the *appearance* of faithfulness
stand in for truly faithful effort, **Christ, have mercy.**

For the times when we have created burdens of injustice and inequality
for others to bear, **Lord, have mercy.**

Hear this Assurance of Pardon and Grace

In Jesus Christ, our Messiah and teacher, we are forgiven and sent out to the world
to *model his life* of justice for all, and joy in God’s kin-dom.

My message today is entitled, “*The Real You*”

Please pray with me: Loving God, surround us with a cloak of love. Sprinkle glitter of goodness all over us, so we may **be** the best that we can be at spreading joy to those around us, without having to “fake it.” Hold a mirror to our faces so that we stop pretending to be someone we are not. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

When was the last time you wore a costume on Halloween? OH, it was last night! Then, how about, before that? One of my fondest memories of Halloween was in 1990 when my husband and I were invited to a Halloween party. The hostess told us not to come if we didn’t wear a costume. Not just a mask. A costume. Not just a sheet over your head. A costume in which others may not even recognize you. I started watching cartoons and old movies and came up with an idea. I would be “Morticia” from the Addams Family. I wore a long black wig, white makeup and red lipstick; long fake fingernails and a dress that I found in someone’s attic.

I remember that I didn’t like being “Morticia” very much. Those long fingernails made some everyday tasks, like zipping up a jacket...pretty impossible. The long hair was annoying, too, and red lipstick is not my “thing.” But...I did enjoy being someone else for an evening. When children dream of being Doctors or nurses; musicians or artists; farmers, teachers or front-end loader drivers... sometimes, on Halloween, they chose to dress up like their “future” self. Sound familiar?

It is likely that we each spend some time imagining being someone that we are NOT. We “fake it” when our friends ask us how we are doing and we make it sound as though we are happily keeping busy and planning what we will do first when we emerge from these days of COVID.

I dare say that some people might even be pretending they are Republican or Democrat just to keep peace in their families or to hold membership in *their* “party.”

It feels almost impossible that it is November. We have entered a new time zone, the first days of a blue moon, the thanksgiving holiday lurks ahead of us and all-the-while we are thinking that no costume, no amount of faking-it will cure our yearnings for a different November than this one! It’s pretty much a “no thank you” November, instead of a time of giving thanks.

How were the great saints of the past and the great present-day saints able to live with hard times, illness, injustices, storms and fire, hurricanes and the unknowns of tomorrow? And yet, they were still able to make a difference in the lives of those around them. Think of someone living or who has passed away that has made a difference in your life. Think of others who have made our world a better place...all of them saints who have made a connection between the thanks and the giving. They have made the ordinary, truly extraordinary in a very real...unmasked way. They have given thanks and have not let “real life” get in the way of their courage to say “yes” to what was ahead of them.

The title of our scripture today, as interpreted in the Message is: *Religious Fashion Shows*. Perfect timing. Listen to what Jesus had to say *about* the Pharisees. How would you describe what they were “wearing”?? At first, it sounds like he is complimenting them, but he tells it like it really is...
in the Gospel of **Matthew 23:1-12**

¹⁻³ Now Jesus turned to address his disciples, along with the crowd that had gathered with them. “The religion scholars and Pharisees are competent teachers in God’s Law. You won’t go wrong in following their teachings on Moses. But be careful about following them. They talk a good line, but they don’t live it. They don’t take it into their hearts and live it out in their behavior. It’s all spit-and-polish veneer.

⁴⁻⁷ “Instead of giving you God’s Law as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals. *They* seem to take pleasure in watching you stagger under these loads and wouldn’t think of lifting a finger to help. Their lives are perpetual “fashion shows,” embroidered prayer shawls one day and flowery prayers the next. They love to sit at the head table at church dinners, basking in the most prominent positions, preening in the radiance of public flattery, receiving honorary degrees; and getting called ‘Doctor’ and ‘Reverend.’

⁸⁻¹⁰ “Don’t let people do that to *you*, put you on a pedestal like that. You all have a single Teacher, and you are all classmates. Don’t set people up as experts over your life, letting them tell you what to do. Save that authority for God; let *him* tell you what to do. No one else should carry the title of ‘Father’; you have only one Father, and he’s in heaven. And don’t let people maneuver you into taking charge of them. There is only one Life-Leader for you and them—Christ.

¹¹⁻¹² “Do you want to stand out? Then step down. Be a servant. If you puff yourself up, you’ll get the wind knocked out of you. But if you’re content to simply be yourself, your life will count for plenty.

"Scripture taken from *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002.
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Now, think of the mask that you are wearing...not the safety mask that helps prevent catching the virus... the BODY mask, the “fashion show” costume that you are wearing. Who is the “real you”? Are you talking the talk, but, not living it out? Are you set on following someone or some plan that is not true and good?

Elisabeth Elliot, Christian author, speaker and missionary, wrote this: Only certain costumes suit Christians. To be otherwise dressed is inappropriate. The clothes we wear are what people see. Only God can look on the heart. The outward signs are important. They reveal something of what is inside. If charity is there, it will become visible outwardly, but if you have no charitable feelings, you can still obey the command. Put it on as simply and consciously as you put on a coat. You choose it; you pick it up; you put it on. This is what you want to wear. Do you want to dress like a Christian? Put on Christ. The act of honest obedience -- the fruit of love for Christ -- is your part. Making you Christlike through and through is his part."

