



This is May 30, 2021. It is Trinity Sunday and the 2nd Sunday of Pentecost!

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!”

Let’s begin with this **Call to Worship**:

Here we are in the presence of the living God, the Three in One...
who is the Wisdom within our hearts, the Word who dwells among us,
and the Spirit who calls us beyond ourselves.

God invites us to share in the wonder of that mystery.

Let’s spend a few moments in reflection and confession:

Blessed be the Holy Trinity, the one who fashions us, the one who heals us,
the one who reforms us again and again. Amen.

Let’s spend some time in silence, confessing our sin and calling for God’s transforming power.

(Silence for reflection.)

Let us pray: Source of all life, we confess that we have not allowed your grace to set us free. We fear that we are not good enough. Although we hear your word of love freely given to us, we expect others to earn it. We turn the church inward, rather than moving it outward. Forgive us. Stir us. Reform us to be a church powered by love, willing to speak for what is right, ready to act for what is just, and always seeking the healing of your whole creation. Amen.

Hear this Assurance of Pardon: God hears our cry and sends the Spirit to change us and empower our lives in the world. Our sins are forgiven. God’s love is unconditional, and we are raised up as God’s people who are being made new in the name of Jesus Christ.

Turn to someone near you now and wave a greeting of peace
then, call someone or text someone later and say, **“Peace be with you!”**

Hymn: *“Spirit of the Living God”* #492 Worship and Rejoice Hymnal

1. Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me; Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me.
2. Spirit of the Living God, move among us all; make us one in heart and mind, make us one in love:
humble, caring, selfless, sharing. Spirit of the Living God, fill our lives with love.

Song # 23488, © Words: 1935. Renewed 1963 Birdwing Music Music: 1935. Renewed 1963 Birdwing Music
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Pam will read online, Gloria in-person, today’s Scripture:

**This is a reading from the Gospel of John, chapter 3, verses 1-17, from the Common English Bible
Jesus and Nicodemus**

¹There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. ²He came to Jesus at night and said to him,
“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could do these miraculous
signs that you do unless God is with him.”

³Jesus answered, “I assure you, unless someone is born anew, it’s not possible to see God’s kingdom.”

⁴Nicodemus asked, “How is it possible for an adult to be born? It’s impossible to enter the mother’s womb
for a second time and be born, isn’t it?”

⁵Jesus answered, “I assure you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, it’s not possible to enter
God’s kingdom. ⁶Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.

⁷Don’t be surprised that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ ⁸God’s Spirit blows wherever it wishes.
You hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. It’s the same with
everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹Nicodemus said, “How are these things possible?” ¹⁰“Jesus answered, “You are a teacher of Israel

and you don't know these things? ¹¹ I assure you that we speak about what we know and testify about what we have seen, but you don't receive our testimony.

¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Human One. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so must the Human One be lifted up

¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

¹⁶ God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life. ¹⁷ God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

My Message today is entitled: "Questions"

Please pray with me: Gracious God, you know very well that we are constantly looking for ways to be better people, for ways to make our lives and the lives of others easier. Help us to discern the truths that will lead us to the answers for which we have given up asking. Guide us in this time of transition and let our every breath be a prayer; let our every action offer you praise in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Last week, in the church, the **Season of Pentecost began**. It is the longest season in the Christian calendar stretching out until the last Sunday in November. Today is Trinity Sunday. It is a good time to consider God's identity and how to locate God.

"Where was God during this COVID year, in the days when 900,000 people caught the virus and didn't survive?" "Where was God during each of the mass shootings this year? Where has God been...you fill in that blank. Some questions will just be questions. As Christians, we can say with certainty that God was there and that God is here. Yes, this God who loves unconditionally; who creates something from nothing, who has died to save us, who whispers encouragement in our grieving ears; who catches us when we fall; who gives us courage to move on; who finds us a way when we think there is none. Does it sound impossible that God can be counted on to love us and save us a create new life in us? It's not.

Questioning was not allowed in the religion of my younger years. We learned to believe though, that the Priest had all of the answers about things that didn't make sense to us; about rules and regulations that we adhered to; about words in the Bible that we didn't understand. We were told that believing was part of our "faith." Walk by faith, not by sight. And do not ask what that is, either!

A little boy wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer and he started on his journey.

When he had gone about three blocks, he met an elderly man who was sitting in the park feeding some pigeons. The boy sat down next to him and opened his suitcase. As he was about to take a drink from his root beer, he noticed that the man looked hungry, so he offered him a Twinkie.

The man gratefully accepted it and smiled at him. His smile was so pleasant that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered him a root beer. The man smiled at him. The boy was delighted! They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, but they never said a word.

As it grew dark, the boy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave, but before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the man, and gave him a hug. The man gave him his biggest smile ever.

When the boy opened the door to his house a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked, "What did you do today that made you so happy?"

"He replied, "I had lunch with God." Before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? God's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the elderly man, also radiant with joy, returned to his home. His son was stunned by the look of peace on his face and he asked, "Dad, what did you do today that made you so happy?"

He replied, "I ate Twinkies in the park with God." Before his son responded, he added, "You know, God's much younger than I expected."

The wisdom of children is amazing, isn't it? I love spending time with the children of our church on Sunday mornings. It has been my weekly joy and privilege for about a year now to guide them, along with their parents, in *faith formation*. I have to admit that my faith formation is also being guided *by the children* each week. On Mother's Day, I asked them what their mother *does for them*...they answered: "She helps us." "She makes food." "She loves us." Last week, I asked: "What do you call your mother?" "How is your mother related to your Grama?" It was a little tricky drawing from the children that their mother, who is called "Mom," is also called "daughter" and "sister..." just as God is called "Creator," "Jesus," and "Holy Spirit."

