

## **This is January 24, 2021...the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany**

On behalf of the family of faith at Community United Church of Christ, Medford, WI,  
welcome to this time of worship!

“No matter who you are or where you are on your life’s journey, you are welcome here!”

**Invocation:** From deep within us, we know of a loving presence.

All around us we see glory, beauty, life and light.

We have no words for what we experience so we cry out, “God!”.

In this moment of worship may that loving presence grow deeper,  
may our awareness of the divine presence around us grow more intense.

May we, gathered, yet scattered, learn to pay more attention to God,  
who loves us at all times and in all places. God of love and life, in this moment of prayer  
be more and more in us that we might live more and more in you. Amen.

### **Our First Scripture today comes from the book of Jonah, Chapter One Common English Bible**

#### *Commissioning of a Reluctant Prophet*

1 The Lord’s word came to Jonah, (A-mit-tai) Amittai’s son: 2 “Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their evil has come to my attention.”

3 So Jonah got up—to flee to Tarshish from the Lord! He went down to Joppa and found a ship headed for Tarshish. He paid the fare and went aboard to go with them to Tarshish, away from the Lord. 4 But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, so that there was a great storm on the sea; the ship looked like it might be broken to pieces. 5 The sailors were terrified, and each one cried out to his god. They hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to make it lighter.

Now Jonah had gone down into the hold of the vessel to lie down and was deep in sleep. 6 The ship’s officer came and said to him, “How can you possibly be sleeping so deeply? Get up! Call on your god! Perhaps the god will give some thought to us so that we won’t perish.”

7 Meanwhile, the sailors said to each other, “Come on, let’s cast lots so that we might learn who is to blame for this evil that’s happening to us.” They cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 So they said to him, “Tell us, since you’re the cause of this evil happening to us: What do you do and where are you from? What’s your country and of what people are you?” 9 He said to them, “I’m a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, the God of heaven—who made the sea and the dry land.”

10 Then the men were terrified and said to him, “What have you done?” (The men knew that Jonah was fleeing from the Lord, because he had told them.) 11 They said to him, “What will we do about you so that the sea will become calm around us?” (The sea was continuing to rage.)

12 He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea! Then the sea will become calm around you. I know it’s my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

13 The men rowed to reach dry land, but they couldn’t manage it because the sea continued to rage against them. 14 So they called on the Lord, saying, “Please, Lord, don’t let us perish on account of this man’s life, and don’t blame us for innocent blood! You are the Lord: whatever you want, you can do.” 15 Then they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased its raging. 16 The men worshipped the Lord with a profound reverence; they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made solemn promises.

#### *No Escape for the Prophet*

17 Meanwhile, the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.

**The Meditation today is entitled,** “*That Was Then. This is Now.*”

**Please pray with me:** Loving God, when you call us, we answer, “Here I am.” When you try to be sure we have heard what you are asking us to do...we say, “I heard you already. Speak, I am listening.” But show us the way, O God...listening isn’t everything. Forgive us when we have tried to ignore you and then, seek you

when we are fearful or frustrated or at our wit's end. **Lord, have mercy.** Forgive us for thinking that the nudge is not real or that we can hide from you. **Christ, have mercy.** Forgive each and every one of our foolish ways; for following what we thought was the right way and for not admitting that we were wrong. **Lord, have mercy.** That was then and this is now. We pray in the name of Jesus who welcomed people like us with open arms. Amen.

I believe that the scriptures in the Revised Common Lectionary, that long list of Bible passages suggested for use during the Church Year, come to us just when we need them! Today's story of Jonah surely did! It is different from the other prophetic books, because it gives only **one sentence of what Jonah actually preached.** Instead, it gives us the story of how Jonah disobeyed God and refused to warn Nineveh that it was going to be destroyed. Jonah wanted the city to *be destroyed* because it was the capitol of Assyria, a hated enemy of Israel. When God gave Jonah one last *gigantic nudge*, Jonah agreed to go and do what God asked him to do in the first place.

As I was reading the whole Book of Jonah, which, by the way is only 4 chapters long... I was thinking of times when, in my life, I, like Jonah, was the one attempting to run away from God's call. What did you think of?

When have we found ourselves in the belly of the whale, feeling desperate and distraught? When have we made the best of that "belly" and have we found that, miraculously we are heaved out onto dry land? There, we perhaps, have found a new beginning that won't even give us time to look back at the "good old days" and won't even give us the urge to cling to old grudges. There, we have found that we can no longer stretch what we thought was truth. **That was then.**

God called Jonah, in much the same way as God calls us. We, too, cannot hide. We are not able to run. Our plan to avoid *the call* will fall apart...even when we jump overboard. When God calls you today, do not look the other way. That way might have been good enough for yesterday. **That was then.**

### **Our Second Scripture today comes from the book of Jonah 3:1-5, 10 Common English Bible**

3 The Lord's word came to Jonah a second time: 2 "Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and declare against it the proclamation that I am commanding you." 3 And Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, according to the Lord's word. (Now Nineveh was indeed an enormous city, a three days' walk across.)

