

Good morning! It is the 17th Sunday after Pentecost, September 19, 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 Pride Tribe is hosting, a night of "S'mores and more" around the campfire
in the prayer garden on Friday evening, September 24th from 6 to 7pm. All are welcome!

I am happy to say that we will be starting **Confirmation classes** once again in October for youth in grades 6,7,8. We will meet every other Wednesday for 11 sessions this school year and will continue next school year for the second 11 sessions. There will be a meeting of parents and students on Wednesday, September 29th in the fellowship hall and on zoom at 6pm. Please let me know if you will be attending.

Our **Church Council** met last 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 us all to be safer this this building. We agreed that masking is the one of the best ways to help keep one another safe, especially the children, those immuno-compromised 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 and will only *un-mask* to speak at the microphone. Please follow the guidelines, so that will all be safe.

One other announcement: I am asking for a friend who has a spinet piano for sale in Medford. Cost \$150.

Call to Worship: One: Jesus challenges us in today's gospel:

All: Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.

One: Then Jesus took a little child into his arms, and said:

All: Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me welcomes not me... but the one who sent me.

One: We are still learning today what Jesus came to teach us 2000 years ago: to change the world, we must change the way we love and welcome all children!

All: May we love all children as if they were our own!

One: Will the children who are here today, please lift up your voices so that we all can hear you?
Say your name and say "Hello!" **All: Welcome, children!**

Hymn: "Jesus Loves the Little Children" 2x

**All: Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.
Red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in His sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world.**

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Prayer of Confession

All: Dear God, we often have not welcomed

the children as Jesus has commanded. Too many children in our community and world suffer from violence, abuse, neglect and poverty. We know that if we were to join together to welcome and care, to celebrate and honor our children we would save ourselves and our world. Forgive us for what we have left undone and lead us in a deeper commitment to make a difference. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Assurance of Pardon and Grace

Pastor: What has been in the past does not have to define the future. God's grace can transform us and 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.**

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.

Rieds: Today's Gospel is taken from the Common English Bible: Mark, chapter 9, verses 30 through 37. It is entitled, "Jesus Predicts His Death."

³⁰ From there Jesus and his followers went through Galilee, but he didn't want anyone to know it.

³¹ This was because he was teaching his disciples, "The Human One will be delivered into human hands. They will kill him. Three days after he is killed, he will rise up." ³² But they didn't understand this kind of talk, and they were afraid to ask him.

³³ They entered Capernaum. When they had come into a house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about during the journey?" ³⁴ They didn't respond, since on the way they had been debating with each other about who was the greatest.

³⁵ Jesus sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be least of all and the servant of all." ³⁶ Jesus reached for a little child, placed him among the Twelve, and embraced him. Then he said, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name... welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me isn't actually welcoming me but rather the one who sent me."

The title of my Message today is: "Redirect"

Please pray with me: Gracious God, may the words of our mouths and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, Creator, Redeemer and Comforter. Amen.

A woman went to the emergency room, where she was seen by a young new Doctor. After a short time in the examination room, the doctor told her she was pregnant. She burst out of the room and ran down the corridor screaming.

An older doctor stopped her and asked what the problem was. He listened to her story and calmed her down, then escorted her into another room. