



Good morning! It is the 16th Sunday after Pentecost, September 12, 2021

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. Welcome to those who are with us on Facebook "Live" and those who are joining in worship by watching the recording of this service on our website!

The Candlelight Guild will meet on Tuesday at 5:30 pm, not 5 as indicated in the bulletin.

Thanks to everyone who brought clothing and other items for our "Free for All" yesterday. We were only left with 3 boxes of clothing and 1 box of books! Thank you to those who set up, took down and spent the day outside together!

Our Church Council met this week. As we do each month, we review the COVID safety measures. We will continue to spray the inside of the church building two times a week with an electrostatic sprayer to help mitigate the virus. We agreed that masking is the one of the best ways to help keep one another safe, and especially, the children and those who are unvaccinated. Wearing masks is optional in this building. I have chosen to wear a mask in public places, including here, when we gather. I will only un-mask to speak at the microphone. We have do have church members who are quarantining right now and we have one church member who is in the hospital and is intubated. Please pray for them and follow the guidelines, so that you and your loved will be safe.

Hymn: "As We Gather" 646

As we gather may your Spirit work within us, as we gather may we glorify your name.
Knowing well that as our hearts begin to worship, we'll be blessed because we came,
we'll be blessed because we came.

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Call to Worship

One: We worship a God who says, "Yes!" **All: "Yes" to life and love and all that is good and true!**

One: We worship a God who says, "Go!"

All: "Go" to the highways and byways, inviting everyone we can find.

One: We worship a God who says, "Follow!"

**All: We come here today to follow. Let us go with open hearts and minds
to wherever God leads us, saying, "Amen, So be it."**

Prayer of Confession: Pastor: Great and loving God, we come before you asking for forgiveness:

**All: Gracious God, you call us to be those who "talk the talk," but also who "walk the walk" with you.
You call us to be just and forgiving; to be peacemakers. Forgive us when we honor you with our lips
but not with our actions. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

Words of Assurance and Grace: Pastor: What has been in the past does not have to define the future.
God's grace can transform us...will transform us. Receive this good news and move in a new direction.

In the name of Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven. **All: Thanks be to God.**

Hymn: "Amazing Grace" 422

1. 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.
2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.
3. Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.
4. When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun.

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Passing the Peace

Pastor: God makes peace within us. Let us claim it. God makes peace between us. Let us share it.
The peace of God is here to stay. **All: Thanks be to God.**

Pastor: Let us turn to one another and wave to those around the room.
Share Christ's peace in your manner of living and with these words, "Peace be with you."
Let's keep the "peace passing" going throughout the week.

Scripture: The Message interpretation of the Bible, Mark 8:27-38 It is entitled, "*The Messiah.*"
²⁷ Jesus and his disciples headed out for the villages around Caesarea Philippi. As they walked, he asked,
"Who do the people say I am?" ²⁸ "Some say, 'John the Baptizer,' they said. "Others say, 'Elijah.'
Still others say, 'one of the prophets.'"
²⁹ He then asked, "And you—what are you saying about me? Who am I?"
Peter gave the answer: "You are the Christ, the Messiah."
³⁰⁻³² Jesus warned them to keep it quiet, not to breathe a word of it to anyone.

He then began explaining things to them: "It is necessary that the Son of Man proceed to an ordeal
of suffering, be tried and found guilty by the elders, high priests, and religion scholars, be killed,
and after three days rise up alive." He said this simply and clearly so they couldn't miss it.
³²⁻³³ But Peter grabbed him in protest. Turning and seeing his disciples wavering, wondering what
to believe, Jesus confronted Peter. "Peter, get out of my way! Satan, get lost!
You have no idea how God works."

³⁴⁻³⁷ Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "Anyone who intends to come with me
has to let me lead. *You're* not in the driver's seat; *I* am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it.
Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way,
to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you,
the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?"

³⁸ "If any of you are embarrassed over me and the way I'm leading you when you get around
your fickle and unfocused friends, know that you'll be an even greater embarrassment
to the Son of Man when he arrives in all the splendor of God, his Father,
with an army of the holy angels."