4 Jonah started into the city, walking one day, and he cried out, "Just forty days more and Nineveh will be overthrown!" 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and put on mourning clothes, from the greatest of them to the least significant.

10 God saw what they were doing—that they had ceased their evil behavior. So, God stopped planning to destroy them, and he didn't do it.

So, Jonah was enabled to go to Nineveh, even though, you can bet he was at least a little fearful to walk into a city full of his enemies and thinking that they would not listen to him. God gave him the courage he needed and the people of Nineveh were saved from peril.

The story of Jonah is not complicated. I believe that it is easy to learn from it that wherever we think we are headed, we should not be surprised by a sudden change of direction. Jonah heads for Tarshish and ends up in Nineveh. The people there take off their robes and put on sack cloth. Even God changes God's own mind about the fate of the city. Everyone in the story repents, including God! **That was then.**

Are you wondering what Jonah's one "preaching" sentence was? **Jonah 4:2b Common English Bible**

*"I know that you are a merciful and compassionate God, very patient,  
full of faithful love, and willing not to destroy."* This is still true now!

Rev. Donna Schaper says: This passage brings to mind the Jewish proverb: "Whenever someone says, 'I have a plan,' God laughs. God is calling us into a future where each day, with each sunrise, we can start anew. **This is now.** This is the day that God has made for us. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

## Time for Prayer

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

Let us pray: We give you thanks, gracious God, for calling us to serve one another and to love one another as you have so extravagantly modeled for us to do. We thank you for the call, every morning. You know the passage of our time very well. We give you thanks for all of your sons and daughters whom you have placed on our path in the journeys...the journeys of everyday life, the journeys to faraway places, the journeys down to the lakeshore and to the office, to the banquet hall and the kitchen table, through the church doors and out into the wider "church" outside the brick walls. We give thanks for the minutes and the hours that we have been able to spend in one another's company, even though distanced and separated.

We thank you for time spent "chalking it up to experience" and all those days in the "belly of the beast." Thank you for lessons learned the "hard way." Loving God, already in the days ahead, help us to step closer to you with the intent to be more open-minded and compassionate.

We lift our prayers to you now for those who are grieving and remembering loved ones who have passed away; for those who are struggling with mental illness; for all those suffering with the corona virus, those in quarantine, those in nursing homes and assisted living and all those we mention in our hearts now.

We lift our prayers for Doctors and Nurses, CNAs and EMTs; the Police Departments and the Firefighters and all who serve in public office. We lift our prayers for President Biden and Vice-President Harris. Lead them and guide them through the first 100 days and every day of this term in office.

We lift our prayers now for those who are hurting, living with illness and waiting for the comfort of healing to come, we lift to you Christine D, Rev. Dale and Jackie, Lily, Jeff and Cindy P, Shelly B, Cathy S, Kristin W, Wayne, Jenn, Rick and Teresa G, Eric E, Jeff P, Jamie H, Brian N, Mike K, Angie, Mike G-P, Matt L; We pray for the children in day care and in the schools and those taking online classes and all those who are taking part in the State testing.

Nudge us to a deeper commitment to keep ourselves, our loved ones and all those around us safe wherever we are. Give us the endurance to mask up and step away from each other for as long as it takes... all the while, praying in the name of Jesus and in his words: **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**

### Hymn: "You Are My Hiding Place" Michale Ledner

You are my hiding place, you always fill my heart with songs of deliverance.

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.

I will trust in You; Let the weak say 'I am strong in the strength of my God.'

You are my hiding place, you always fill my heart with songs of deliverance.

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.

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### This is our time of intention and thanks

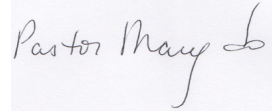
Let us turn our thoughts to what we will give for the support of church's ministries and how we will reach out into the community.. Know that no matter the size or the shape, each and every gift of time, talent and treasure will make a difference. "Take your everyday, ordinary life: your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life and place it before God as an offering" Romans 12:1

Let us pray: In your extravagant generosity, O God, you sent us Jesus, in person. We offer all that we have: our worship, our talents, our time, our money and our lives in service to the kin-dom that Jesus came to proclaim. We dedicate the gifts that we have shared, mailed, dropped off or given electronically, in his name. Amen.

**Benediction:** This time of worship has come to an end, let our service continue.

Hear now the words of Rev. Traci Blackmon, Associate General Minister for Justice and Local Church Ministries, UCC: *In thee, O God, we place our trust. In thee, O God, we seek your peace. We pray, O God, to heal your land. Be with us, O God, we need your love.*  
*In thee, O God, we place our trust.*

**Go now, be alert for God's call and be safe,**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pastor Mary Jo Laabs". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured background.

“Like” us on FaceBook: Community United Church of Christ, Medford, WI

Visit our webpage: [uccmedford.org](http://uccmedford.org) Click on “Media” to watch the video recordings of recent Worship Services and this Service! **Pastor Mary Jo Laabs, 715-351-0450**