In a recent webinar that I attended, someone named, Brenda, from Canada, said this: “We need to BE ‘Jesus Christians.’” I can’t stop thinking about those words. Just because you are “costumed” for a day, or a season, doesn’t make it “you.” Really you.

In Paul's letter to the **Colossians 3:12-17**, he writes: "So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it. Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God... every step of the way." The Message

What do you think that Jesus would say about the costumes that we are wearing? My friends, throw off the "costumes" that have such strong grips on you and listen to your heart; turn around, step into God's future whatever it may hold, say "yes," give thanks and start being the "real you!"

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

Let us pray: Gracious God, we are not the first and only ones who have ever tried to shelter ourselves from evil, false voices and violence. Guide us to be more courageous followers of Jesus, who dare to speak the truth in love. Let us *only be* imitators of Jesus Christ, lifting others up even when the world puts them down; reaching out to one another when even when a prayer and a bowl of soup or a few pieces of bread is all that we can offer. Assist us to use the voices that you gave us to call out unsafe practices, injustice and wrongdoing. Let us be the ones who model a better way, not the scratchy disguise of indifference.

Hear our prayers for our families and friends who are struggling with illness, are hospitalized and quarantined; for those who have lost homes and loved ones due to fire and hurricane and incurable diseases. If we ever needed one or more miracles, it is now, O God. Let it be in your own perfect timing. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Celebration of Holy Communion for All Saints Day

Come to the table as all saints come, as God's people always do, with love and questions – bricks without straw? fiery furnace? no-wine? five-loaves? who's going to wash the Passover feet? Come to the table with your mourning –old or new or delayed –and your celebration of memories, and your imagination of possibilities for times yet to come, because here you are welcome, in a weeping, laughing communion of saints, in a weeping, laughing communion ... of us.

Words of Remembering

There is a sacred story that goes way back, older than ancestors, older than anything here, to wind blowing over waters. God's love was in a garden, and a flood-drenched rainbow. God's love was in a desert tent, in barley fields for gleaning, a slingshot, a mythically big fish and a new-thingled way in the wilderness. There is a sacred story that goes back to a mother in a barn, a foster father and sky-fully-distanced angels.

We love stories, especially this one of the baby named, Jesus: loved by a cow, three magi, and many shepherds; who grew up, healed people, told awkward parables and made people angry. At Passover, he broke unleavened bread and poured wine and himself –for saints who slept when he needed friends.

But the Shelter-in-every-place of Love gave that time full of death a hope of waking to Resurrection and an Emmaus of self-understanding.

And so now we come, clothed in our own sad times, and our cloud of witnesses to hope – all the saints we have known, the saints we will know, and the saints we are.

Prayer of Consecration

Bless us, O God, s and bless these gifts. May the Spirit rest upon this time and this table, surrounded tenderly by our memories of saints as on sacred times and tables long ago...

(breaking, touching or lifting bread) so that this loaf may be broken love,
(pouring, touching of lifting cup) and this cup be a well of blessing,

for we pray in the words of our ancestors that we claim as our own:
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

Sharing of the Elements (Psalm 34)

Taste and see that God is good. [Eat this bread.](#)
Sharing love, we will never be hungry. Happy are those who take refuge in God.
The cup on your table is blessed. [Drinking deeply](#), we will never thirst.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Spirit of Christ, stay with us where we stay, as familiar as our daily plates and cups.
Go with us where we go, safe and full of love as the mask across our lips. May we, your eager and sometimes awkward saints, carry in us a Communion from which all can share –
comfort for loss, courage for speaking, compassion for healing.
We give you thanks for both the shelter and the road. Amen.

This is our time of intention and thanks:

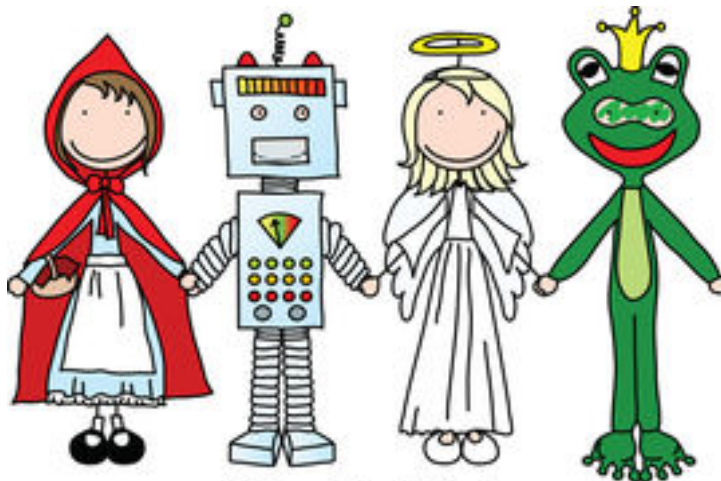
Anyone who has ever loved, knows that to love is to give –to give joyfully and from our hearts.
Let us pray: Gracious God, receive our gifts of time, talent and treasure as our love offerings to you,
With thanks for your many blessings and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Benediction: Go now, take off this costume and put on “Christ!”
God bless us and keep us and hold us in her mighty hand!

This time of worship has ended, let our service continue.

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