The title of my Message today is: "*The Bad News and the Good News*"

Please pray with me: Good and gracious God, you have put before us in black and white, in good times
and in bad, "the way, the truth and the life of Jesus." In all our humanity, we admit, though, that we, the 21st
century disciples, are sometimes just as skeptical as the 1st century followers of Jesus. Sometimes we just do
not "get it," either. We get confused and become followers of other "ways" that do not line up with who we
are; we make decisions based on hearsay, instead of the "truth;" the "life" *we* live becomes merely a series
of highs and lows. You know our ways; you hold the truth; you are with us in this life. Hear this, our
collective prayer of praise and thanks for loving us just as we are. Let your Spirit blow winds of change
and flames of passion our way. Lead us and guide us in the name of Jesus and in his way, his truth
and his life. Amen.

Does today's Gospel make any sense to you? It makes me wonder why Jesus would ask his disciples
who the people, *the others*, say he is. I think that he is engaging them in an exercise of admission...who
THEY really are...and in giving instruction on how to follow.

The disciples repeat what others have said: "*They* say that you are John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the
prophets. He asks them, "Who do you say I am?" They answer what they know in their own hearts to be true:
"You are the Messiah." They spoke those words because they were eye-witnesses of the miracles. They were
ear-witnesses of words he had spoken. They were the heart-witnesses of compassion and were becoming
some of the first incubators of justice and welcome for all.

Perhaps Jesus thinks," They finally get it!" This is "good news."

But, what if...they, too, would have answered the second question like this: “Certainly you are John the Baptist, aren’t you?” Or what if some of them would agree with their friends, saying, “Seems to me you are Elijah...” or without further thought, what if some of them would have admitted that they too really thought of Jesus as a prophet? They didn’t. Instead, they followed their hearts and admitted that Jesus is the Messiah. That was their statement of faith...the good news. The bad news came next.

Jesus has their attention now and begins to tell them something they didn’t expect to hear;³⁰ “Do not to tell anyone about me being the Messiah.” While they are *processing that*, he goes on to tell them something that they cannot believe.³¹“The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected and killed, and then, after three days... rise from the dead.” What?

Did it occur to even one of them that Jesus had recently said, “Take nothing for the journey...just follow me” and that now they are realizing more fully that *discipleship wasn’t promised to be easy*. Did their hearts skip a beat? Scripture tells us how Peter *reacted* to the bad news and perhaps he says some things he would later regret saying. Those words are not recorded, but, Jesus retorts: ³³“Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.”

That was the end of that conversation. Jesus turned his attention to the crowd that was gathering. “All who want to come after me must say “no” to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. ³⁵All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them.

How does this apply to us? When bad things happen to good people, God is not the cause of it. Sometimes, we cause bad things ourselves without realizing it. Sometimes other people cause bad things to happen, too. And all the while, God is with us at work sending help. When we think we have a good plan and it has to be canceled or rearranged; when something unthinkable happens like the 9/11 attack, forest fires, hurricanes, floods, pandemic, we find that people begin to help one another and set aside their differences to do so. I believe that is God’s plan. That is what God is up to, my friends. That is our new normal.

John Lewis once said: ***Don’t close your eyes because you’re afraid of what you will see. Be honest in your assessment. Transformation and revelation require an adjustment from what we know to what we know can be.***

That is what happened to the disciples that day. In a short time, and as the result of what seemed to them to be the worst disaster of all, they were about to be transformed into Resurrection people who were on fire, spreading the good news about Jesus. There would still be bad news and good news. What brought them together on level ground again was the good news that they were sharing and the good works that they were accomplishing.

Let’s not be consumed by the bad news. Let’s make it our intention to look to the possibilities that God is placing right here in front of **us**. It is perfect timing for my favorite story:

There was the man who was unfortunate enough to be in a torrential rainstorm. It rained and rained for days and finally, flood waters came up over the windows of the first floor of his house. He went up to the second story and sat and waited for the rain to stop. A friend came by in a boat and wanted him to crawl out the window, get in the boat and go to safety. He said “No, I know that God is with me and will save me.”

