



**It's July 25, 2021: the 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost.**

**Prelude:** “*Not Too Far From Here*” Solo: Pastor Mary Jo  
*Somebody's down to their last dime, somebody's running out of time,  
not too far from here. Somebody's got nowhere else to go,  
somebody needs a little hope, not too far from here.  
And I may not know their name, but I'm praying just the same  
that you'll use me, Lord, to wipe away a tear.*

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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” and those who are worshipping at other times this week, who are watching the recording of this service on our website! **Next week, August 1, we will worship outdoors.** We will share the Sacrament of Holy Communion. and my cousin, Steve Strasman, will be here, leading the music with guitar and voice.

Today, after worship, there will be time of fellowship! Please stay awhile.

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

One: We join together as hungry eaters to be nourished by the food that you offer us.

**Many: God of sustenance, give us this day our daily bread.**

As you care for the wheat fields that turn into bread and the vineyards that labor to produce sweet wine, tend to our bodies by feeding us what we need for healthy growth.

**God of abundance, give us this day our daily bread.**

The rich crops that you have prepared are now ready to be harvested by our hands and our hearts.

**Holy Spirit, come! Give us this day our daily bread.**

Since we could not sing Christmas Carols together in December, we'll celebrate **Christmas in July** as we sing

2 verses of “*O Come, All Ye Faithful*” #182 Worship and Rejoice Hymnal

1. O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;  
come and behold him, born the King of angels;

O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord.

2. Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation, sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;  
glory to God, all glory in the highest;

O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord.

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**This is our Prayer of Confession:**

Pastor: Great Provider, we recognize that widespread hunger is no longer necessary.

You have given us humans the resources to feed all people, yet we are selfish.

Lord, have mercy. *Silence and Ringing of Singing Bowl*

**Many: Living God, cultivate within our hearts reckless generosity, and plant within us spirits of simplicity and balance in body and soul.**

**Christ, have Mercy.** *Silence and Ringing of Singing Bowl*

Pastor: Though at times we fail to be generous, your generosity toward us is never-ending!

**Many: By sending Christ and the Spirit to your people,  
you have extended generosity and forgiveness  
beyond measure. Thanks be to you, O God. Amen.**

*Silence and Ringing of Singing Bowl*

**Response:** “*Forgive Our Sins*” vs. 1, 382  
“Forgive our sins as we forgive,” You taught us, Lord, to pray.  
But You alone can grant us grace to live the words we say.  
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**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!”**

The Reid Family will be reading the scripture:

This is a reading from the Gospel of **John, chapter 6, verses 1 to 13, from the Common English Bible**

It is entitled, “*Feeding of the Five Thousand*”

<sup>1</sup>After this Jesus went across the Galilee Sea (that is, the Tiberias Sea). <sup>2</sup>A large crowd followed him, because they had seen the miraculous signs he had done among the sick. <sup>3</sup>Jesus went up a mountain and sat there with his disciples. <sup>4</sup>It was nearly time for Passover, the Jewish festival.

<sup>5</sup>Jesus looked up and saw the large crowd coming toward him. He asked Philip, “Where will we buy food to feed these people?” <sup>6</sup>Jesus said this to test him, for he already knew what he was going to do.

<sup>7</sup>Philip replied, “More than a half year’s salary worth of food wouldn’t be enough for each person to have even a little bit.”

<sup>8</sup>One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said, <sup>9</sup>“A youth here has five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that for a crowd like this?”

<sup>10</sup>Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass there. They sat down, about five thousand of them. <sup>11</sup>Then Jesus took the bread. When he had given thanks, he distributed it to those who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, each getting as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup>When they had plenty to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather up the leftover pieces, so that nothing will be wasted.” <sup>1</sup>

<sup>3</sup> So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves that had been left over by those who had eaten.