Where is God? How do we find Jesus? How will we get in touch with the Holy Spirit?

I am not the only one that knows the answers. From what I have learned and read and experienced and have guessed about the answers to the questions that this sustaining mystery of our faith, this Holy Trinity places in our minds, I can tell you this: God is with us and always has been. Always will be. Father, or, if you prefer to call God, "Mother"...Son, Redeemer, Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit. God is here now! Jesus can be found in unexpected places. We are able to talk with the Holy Spirit in our prayers, both those that are we say out loud and in the ones we hold in our hearts. We come to believe this little by little during the years of our lives. God has been at work in the life that we each have lived and is not finished working in us yet.

The church calls this Sunday, "Trinity Sunday." The mystery of the Trinity was taught by St Patrick in the 4th century, by lifting up a clover in his hand. Three leaves, three persons...one stem, one God.

Today's scripture is one of the few places in the New Testament that indicates that *there is a trinity*. As I read through it and considered the questions that Nicodemus posed to Jesus...I couldn't help but laugh. They were having a conversation. Even though Nicodemus was having difficulty with the answers, I wondered why he didn't question Jesus when he used the words, "God's Spirit," and "God sent his Son." I thought that Nicodemus was just more worried about trying to trick Jesus, as the Pharisees often did but, what came about here was that Jesus turned the conversation around, and mused about what he was about to say, "¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"

Then Jesus DID tell about "heavenly things" and Nicodemus was the first person to hear the words that we know very well and can recite from memory, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

There are no further questions from Nicodemus. *Later, in John 7, Nicodemus advises his colleagues among "the chief priests and the Pharisees", to hear and investigate before making a judgment concerning Jesus. Finally, when Jesus is buried, Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes (about 100 pounds) and he and Joseph of Arimathea buried the body of Jesus. (Wikipedia)*

Trinity Sunday is a good time to pause and wrap our minds around the idea that there are three persons in ONE God...God the Creator...God the Redeemer and God the Comforter. One God who guards and guides us in all the good times and in times of deepest despair. One God who is with us on the dock at the edge of the lake, who is with us when we bend down to plant the beans or when we take the screen door out of the packaging and consider its attachment to the house...one God who oversees our lawn mowing tasks and is just around the corner when we swerve to miss a squirrel. One God who brings joy out of frustration and sets friends in our path when we least expect them to appear. One God who calls us and nudges us and speaks to us even when we do not realize it, even if we question what we are hearing. One God who has called us here together today at this time and in this place...each and every one of us, just as we are.

Today's message is *not meant to be* a clear explanation of any mystery of our faith. It is however, a great starting point for these days of summer, as we transition from this liminal time into what God is up to out there somewhere.

Even though our human nature causes us to look for answers and to seek explanations and proofs, today's message brings to our attention: one, awesome, loving God who might be in the city park eating twinkies and drinking root beer right now. Oh, and go ahead and ask as many questions as you want.

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

Time for Prayer:

Let's spend a few moments in silent prayer.

Let us pray: Let us breathe in strength and hope... and breathe out our fears. Holy One, empower us to be the church wherever we find ourselves in the coming days. Let us together be the body of Christ's presence in the world.

God of heaven and earth, before the foundation of the universe and the beginning of time, you are the Trinity: the Author of creation, the eternal Word of salvation, and the life-giving Spirit of wisdom.

You are mystery far beyond our understanding. Having been baptized in your name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we ask now for the grace to live our baptism as the community you have created. Heal our separations. Quiet our fears and doubts. Bind us together as we rejoice in one another's joys and carry one another's burdens. Give us the eyes of faith to discern where you are at work in our lives. Come with healing and hope to those who face illness or are troubled especially those we name in silence. We lift our prayers for those grieving the loss of loved ones, especially the family and friends of Jim Staffeil.

We pray for strength and courage for those who serve our country and give thanks and remember all those who have died in service to our country. Praise to God our Creator, source of our being and wellspring of life. Praise to God the Word, love made flesh to dwell among us.
Praise to God the Spirit, fiery light and rushing wind.

We lift our prayers for those who are graduating from High School and College, those finishing elementary education and those graduating from pre-school to kindergarten. Bless them as they take these steps into their futures. Let them dream dreams that will come true. As we close our eyes and count our blessings, we ask your blessings on our wide circle of friends and family. Hear our prayers for those for whom we have been asked to pray...and for those who never thought to ask. We pray together now as Jesus has 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

A Time of Intention and Thanks: Many thanks to all who, by your loving and by your giving, have made possible the loving ministry of Jesus to continue in our community. Let's dedicate the gifts given in person, through the mail and by electronic means.

We give thanks, O God, for all that you have given us. Pour out your blessings on these gifts that we offer that they might be a source of blessing in our community and in our world. We dedicate our gifts in the name of the Creator, the Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pentecost Benediction, by Maren: Let our intent be inspired by the Holy Spirit ...

May our tongues tingle with the good news.

May our hearts open to all the people of the street.

And, when we are bent over by sorrow, may we find the Spirit's feather on the ground waiting there to give us hope. Amen

Peace be with you and continue to be safe!

You will find this *recorded service* at uccmedford.org
Click on "media." 715-351-0450

