



### **This is March 7, 2021...The Third Sunday of Lent**

On behalf of our 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:** Lent is a homecoming. We are home from a weary year and home to calm our fears and home to dry our tears. Lent helps us to remember who we are, and draws us in to center us in a hopeful place.

Lent brings us home to Christ, who always is one with our journeying. At home, we worship and recall the last days of the earthly ministry of Jesus.

**A Time of Repentance:** Let us pause now in silence and repent our sins of thought, word and deed; what we have done and what we have left undone.

### **Receive this Assurance of Pardon and Grace as written in John 3:16**

“For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Amen.

**Now in our “virtual” Worship, Tamara C. will be read the scripture:**

This is a reading from the **Gospel of John 2:13-22**, Common English Bible

*Jesus in Jerusalem at Passover* 13 It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 He found in the temple those who were selling cattle, sheep, and doves, as well as those involved in exchanging currency sitting there. 15 He made a whip from ropes and chased them all out of the temple, including the cattle and the sheep. He scattered the coins and overturned the tables of those who exchanged currency. 16 He said to the dove sellers, “Get these things out of here! Don’t make my Father’s house a place of business.” 17 His disciples remembered that it is written, “Passion for your house consumes me.” (Psalm 69:9)

18 Then the Jewish leaders asked him, “By what authority are you doing these things? What miraculous sign will you show us?” 19 Jesus answered, “Destroy this temple and in three days I’ll raise it up.” 20 The Jewish leaders replied, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days?” 21 But the temple Jesus was talking about was his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered what he had said, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Thank you, Tamara! **My Message today is entitled,** “Whose House?”

**Please pray with me:** God bless the places that we call “home.” We thank you for the blessings of walls and fences; hard beds and soft pillows; kitchen tables and couches; corners and secret hiding places; leaky pipes and sagging roofs. God bless the memories that come to us when we look back on each place that we have called *home*. Forgive us for not noticing you’ve been there, too! O God, let our surroundings be holy places as we work and play and pray and rest. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

This letter to the editor was in “The British Weekly,” a few years ago: *Dear Sir, It seems to me that ministers feel that their sermons are very important and they spend a great deal of time preparing them. I’ve been attending church quite regularly for over 30 years, and I’ve probably heard 3,000 sermons. To my dismay, I can’t remember even one. I wonder if the minister’s time might be spent more profitably on something else.*

For weeks, there was a flood of responses. Finally, this letter seemed to end the discussion:

*To whom it may concern: I’ve been married for 30 years. During that time, I’ve eaten 32,850 meals, mostly my wife’s cooking. Suddenly, I have discovered I cannot remember the menu of a single meal. And yet, I have the distinct impression that without them I would have starved to death long ago.*

Perhaps, by tomorrow you will not recall the details of this message, but it is my hope that you will remember that this time in worship has been a time of respite from the ordinary or that it has been a time in which a single scripture passage might have touched you with a new idea. Maybe you will realize that it has been a time in which we have been “together” even though the overturning of our lives, has left us scattered. All who witnessed the events in the temple that day in Jerusalem most likely never forgot it!

It was one of those times in which, for many years, they would ask one another. “What were you doing when Jesus came into the temple that day?” Something like this, “Where were you when you heard that President Kennedy was assassinated?” “Where were you doing on 9-11?” You have not forgotten.

In one of our *Cerebration* studies, I asked, “What is one of your favorite stories about Jesus?” The ten of us started telling what they were. Although we all agreed that there were many more, I mentioned the story that Tamara just read. Funny that it came up in the lectionary for today! Here are some historical details.

It takes place during a Passover Festival. Passover attracted worshippers to Jerusalem from all over the world. There were different languages spoken and people carried foreign monies. Enterprising merchants had set up booths and stalls in the Temple to accommodate the travelers who needed to exchange their monies in order to pay their temple taxes. Others were busy selling animals to be used in the ritual sacrifices.

The historian, Josephus, estimates that more than two and a half million pilgrims came to Jerusalem each year for the festival. Add to those crowds thousands of cattle, sheep and doves. The temple area covered some 35 acres. That’s more than 35 football fields! The Temple originally been built by Solomon in about 950 B.C. but was burned to the ground by Nebuchadnezzar 363 years later. The Temple was rebuilt. It was desecrated and stripped by Antiochus in 168 B.C. and restored again by Judas Maccabaeus three years later.

Jesus was in the glorious temple that was begun by Herod the Great twenty years before his birth. It would not be completed until 68 A.D. Two years later, it would be completely destroyed again!