The title of my **Message** today is: “*Turning Nothing into Something*”

Please pray with me. God of Grace and giver of this day, you call us *to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil...* (~from the UCC Statement of Faith) Holy God, as we think it is important to count the days, the months, the vaccinated, the sick, the dead, help our focus to be among those things that we cannot number: the good, the love, the hope and the caring. When we think that we have too little to give, you’re whispering, “just do it?” Lead us and guide us to do better at sharing what we have. We pray in the name of Jesus who has perfected this sort of extravagant generosity! Amen

In a little book entitled “*Spiritual Illuminations*” that Patricia Schultz gave to me a while back, I found this quote by Unitarian Philosopher, James Martineau: *The universe, open to the eye today, looks as it did a thousand years ago... We see what all our fathers saw. And if we cannot find God in your house or in mine, upon the roadside or the margin of the sea, in the bursting seed or opening flower, in the day duty or the night musing, in the general laugh and the secret grief, in the procession of life, ever entering afresh, and solemnly passing by and dropping off, I do not think that we should discern him any more on the grass of Eden, or beneath the moonlight of Gethsemane.*

Pat was just one of the many saints among us who I thought of when reading this quote, and not just because she shared the book with me. Pat was always very sure where God is...and that is in our midst! She was someone who somehow could foresee the needs of others and the needs of the church and would pop in with a check. “Buy a lawn mower,” she said. “Replace that snowblower,” she said. “Here are the dollar bills I have been saving for the buildings and grounds fund,” she would say.

Extravagant givers are not interested in being acknowledged for gifts given, as much as they just feel it is something they are able to do when there was a need. It comes as naturally as breathing.

After the General Synod of the United Church of Christ ended last weekend, Rev. John Dorhauer remarked: "I am in awe of what we do together in this denomination. Beloved United Church of Christ - thank you for an amazing Synod experience. We face our future with hopeful expectation of what we can do when we center in love and work for justice..." with a "Wow, look what the Holy Spirit can do!" attitude.

I would like to echo those words, Wow, look what the Holy Spirit can do!" Look at what the Holy Spirit is doing in our midst! Look ahead into the unknown future, knowing that God is already there waiting for us in a time when all people will truly be equal; when the air and the water will be clean; when nations will agree with one another and never seek evil ways to become the most powerful; when incurable diseases will no longer linger among us; when businesses will thrive and all who are able will find jobs; when families will not worry about how they will feed their children or worry about where they will lay their heads tonight.

It's not an unheard-of dream. Our ancestors dreamed it. Ages and ages of people dreamed these dreams. Those who walked around the lake, barefoot and hurting that day in today's scripture dreamed it. They were looking for someone who would save them from their poverty, who would cure their ailing bodies, who would quench their hunger for justice and their physical hunger.

Scripture has recorded that Jesus was looking for a little time alone. All 4 Gospel writers tell this story. The people found out where Jesus had gone and followed him around the lake. Scripture indicates that more than 5000 men followed him there. Even though the women and children were not counted, they must have been there, too! That's more people than live in Medford! Out of loving kindness and with compassion...and after having had a day already full of miracles and healings, when the disciples were hoping to have some peace and quiet, Jesus continues to heal more people and talks to them. Then, he suggests that they rest awhile, but, it was getting near mealtime and the disciples were urging Jesus to wrap it up. Jesus says: "There is no need to send these people home. Give them supper."

Can you imagine that conversation? or maybe those words have come out of your mouth! "What? you've got to be kidding. Feeding this crowd would cost a fortune. All we have are five loaves of bread and two fish. Impossible!"

In first-century Jewish culture, eating a meal was really more of an event than simply gobbling down 'fast food.' Meals were about hospitality, about sharing and bonding. If you ate with someone, it meant that you were engaging in a deeper relationship. Jesus had shared meals with many people, from the religious elite to the outcasts of society. For him, eating with people was a sign of things to come. When he broke bread with friends and crowds of strangers, he was proclaiming God's kingdom...the kingdom where everyone is welcome, everyone is fed and no one goes away hungry.

Then Jesus took command in a way none of them had seen before. When disciples are thinking scarcity ... Jesus is thinking abundance. "Don't tell me what you don't have, here is what we have." And Jesus says, "Here, feed them." The Disciples learned something that day. They would have been content to send the crowd home to find their own food. Instead, in the hands of Jesus, five loaves of bread and two fish become a table of plenty.

This is a dream come true. More. With God, there's always more — more grace, more love, more room at the table, more of everything...and much more than we could ever ask for or expect.

I believe that this story speaks clearly to us today. Now is the time to continue what we have been called to do. To use what we have and get busy feeding the hungry...helping the sick...loving one another... and without ever give up. Jesus calls us to dream bigger; to make it be enough for all!

Not too far from here, there is someone who does not expect to be helped, or to be given a meal...or to be welcomed in. Not too far from here, there is someone who needs to hear your voice. Not too far from here, there is someone who you can give more than they are expecting.

