

This is February 14, 2021...Transfiguration Sunday



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!”

Call to Worship

Gathering in this sacred place, we anticipate new wonders each week. Wherever two or three are gathered to worship, a holy spirit is present. Open our eyes to witness the fantastic love and wondrous joy waiting to be revealed, even this day, even in this place.

We will want to linger and camp out in this holy place, but as we step away, may our hearts be open to all the wonders of God’s beautiful world.

Invocation: O Holy One, on mountaintops and valley floors you reveal to us the light of your love.

Our heart’s desire is to bask in the amazing glory of the divine presence. With each encounter, *we* are changed and transformed. Help us, O Holy One, to live our lives as a reflection of your glory. May we walk among our siblings and friends as a blessing, bearing light into dark places, hope to displace despair, and love that casts out hate. Our world is hurting and we need the followers of Jesus to follow more closely.

Maybe then we will listen up when you say... “listen to my Child, the Beloved!” Amen.

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

Mike: Today’s scripture is taken from the Gospel of **Mark**

Chapter 9, verses 2 through 9 as interpreted in the “Message”

2-4 Six days later, three of them did see it. Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain. His appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes. His clothes shimmered, glistening white, whiter than any bleach could make them.

Elijah, along with Moses, came into view, in deep conversation with Jesus.

5-6 Peter interrupted, “Rabbi, this is a great moment! Let’s build three memorials—one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah.” He blurted this out without thinking, stunned as they all were by what they were seeing. 7 Just then a light-radiant cloud enveloped them, and from deep in the cloud, a voice: “This is my Son, marked by my love. Listen to him.”

8 The next minute the disciples were looking around, rubbing their eyes, seeing nothing but Jesus, only Jesus.

9-10 Coming down the mountain, Jesus swore them to secrecy. “Don’t tell a soul what you saw.

After the Son of Man rises from the dead, you’re free to talk.”

They puzzled over that, wondering what on earth “rising from the dead” meant.

Today’s Message today is entitled, “Down to Earth”

Please pray with me: Holy God, may the words we hear today be our inspiration as we seek the serenity to accept the things we cannot change; courage to change the things we can; and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen. (by Reinhold Niebuhr)

On April 3, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr spoke these words: “Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life; longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you.

But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. So, I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

I believe that these words may be some of the most transforming words ever spoken. These hope-filled words have lifted many a hurting soul, many a longing heart through long, dark nights to the eye-rubbing brilliance of the new day's sun. It is in our nature to long for those precious moments that lift us up and take us to a place a little closer to God. Those precious moments that we would like to savor could be revisited whenever we needed a little pep talk. Like right now.

We began this season of Epiphany thinking of the bright star that the Wise Men followed. Matthew 2:9b: "And the star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was." Today, on this last Sunday of Epiphany, we heard Luke's version of the "Transfiguration" story. Mark 9:2-4 NRSV: "And Jesus was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them." It is the event that marks the beginning of a new phase in the mission and ministry of Jesus, as he moves towards Jerusalem and the cross.

The disciples had already witnessed Jesus feeding a crowd with just a few loaves of bread and fish. They were there when Jesus restored sight to a man who was blind. They had listened as Jesus revealed to them his mission as the Messiah and predicted his death and resurrection. They agreed to tell no one, yet!

Picture this: Peter, James and John were vigorous young men, maybe in their early twenties. They followed Jesus, the young rabbi, not much older than they were, up a mountain. It may not have been an easy climb. Do you suppose they were saying, "Well, if Jesus can climb up there, so can we!" My guess is, that by now, they couldn't help but wonder what each day would bring. If there was any question about it that day, it was answered as Jesus was "transfigured" right before their eyes.

The scripture tells us that Peter spoke up. "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." That sentence always amazes me. Weren't they speechless? or even a little bit shocked? It makes me laugh to think that Peter, in an attempt to hold on to that moment and make it last, thinks that they should put up some tents. It also brings to mind the song, *Time in a Bottle*: "If I could make days last forever...if I could make wishes come true...I'd save every day like a treasure and then, again, I would spend them with you."

It's not the end of the story. Peter, James, and John *now* find themselves being "overshadowed" by an all-encompassing cloud. God speaks: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased: Listen to him!" Stop trying to build tents...and listen. It is a good lesson for us, isn't it?. Listen to God's words. Listen to Jesus. Listen to one another. Listen to those in need around us. Listen to the cries of the poor, the elderly, the children, your family, your friends. Poet-laureate Amanda Gorman has written, "For there is always light if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it." Stop trying to build tents, when God is telling us to listen and be the light!

Perhaps in a blink of an eye, Jesus came and touched the disciples. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." They looked around and saw only Jesus. Their first reaction was, no doubt, to run down the mountain and tell everyone, but, they agreed to tell no one. ***We've been to the mountaintop...and we don't know exactly what will happen next.*** They suspected that they were going to have difficult days ahead, but, they had been empowered not to fear them!

When was your last "mountain top" experience? When your children were born? When the doctor told you that the cancer was gone? When you passed the test that you thought you had failed. When you were offered the job, even after you were quite sure that the interview didn't go so well? When you read the letter that you had been accepted at University? Was it when the Christmas tree lights were plugged in and they all worked, or when the doorbell rang and *in stepped* the sibling you had not seen for many years? Was it when the frozen pipes were finally thawed? Or when God whispered, "Go!" "Make that call." "Bite your tongue." Or, when the only words *we could think of were*: "What on earth!?" and when they should have been, "Thank you, God!"

We might not be able to count beyond our fingertips, the number of mountain top experiences there have been in our lives. We can be sure that God has been present in each one, whether there was a bright light or a cloud or an overcast sky to accompany them. I think that we can all agree that when we get back to ground-level, we long for those times...thinking we should have built a tent or should have written a page in our journal... in order to keep those precious moments with us.

Last weekend, when I attended the NWA Annual Licensed Pastor Retreat on Zoom, we joined in an overview of the book by Susan Beaumont, “How to Lead When You Do Not Know Where You’re Going.” We were able to share ideas and to encourage one another in the challenges we are all facing. And then, at the end of our three hours together, we each “received” our licenses for another year of service in our churches. Together, we repeated this for one another: “We partner with you, in joy, in the service of Jesus Christ.”

A “mountain top” moment, for sure! This licensing retreat each year always reminds me of the many reasons that I love our church...and why I chose to join the United Church of Christ in 1985. I was drawn to the extravagant welcome, the diversity, the non-judgmental nature, the discipleship experience and a mutual ministry that I could not wait to share. We’ve been to the mountaintop many times...and we never know exactly when it will happen next.

What we do know is this: In nearly 120 years as a congregation, faithful people have come here to worship God and the leaders of this Church have guided it to become a “presence” in the community. Through the years, people have come to know God and live good lives, be baptized, confirmed, and married here. Families have shared their faith with their children and their children’s children here. Friends have comforted and encouraged one another here. Many have moved on to the Church Triumphant as members and friends here. People have been fed here, have found shelter here, have been guided into the ministry here; some have found love here and some lives have been changed forever here. Mountaintop experiences have occurred here!

Now what? Come down the mountain with me. It is here that in our minds and in our hearts, we can spread the word that we have seen Jesus. Jesus tells Peter, James, and John to keep quiet about what happened that day until they get the whole story... that they didn’t yet know would include his suffering, death, and resurrection. It is with confidence that we can tell others what we know about what happened next. Do not fear spreading the good news. Tell how you have been lifted up from the lowest lows and how God has whispered in your ear. Share what you have seen, and what you have heard.

The good news of today’s scripture is that we do not necessarily need to wait for the next mountaintop experience in order to realize in God’s presence in our lives. The gospel today dramatically manifests Jesus’ identity and brings the season of Epiphany to a fitting close. We turn our eyes to Jesus and our ears to his word. These are “down-to-earth” precious moments, my friends. Remember them well.

Take a deep breath... and let it out.

Time for Prayer: Let’s spend a few moments in silent prayer. **Let us pray:** In all ways, we commit our tasks to your guidance, O God. (pause) In every moment, we ask for your peace. (pause) In all seasons, we trust that you are at work. (pause) In the midst of difficulties, we know you will lead us through. (pause)

At all times, we praise your might and majesty, great God, and thank you for all the blessings we have received...the highest highs and the lowest lows which bring us into close companionship with you. (pause)

We thank you for loving families and forgiving friends... promises of newness in our lives and in our church, the faith community in which we worship and enjoy fellowship, blessings of nourishment and shelter and safety. We lift to you now family and friends... who are in need of healing... Maggie M, Dan and Albert, Tamara C, Phil G, Christine D, Rev. Dale and Jackie, Cathy S, Rick and Teresa G, Jamie H, Angie, Mike G-P, Matt L and Angie; for those who are grieving the loss of loved ones, especially Marie’s family. (John (Sue) Vornholt’s sister) Let them not forget that eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor human imagination envisioned what you have prepared for all of us!

Holy God, you have revealed the glory of your love in Jesus Christ, we lay our hopes and dreams and troubles before you now...

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.

We pray 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 and 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: "Just As I Am"

Composer: composer/lyricist: William Bradbury, setting by Craig Courtney
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Verse 1: Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou bidd'st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Verse 2: Just as I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot,
to thee whose Blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Verse 3: Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings and fears within without, O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Verse 4: Just as I am, thou wilt receive, wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

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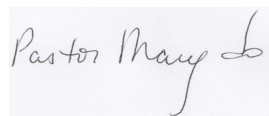
This is our time of intention and thanks

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, The Message

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

Go now and savor how long, how high, and how deep God's love for us really is! Praise be to God, who is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or imagine!

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**

Amanda Gorman:

*For there is always light if only we're brave enough to see it,
if only we're brave enough to be it.*