The temple had always been a symbol of God’s presence. Every time it was destroyed, it was restored to proclaim once again that God was there. It was the center of life and it defined what it meant to be a Jew.

With this in mind, at the time of the festival, you can imagine how the word spread through the Temple grounds and the entire city of Jerusalem when this controversial Rabbi came into the crowd, cracked a whip, overturned the moneychangers’ tables and stampeded the animals, saying: “Get these things out of here! Don’t make my Father’s house a place of business.” Or, as it is in the New King James Version of the Bible, the words of Jesus are these: “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”

"What credentials can you present to justify this?" the Jewish leaders asked. Jesus answered, "Tear down this Temple and in three days I'll put it back together." That sent the people reeling. "This temple has been under construction for many years, and will you raise it up in three days?" Ridiculous!

Jesus was speaking about himself and not about the construction of a building. Only he was aware of that. John writes in vs. 22, “After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered what he had said, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken”

How does this story speak to you today? I am wondering what happened next. Did anyone dare to go back to what they were doing? Were they able to find all of the animals? We do not know.

One thing that stands out to me is that whatever happens next that day doesn’t matter as much as the fact that it gives us a glimpse of the humanity and divinity of Jesus. He gets really angry. The Jesus we know: that kind and compassionate Jesus, who speaks of loving one another and embodies that love; who cures the sick and forgives the sinner; who tells life-changing stories and challenges the authorities...now, is yelling and throwing things! Then, goes on to give a hint about his resurrection.

Jesus is so annoyed by the twisted religious system of the day, that he reacts knowing that he could be arrested. What he saw that day was that his beloved temple had become nothing more than a market-place, a slaughterhouse, party central! Jesus had seen enough! It was time to clean house.

The second thing that speaks to me is how this story parallels our time, right now. Yes. Our lives, now. Our churches, now. Here’s how. If Jesus would walk into our community today, who would he “drive out”? What would he overturn and who would be running from him?

Should we take a guess? Probably, not. Maybe I should ask, what needs some changing here? We do not have to look too far to find people accusing one another of having ridiculous ideas or to uncover old systems that aren't working anymore. What seemed good just a year ago, doesn't seem to fit now, or maybe not ever again.

We drive by our church building and we are reminded how frustrated we are that our holy gathering place is still closed to the public. Was this building ever the *center of our lives*? What has this "house" been to you and your family? A coffee shop? A gossip corner? A place to make soup? How many times would we rebuild it if it was burned down or blown down by a tornado? Could we say that our life or our culture centers around our church building? Does this building define us as Christians?

Well, if it didn't before, I believe it defines us now! In a way, having been driven out of the building by the threat of a virus, has given us all some time to re-evaluate our beliefs and to cling to our faith "out here." We will never forget having gone through this "being driven out," this "being at risk" and this overturned "normal." Jesus says to us. "My Father's house shall be called a house of prayer."

I believe that we have learned this very well over this past year. If not, then we learned what the "church" really IS not: it is not just a place to have a fundraiser soup supper. It is not just a Holiday Fair flea market place. It is not just a place to sell pies or bags of nuts. It is not a place to count the kids who showed up for Sunday School or the heads in the pews at a Sunday service.

We have learned that "Church" outside these brick walls is what it always should be **inside and out**, and *has been* from the time of the early church and from the time preceding the laying of this building's cornerstone. It is a place of fellowship and caring; a place to share one another's joys and accomplishments. It is a place from which to reach out and help when someone has lost their home in a fire; a place to begin speaking up about justice for all; a place to take seriously the better care of God's creation; a place to be lifting one another's spirits; a place to check in and to be reminded to keep in touch; a place to talk about how we will keep one another safe and healthy; a place to pray together. That church, my friends is right here, right now and is wherever we happen to be, no matter whose house we are in.

We will come together to worship inside our beloved building again. But, meanwhile, outside of the walls, we have this good news still: our faith sustains us. Use this time well. Pray and think and dream of what we will next. I believe it is important to focus on returning to what is really important. We have much good work to do. We have been blessed to be able to see life a little better on this side of the walls of our church.

My good friend, Rev. Dr. Dale Kuck, once preached these words in a sermon. I have not forgotten them! "Some of us find God in almost every place that we *find ourselves*. Others have not tuned into his presence. Some are very sensitive, some are not. If we are insensitive to the normal things in life, friendship, love, the beauty of a Spring day, will we be any more sensitive to the presence of Christ? If any of us are dull about the obvious, how can we be alert to spiritual gifts?"

