



It's July 11, 2021: the 7th Sunday after 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. A special welcome to those who are with us on Facebook "Live." The recording of this service will be available on Facebook even though this time of worship has ended.

Today, after worship, there are brownies downstairs...given by Sue King from Don's memorial service luncheon yesterday...and there will be coffee! Please stay awhile.

The Church Council, in talking about COVID restrictions at the meeting on Thursday, decided that we would take down the divider tapes and that, starting next week, masks will be optional; coffee hours will resume (using disposable cups and plates); the hymnals and bibles will be returned to the pews and we will begin singing hymns together beginning in August.

All meetings will be resumed in the building and some will also be held simultaneously on Zoom.

I am leaving for a week's vacation this afternoon and will be driving to visit with family in Oostburg and then heading back North, making a few stops along the way to Ashland. I am hoping to make up for not lighting any fireworks with my grandchildren for two years, and then will be attending a wedding in Cable and another wedding reception in Park Falls. Rev. Amy Heinz of Our Saviours Lutheran Church in Holway has agreed to be on call for pastoral emergencies and Patti Steevens will be here next Sunday. She will meet with the children at 9:30 and will lead Worship. Patti retired a couple years ago. She had been serving St Pauls UCC in Marshfield. Some of you know her from our Tuesday "Cerebration" studies...which by the way, will be held this week with Pam leading the discussion.

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

(We have so many reasons for which to be grateful!)

Psalm 118:24 NRSV *This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

Let's worship and give thanks!

This is our Prayer of Confession:

Blessed be the Holy Trinity, the one who fashions us, the one who heals us, the one who reforms us again and again. Let us confess our sin in silence now. (Pause)
Source of all life, we confess that we have not allowed your grace to set us free. We have fears that we are not good enough. We hear your word of love freely given to us, yet 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, to act for what is just, and to seek the healing of your whole creation. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Anyone in Christ becomes a new person altogether; the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel:

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Amen.

Passing the Peace: After you turn to those near you and offer the words, "Peace be with you," turn and wave a greeting of peace to others around you... later, call or text someone and continue this "peace passing" throughout this week. **"Peace be with you!"**

Hymn: "I Surrender All" #474 Worship and Rejoice Hymnal

1: All to Jesus I surrender, all to him I freely give; I will ever love and trust him, in his presence daily live.

Chorus: I surrender all, I surrender all, all to thee my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

2: All to Jesus I surrender, humbly at His feet I bow, worldly pleasures all forsaken, take me Jesus, take me now. **Chorus**

3: All to Jesus I surrender, make me, savior, wholly thine;
may thy Holy Spirit fill me, may I know thy power divine. **Chorus**

4: All to Jesus I surrender, Lord, I give myself to thee; fill me with thy love and power,
let thy blessing fall on me. **Chorus**

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Linda will read the scripture: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 Common English Bible

“Showy Religion”

¹“Be careful that you don’t practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention.
If you do, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

²“Whenever you give to the poor, don’t blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people. I assure you, that’s the only reward they’ll get. ³ But when you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing ⁴ so that you may give to the poor in secret. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

“Showy Prayer”

⁵“When you pray, don’t be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that’s the only reward they’ll get. ⁶ But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

“Showy Fasting”

¹⁶“And when you fast, don’t put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They distort their faces so people will know they are fasting. I assure you that they have their reward. ¹⁷ When you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. ¹⁸ Then you won’t look like you are fasting to people, but only to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“Earthly and Heavenly Treasures”

¹⁹“Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. ²⁰ Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don’t eat them and where thieves don’t break in and steal them. ²¹ Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The title of my **Message** today is: “Pray, Fast and Down-Size”

Please pray with me. God of Grace and giver of this day, *you call us into the church to accept the cost and the joy of discipleship to be your servants in service to all humanity..* (~from the UCC Statement of Faith)

We say that this just a fraction of what we believe and yet, we look around and wonder...how much discipleship can I afford to give? Lead us to be faithful servants and let not the cost hold us back.

We pray in the name of Jesus who has shown us the way over and over again. Amen.

Summer came this year just when we really needed it, didn’t it? After being cooped up for over a year and now being less paranoid about being in groups of people, I open the door and step out, unmasked. Where should I go first? to visit relatives? to South Dakota? to that wedding reception that was put off for a year? Is it my imagination or did you notice, too, how much bigger the tomato plants out in front of the church are this year? how many more fireworks and more elaborate displays there were last week; how pools and lakes and parks, and even the front porch looks more inviting this year. Summer feels *so good*.

Don’t you just love the little surprises that somehow seem better now? Who doesn’t love finding a five-dollar bill in those jeans that has been hanging in the closet? Or a few extra fries in the bottom of the bag? That is exactly what is so amazing about grace.

When was the last time that you thought about “grace”?

