

This is February 7, 2021...the 5th 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!”

Today, as we gather virtually and by mail, we will hear scripture and message, pray and share the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Please prepare a piece of bread, a cracker or a rice cake; juice, wine or water.

Call to Worship

Good people of the church, lift up your eyes and see. Have you not seen?

Have you not heard? Our God greets us here and meets us here.

Good children of the light, open your hearts and know what it means to delight in God.

For we have seen, heard and known from the beginning to the end, our God...is.

**I am happy to share with you that, today in our “virtual” Worship,
Jerry G-P will be reading scripture:**

Jerry: Today’s scripture is taken from the book of **Isaiah 40:21-31 from the** Common English Bible

21 Don’t you know? Haven’t you heard? Wasn’t it announced to you from the beginning?

Haven’t you understood since the earth was founded?

22 God inhabits the earth’s horizon—its inhabitants are like locusts—
stretches out the skies like a curtain and spreads it out like a tent for dwelling.

23 God makes dignitaries useless and the earth’s judges into nothing.

24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely is their shoot rooted in the earth
when God breathes on them, and they dry up; the windstorm carries them off like straw.

25 So to whom will you compare me, and who is my equal? says the holy one.

26 Look up at the sky and consider: Who created these?

The one who brings out their attendants one by one, summoning each of them by name.

Because of God’s great strength and mighty power, not one is missing.

27 Why do you say, Jacob, and declare, Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord,
my God ignores my predicament”?

28 Don’t you know? Haven’t you heard? The Lord is the everlasting God,
the creator of the ends of the earth. He doesn’t grow tired or weary.

His understanding is beyond human reach, 29 giving power to the tired and reviving the exhausted.

30 Youths will become tired and weary, young men will certainly stumble;

31 but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength; they will fly up on wings like eagles;
they will run and not be tired; they will walk and not be weary. 1 min.

Today’s Message today is entitled, “Who Do You Think You Are?”

Please pray with me: Holy One of many names, we praise you for all things great and small: mice scoting in the snow, frosty windows and thick ice on the lake; children on the playground, friends who call to check up on us, family members far and near; mountain peaks and sandy beaches. All thanks and praise to you, great and glorious God! Amen.

Does anyone remember the over 50-year-old television program, “To Tell the Truth”? If you have never heard of it, it was a classic game show in which a person of some notoriety and two impostors would try to match wits with a panel of four celebrities. The object of the game was to try to fool the celebrities into voting for the two impostors. In the end, the three identities would be revealed. But, first, the famous one would stand up.

After reading today’s scripture passage from the book of Isaiah, my wandering mind took over: imagining

the host saying, “Would the One, true God please stand up?”

Would we, as contestants be able to distinguish who the imposters were?? First of all, we are familiar with God, have had a lifetime of experiences with God and we should be able to recognize God, right? We have read about God. Maybe we have had little conversations with God and we are able to point out God’s presence anywhere!

The prophet, Isaiah, assumes that *his* audience should know who he is talking about. His words are not meant to reveal new truths, rather they serve as a reminder of what appears to be the forgotten characteristics of a God who they think is very distant from them. Isaiah is giving encouragement, with an underlying charge not to forget what they already know.

The Israelites were skeptical. Their captivity was ending and they would soon be restored in their ancestral and promised land. It would be a place of comfort with new freedom. Something new was up ahead of them and they needed a pep talk. They were facing a transition and a new reality. Their former world was destroyed, the in-between experience in the wilderness had changed them, and the reality of the present time was difficult to get used to. Does any of this sound familiar?

I have been looking into the history of our congregation, which was most recently written up in 2002. The official Founders Day of our Church is December 1, 1901. There were sixteen charter members who came together to form the German Evangelical Church of Medford, WI. (Duetsche Evangelische Gemeinde zu Medford, Wisconsin) Worship was held, at first, in the Temperance Hall across from the Taylor County Prison, until the completion of this “Red Brick Church on the crest of the hill on Broadway.” The lot was purchased and plans were underway for building the church and parsonage.

Reverend Ludwig Kehle, the first pastor, arrived with his family in February 1902. With a team of horses and a plow, the basement was dug out, stumps removed and the land was cleared. Church members, people from other congregations, and local merchants did most of the work. As the parsonage was completed, the work on the church began.

Sunday School and a Ladies Aid (Frauenverein) were organized. As work progressed on the church building, services were held in the basement. The church bell was purchased by the young people’s group and the pews by the Ladies Aid. All services were held in the German language including Catechism and Confirmation until after World War I.

The Second Pastor, Reverend John Bizer, arrived in 1906. He was born in Wuerttemberg, Germany and had immigrated to America in 1890. He served St. John’s Evangelical Church in Colby, a three-hour trip on dirt and mud roads from Colby to Medford by horse and buggy. In 1913, ties with the Colby church were discontinued. We yoked with Peace Church in Dorchester and Reverend Bizer started a small German Congregation in Perkinstown.

After forty years of hard work and dedication, church members burned the mortgage in 1941.

When the Evangelical Synod of North America merged with the Reformed Church in the USA, the name was changed to Community Evangelical and Reformed Church. In 1957, the Evangelical and Reformed Churches merged with the Congregational Christian Churches to form the United Church of Christ denomination. The merger gave us our current name of Community United Church of Christ.

Many additions and restorations have taken place to beautify our church including: replacing plain white windows with beautiful stained glass windows in 1939; adding on to the South side of the building a kitchen and upper floor Sunday School rooms, in 1953; adding on to the North side of the building, a narthex and two Sunday School rooms on the ground floor, in 1957; installing new pews in 1961; building a new parsonage in 1963; updating the church building with a “cry room;” a library, glass doors, a new altar and chancel furnishings; replacing the sanctuary carpeting, adding pew cushions, a Baptismal Font and paneling; giving a face lift to the restrooms, and restoring the interior to maintain the beauty of our house of worship.

In 1901, the charter members had no idea of what was up ahead of them. Families of some of the charter members are members and friends today. This year, in December, we will celebrate 120 years as a congregation.

Let me introduce to you, our good and gracious God who has been our help in ages past and who will be with us in whatever will come! How can we hope for what we cannot even imagine? Some of the Israelites, in their captivity, lived their whole lives in the shadow of fear traveling from place to place in the desert. Our ancestors in faith have come through many dangers, toils and snares so that we can be where we are today. We have spent one recent fearful year of disorientation and pandemic and have very recently learned first-hand what living in fear looks like: very little means, loss of the “familiar”, loss of jobs, loss of plentiful food, loss of loved ones... and all of us feeling separated from people we know and love...and yes, in a wilderness that we would be most happy to escape! Have you wondered what will happen next for us; where we can go from here?

The answer? This: Don't you know? Haven't you heard? Wasn't it announced to you from the beginning? Haven't you understood that since the earth was founded God has inhabited the earth's horizon. That horizon stretches out the skies like a curtain and spreads it out like a tent for dwelling. Don't you know? Haven't you heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He doesn't grow tired or weary. His understanding is beyond human reach, giving power to the tired and reviving the exhausted.

Who do we think we are, trying to solve problems on our own?! What imposters are posing as *God* for us at this very moment? The prominent images of God in these verses in the book of Isaiah are telling us what we already know; what we should be remembering about a powerful, all-knowing, everlasting Creator.

The prophet describes God's participation in humanity; God's presence encircling all creation. The repeated rhetorical questions, “Don't you know? Haven't you heard?” invite us who listen to the prophet's words to consider who God is and what God has done and what God will do next. God is not distant, indifferent, or uninvolved. The Israelites needed to hear that truth again, and, so do we!

The Israelites needed to draw from a communal memory that had been transmitted to them from their ancestors and to envision the future that, even after all these years, was unsure for them. They had come this far and now they had to ready themselves for their role in the construction of their *new world*.

We, too, need to draw from a communal memory that has been transmitted to us from our ancestors and to envision the future, that even after all these years, is once again unsure for us. We have before us the same challenge of getting ready for our role in the construction of *our new world*.

The Israelites took a 40-year risk of wandering through the desert. Our Community United Church of Christ ancestors took a 40-year risk, too, when they first built this church building and began working together so as to be able to pay off the mortgage in 1941 and as remodeling and updating has taken place over the years. Our history as a church includes numerous families who have raised their children in this community, and those who have embraced our church as a stepping stone to move on elsewhere. We look back and give thanks that they had a vision of a future with hope, without knowing for sure if they would see its completion.

Their love recognized no barriers. They worked together, dug a foundation and leaped a few hurdles, in order that we who inherited their vision would arrive here at this destination filled still with new hope for the future. Have our memories slipped? Have we forgotten who we are?

Haven't we figured it out, yet? God will be with us when we take any sort of a leap of faith in our own personal lives. God will be there to catch us if we slip and will be there to encourage us if we fall.

God will be with us when we take the next leap of faith here at Community United Church of Christ. God knows where we, as the church, will go from here during the next 40 years.



Who do we think we are? Just a few of God's people following Jesus and being reminded today that, in times of crisis, we have somehow forgotten to praise and thank God every day for the blessings we have received.

This was Israel's problem, too.

To tell the truth, we shouldn't be at all surprised when God stands up!
God is God. We are not!

Take a deep breath...breathe in trust! and let it out.

Time for Prayer: Let's spend a few moments in silent prayer.

We will begin with a prayer of Thomas Aquinas: "Grant me, my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you, wisdom to find you, conduct that pleases you, perseverance to wait for you, and the hope of embracing you when everything ends."

We lift our prayers now for those who are waiting for the comfort of healing to come, we lift to you Maggie M, Dan and Albert, Tamara C, Phil G, Christine D, Rev. Dale and Jackie, Cathy S, Rick and Teresa G, Jamie H, Angie, Matt L and Marie; for those who are grieving the loss of loved ones, especially for Jeremie's family. (Tessie and Bill's son-in-law)

Nudge us to a deeper commitment to keep ourselves, our loved ones and all those around us safe wherever we are. Lead us and guide us in the words we speak and in the decisions we make. We ask your blessings on all of us during this liminal time, between **what has been** and **what will be**...as we go along somewhere in the middle, hoping and waiting, planning and unceasingly praying. Enable us to live in such a way that we draw closer to you and your vision for us in the coming days.

We offer you our humble thanks and praise for each blessing, as we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen

Hymn: "These I Lay Down"

1. Before I take the body of my Lord, before I share his life in bread and wine,
I recognize the sorry things within: these I lay down.
2. The words of hope I often failed to give, the prayers of kindness buried by my pride,
the signs of care I argued out of sight: these I lay down.
3. The narrowness of vision and of mind, the need for other folk to serve my will,
and every word and silence meant to hurt: these I lay down.
4. Of those around in whom I meet my Lord, I ask their pardon and I grant them mine
that every contradiction to Christ's peace: might be laid down.
5. Lord, Jesus Christ, companion at the feast, I empty now my heart and stretch my hands,
and ask to meet you here in bread and wine which you lay down.

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THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

We begin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
This is the joyful feast of the people of God. People who have come from the East
and the West, from the North and the South, and gather about Christ's table.

The table is for all who wish to know the presence of Christ and to share in the community
of God's people. Let us give thanks to God for God's gifts. We give you thanks, God of majesty and mercy,
for calling forth the creation and raising us from dust by the breath of your being.

We bless you for the beauty and bounty of the earth and for the vision of the day when sharing by all
will mean scarcity for none. We remember the covenant you made with your people, Israel,

and we give thanks for all our ancestors in faith. We rejoice that you call us to reconciliation with you and all people everywhere, and we give thanks that you call the entire human family to this table.

In the fullness of time, you came to us and received our nature in the person of Jesus, who, on the night of betrayal and desertion, took bread, and after giving thanks to you, broke it, and gave it to the disciples, saying, *“This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”*

In the same way he also took the cup, saying,

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of our faith: **Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

We spread your table with these gifts and pray that you will send your Holy Spirit on these gifts and on us. May we remain faithful in love and hope, until the perfect feast with our Savior in the eternal joy of your heavenly realm. Let us pray together the prayer 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.

Eat the bread now and remember that the body of Christ was given for us.

Drink from the cup now and remember that the blood of Christ was shed for us.

We give thanks, Almighty God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of your Son, Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

This is our time of intention and thanks

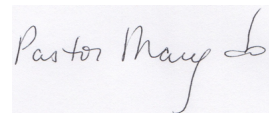
Let us turn our thoughts to what we will give for the support of church’s ministries and how we will reach out into the community. Know that no matter the size or the shape, each and every gift of time, talent and treasure will make a difference. "Take your everyday, ordinary life: your sleeping, eating, 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 kingdom 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.

Go now and let this day be a praise-filled day!

Peace be with you and be safe,



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