The waters grew higher and higher. Soon, he was forced to go out and sit on his roof. A rescue boat came by. The man said, “No, thanks, God will provide for me.” More rain came, the water rose and he was soon clinging to his chimney. A helicopter hovered over him and lowered a ladder and tried to talk him into getting on board. Insisting that God would provide for him, he refused.

It was not long before the man drowned and came before God in heaven. He said to God, “Why did I die, why didn’t you save me? I believed in you! I trusted you!” And God answered: yes, you believed, but you didn’t hear me. I sent two boats and a helicopter and you didn’t get it!

Are we closing our eyes and ignoring an opportunity right now? or if you want to think about it awhile, then answer this: Who do we say that Jesus is?

If we say that Jesus is the Messiah, then we, too, must recall today the words of the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith: *God calls us into the church to accept the cost and the joy of discipleship; to be his servants in service to all humanity; to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil; to share in Christ's baptism, eat at his table, and unite with Jesus in his passion and victory.*

I believe that Jesus is telling us today to not set our minds on human things but to set our minds on his way, his truth, and his life. Not too far from here is an opportunity to **get behind Jesus and welcome the immigrant, the asylum seeker, and the refugee.** Wherever we go, we have occasion to *get behind Jesus and celebrate the dignity and worth of every human being, as bearing the image of the divine.* In our own homes and in our back yards, we are challenged to *get behind Jesus and start caring for creation.* And yes, there are ways to *get behind Jesus and do the hard thing, taking up our cross, and moving toward redemption, restoration, and re-creation.* (Part of this paragraph, by Cheryl Lindsay)

The first disciples were not the only ones...**we also have had to go through what we have gone through to get to where we are.** Jesus has told us, too, that he is the Messiah and we are in place hear his call to follow. With God's help and by setting our minds on this good news, we will go on from here!

Does that make sense to you? It does to me, too!

Breathe in the possibilities. Breathe out at least a little bit of anxiety.

Morning Prayer and The Lord's Prayer:

Pray with me: We give you thanks and praise for this time that we have shared together in person and for the technology that brings together friends and family who live in town, in neighboring cities and in other places many miles away. We give thanks and praise for every one of us who has been in the right place at the right time this week to help and encourage one another.

We ask your blessings upon friends and family, on the members and friends of this family of faith; bless heal and strengthen those who are living with illness, those who are at home and in the hospitals suffering with the COVID virus, those who continue with chemotherapy and other treatments; those who are recovering from sickness, surgery and accident and those who sit at their bedsides. Bless those are picking up the pieces of their fire-ravaged, flooded and hurricane-blown lives and those who have volunteered to help. Bless medical workers who devote their lives to our better health. Bless all who are grieving the loss of loved ones.

Bless the children and all who have begun the school year and bless those who have begun news jobs and those searching. Bless those who are traveling, those who are walking, those who are on their knees cleaning up the gardens and those in the fields harvesting. Bless the homeless in our community with a place to rest their heads and enough shelter to make a difference.

Merciful God, you know our every joy and our every need...but, we still need to tell them to you in our hearts... Help us to listen more closely to what you have to say to us and help to be on the alert when you send us those **boats**. ☺ We pray 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:

Pastor: 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 have enabled Community United Church of Christ to faithfully serve.

As we dedicate our gifts let us also offer our lives to God:

All: Loving God, receive our offerings and unite us into a community of mutual caring, where the light of your love shines through all of our efforts as we share our time, our talents and our monetary gifts. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Hymn: “Lift High the Cross” 287

Chorus: Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adore his sacred name.

1. Come, Christians, follow where our Savior trod, our King victorious, Christ, the Son of God. **Chorus**
2. All newborn servants of the Crucified bear on their brow the seal of Christ who died. **Chorus**
3. O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree, your death has brought us life eternally. **Chorus**
4. So shall our song of triumph ever be: praise to the Crucified for victory. **Chorus**

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Benediction: Go now...knowing that the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit will give us the boldness we need to face the living and loving of these days. ~ Philippians 4:7

Go in peace & continue to be safe.

Pastor Mary Jo