God is not just inside the church building. God is with us wherever we are. Now, let me ask you this: What part of this message will you remember? Let every house you enter be a house of prayer... Whose house it is anyway? Take a deep breath... and let it out

**Time for Prayer:** Let's spend a few moments in silent prayer. God of grace and God of glory, we give you thanks and praise for bringing us together by means of our thoughts and prayers today. We lift before you those who have lost hope, those who are lonely, those who are recently diagnosed with the COVID virus, those who are recuperating from surgery and those who are in places that are unfamiliar. Let your presence be known to those who mourn this day, those who are victims of tragedy and disaster, those who suffer because of war and injustice. We give thanks for those who have heard good news this week and those who have possibilities of new job offers, new housing and new relationships.

We pray, O God, for those you have placed upon our hearts and minds this day... we lift our prayers for pastors and churches in the WI Conference and all faith communities around us; for those who serve

in the medical profession; for those who keep us safe; for those who serve in local and national government; for teachers and students; for those in assisted living and in nursing facilities; for our families and our friends; especially for Maggie M, Tom N, Dan, Albert, Tamara C, Phil G, Christine D, Dale and Jackie, Cathy S, Rick and Teresa G, Jamie H, Angie, Shelly B, Mike G-P and Matt L, Jeff and Cindi, Mary Kay's husband, and Trudy's mother.

We lift our prayers for your church that you would guide and lead us in our call to mission and in our call to be loving one another as you have loved us. 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: "All Are Welcome" by Marty Haugen**

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1. Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live,  
a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace,  
here the love of Christ shall end divisions: All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

2. Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true,  
where all God's children dare to seek to dream God's reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness, and a symbol of God's grace;  
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus: All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

3. Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine and wheat:  
a banquet hall on holy ground where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus is revealed in time and space,  
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us: All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

4. Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone  
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live the Word they've known.

Here the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face;  
let us bring an end to fear and danger: All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

5. Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter: All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

**This is our time of intention and thanks**

Let us turn our thoughts to the privilege we have as members and friends of this church family to ALL be welcome here. We are also invited as one body in Christ, to give toward the support of our church's ministries. Remember that no matter the size or the shape, every gift of time, talent and treasure makes a difference! Thank you to all who have made it possible for bills to be paid and for our outreach into the community to continue!

**Let us dedicate our gifts:** As we share what we have received from your hand,  
O God, we dedicate all that we offer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen

**Benediction:** Go now and may the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace... This time of worship has come to an end, let our service continue.

**Peace be with you and be safe!**

### Wednesday Devotional, March 10, The Nineteenth Day of Lent (not counting Sundays!)

It is good that we can be together, even though apart, in this “Time for Pause!”

#### **Let’s sing a hymn: “Grace Alone” #436**

1. Every promise we can make, every prayer and step of faith;  
every difference we will make is only by His grace.  
Every mountain we will climb, every ray of hope we shine;  
every blessing left behind is only by His grace.  
Grace alone which God supplies; strength unknown He will provide.  
Christ in us, our cornerstone, we will go forth in grace alone.
2. Every soul we long to reach, every heart we hope to teach;  
everywhere we share His peace is only by His grace.  
Every loving word we say, every tear we wipe away;  
every sorrow turned to praise is only by His grace.  
Grace alone which God supplies; strength unknown He will provide.  
Christ in us, our cornerstone, we will go forth in grace alone.

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#### **Listen now to a passage from Paul’s letter to the Philippians 4:6-7, that draws our attention to prayer:**

~from the Common English Bible:

- <sup>6</sup>Don’t be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. <sup>7</sup>Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

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#### **Response: Remind us, O God, that your love is with us.**

When loved ones experience pain and suffering. When illness, aging, or chronic pain diminish our joy.  
When doubts arise and confusion fills our minds. When others fail us or refuse to forgive us for our failings.  
When we stumble and stray from the path of goodness. When death separates us from those we love dearly.  
When financial problems threaten our security...When things do not go the way we planned...  
When depression or loneliness return again and again.

#### **Response: Remind us, O God, that your love is with us.**

When broken relationships seem unmendable...  
When our faith strengthens and gives us courage...  
When the precious gift of life is recognized and appreciated...  
When unexpected kindness and caring comes our way...  
When optimism stirs in our heart and springtime returns...  
When the peace of Christ calms our anxiety and softens our sadness...  
When we realize that our loving presence can make a difference...  
When the joy of Easter quietly permeates our heart...

#### **Response: Remind us, O God, that your love is with us.**

**The blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Comforter is with us  
during these days of Lent and always!**

*Pastor Mary Jo*

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