In John Lewis's words: "When historians pick up their pens to write the story of the 21st century, let them say that it was your generation who laid down the heavy burdens of hate at last and that peace finally triumphed over violence, aggression and war. So, I say to you, walk with the wind, brothers and sisters, and let the spirit of peace and the power of everlasting love be your guide."

Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay wrote this commentary about today's scripture: *Scarcity is a sickness, not of the individual body, but of the community that has resources it withholds out of fear of deprivation.*

*... I find myself wondering, she writes, ...is the subversive miracle found as Christ frees us from the mindset of scarcity to embrace the good news of abundance? Would it be an even greater miracle if after Jesus takes that bread and begins to distribute it...if others opened up their satchels and shared what they had previously decided to keep only for themselves? Could the lesson be not just that Jesus can multiply, but that the miracle doesn't happen until we stop clinging to what we have and place it in God's hands?*

With God's loving guidance, all things are possible. Let us calm our minds and know that God is here waiting for us to serve again and again. Let the story be told about us, that we took what had, and gave even more than anyone ever asked for!

That is exactly what "turning (what we think is) nothing into something" means...and if you cannot find God in your house or mine...then, we had better start looking closer!

**Morning Prayer:** Let us spend a few moments in silence walking back in our minds through the days of this past week. Forgive us, O God, the times that we have been like the disciples: short-sighted and small-minded, worried about our own needs and forgetting the needs of those around us; the times when we have forgotten to turn to you, and we have failed to depend on your Spirit. Let's spend a few moments asking forgiveness, with every good intention to do better. **Breathe in abundance. Breathe out scarcity.**

Gracious God, we trust that you are near to those whose lives have been changed due to natural disasters and those that have been caused by human hands. We trust that you will keep safe those who serve our country in faraway lands and will guide the leaders of our world to be just and merciful in all that they do. We trust that you are near to you those who are hurting and in need of healing, those who have been newly diagnosed with the COVID virus, those awaiting surgery and those recovering...those awaiting the results of medical testing and those undergoing cancer treatment and dialysis... those who struggle with mental illness. We ask your blessings on those who have lost loved ones.

We give thanks for unexpected joys experienced and blessings sent our way... for good news and good friends, the love of family and the concern and care of those around us.

Let's pray now in the name and in the words of Jesus: 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, the power and the glory forever. Amen.

**Time of Intention and Thanks:** We each, as members and friends of this church family, are called to minister to one another and to the world around us. Thank you, to all of you whose various gifts electronically, through the mail and those given in person today have enabled Community United Church of Christ to faithfully serve. **Let us dedicate these gifts: God of mercy and of kindness, help us to be good stewards of all that we have and all that we are. We dedicate our offerings, as we take part in the grace of sharing, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**Hymn:** "All Things Are Yours" 687

1. All things are yours! We make that true when we return our gifts to you.  
And so we give, and so we share, in Christ's strong name expressing care.
2. "Give out of love," your Word commands. We are your head, your heart, your hands.  
Your Word you underscore with deeds by using us to answer needs.
3. O what a joy to give and then, out of compassion, give again.

You have no needs. Though that be true, the gifts we share are given to you.

4. All things are yours! We make that true when we return our gifts to you.

And so we give, and so we share, in Christ's strong name expressing care.

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**Benediction:** <sup>20-21</sup> God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us. Glory to God in the church! Glory to God in the Messiah, in Jesus! Glory down all the generations! Glory through all millennia! Oh, yes! Ephesians 3:20-21 The Message

This time of worship has ended, let our service continue.

Go now in peace and continue to be safe.

**Hymn:** “*Love Came Down at Christmas*” **verse 3, #210** Worship and Rejoice

Love shall be our token; love be yours and love be mine;

love to God and neighbor, love for plea and gift and sign.

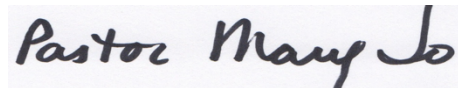
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Thank you, Council Members for ushering and for turning on Face Book Live and thanks to the Reid Family for reading scripture! Please stay for a while to visit downstairs.

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

**You will find this *service* at 10 am Sundays, “live” on the Community UCC, Medford, WI, Face Book page and later posted on [uccmedford.org](http://uccmedford.org)**



Pastor Mary Jo