A friend of mine who is a Biblical Scholar once asked me, “What is grace, anyway?” I remember telling him that it was like the thickest, richest frosting on a cupcake or an inheritance from a relative that you haven’t seen or heard from in years; something sweet and good that comes along unexpectedly. As children of God, that *inheritance* begins with the unexpected gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Today’s scripture reminded me of that cupcake and that inheritance.

On first reading or hearing it, it sounds like some advice we would rather put off until another day. Jesus brings to our attention that he has noticed that religious people act like they are showing off. He goes on to say how important it is to give to the poor and not to expect a reward for doing it.

Then, he talks about how we should be praying... let it be quiet and private. he goes on to bring up fasting...do it, but do not flaunt it...don’t let anyone even guess what you are doing.

It is almost exhausting to read this scripture! Did it occur to you like it did to me, that we could just wait until Lent to do these things? Haven’t prayed enough lately? Or, did you feel guilty for taking the free t-shirt when you donated to your favorite charity? Or did the “fasting” idea just bring you back to a diet you were once on or the days of no meat on Friday?

These words of Jesus are the climax to what is called “The Sermon on the Mount.” They are not an introduction to a week of doing good or being holy just for day. They are his urgent call: not be holy because it is what the world expects of us, but rather a call to live holy lives because of craving closer relationship with God.

When we give more of ourselves away, and do not ask for a reward, we just might find that a piece of our own broken lives has been mended. Thus, in order to build up, we must give out.

The world would call this “radical behavior...” the praying, fasting and giving lifestyle.

Do we really have to talk about this today when it’s so beautiful out and we should just be sitting back and enjoying it? Yes. I am not leaving town for a few days and leaving you with thoughts of fasting and praying and down-sizing...just hanging out there to dry. But, I do think it would be a good passage of scripture for all of us to read over again this week...because I read the scripture for the second time, I heard an unspoken, underlying “rest of the story.” You might remember a man named Paul Harvey who wrote a book by that name and who hosted a radio program by that name: “The Rest of the Story.” It consisted of stories presented as little-known or forgotten facts on a variety of subjects with some key element of the story held back until the end.

When the world says prepare for the worse. Secure your borders. Hoard your money and hide it under your bed. Avoid the stranger, Take care of your own and one day he or she will take care of you. Jesus says: prepare for the best. Live expansive lives. Give generously. Engage the stranger. Care for the needy. As the country music singer says: “The hearse doesn’t come with a luggage rack.”

These few lines of scripture are not about waiting around for God’s grace to pop up, but, to bring to our attention to that which will sustain us.

Maybe we haven’t prayed enough...maybe it would not be bad idea to do a little fasting...and then, as if it were not enough to digest for one day, Jesus delivers the punchline: Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust decay and thieves break in and steal, but, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...it’s really all about grace.

The rest of the story is about the gift of grace. By God’s grace, we have come to this day and this hour and by God’s grace we will be led and guided from here on...as we pray and as we fast and as we sort things out in the attics of our minds as well as between the rafters of our homes and of our church building.

This is our task, no matter what the weather is like.

This is the day that God has made. Wherever we are, God is with us...God hears us when no one else does. We do not have to look too far for glimpses of God around us...that’s the frosting! that’s the inheritance...that’s the grace.

Oh and one more thing: This morning when I flipped over my daily scripture calendar there was this: from the letter of Titus, Chapter 3: 4-7 NRSV

⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶ This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Take a deep breath and, let it out.

Let us pray: God of grace, we give thanks for each blessing you give us...each treasure that we hold dear...that doesn't take up any space. We recall some of them now in silence...we give you thanks and praise for moments of grace and ask for your help that we may offer grace to one another.

May we breathe in every warm breeze that comes our way and find spaces that refresh us renew our tired bones. May we find happiness in the little things and find times when joy will lift us. May summer rains remind us that someone somewhere is thirsting and hungry...may God bless them as we find our way to lend a hand and fill their needs. May we enjoy the fruits and vegetables of the summer harvest and may we know the satisfaction of planting a seed. May we be at shelter from summer storms...and sheltered when inner storms threaten our peace of mind.

May we be blessed by unexpected surprises on our summer journeys and may we discover solace in the inner roads of our souls. May God's grace enfold us as does the warmth of these days.

God bless each one of us here and our wider congregation in town and out on the internet. Let your healing and comfort come to those who are recovering from surgery and those awaiting surgery...those who are grieving the loss of loved ones. Bless those who travel and those all those who are celebrating this week.

We place our trust in you, Jesus, and we pray as you have taught us, like this: 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: "Amazing Grace" #422

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but, now am found, was blind but now I see.

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Thank you, Darlene, for your music; thank you Council Member for ushering and for turning on the camera and thanks to Linda for reading scripture! Please stay for awhile to visit downstairs.

Benediction: As you go on your way, let it be your intention
to enjoy this life and all of its times of grace.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Peace be with you and continue to be safe!

You will find this recorded service
on FaceBook and on uccmedford.org

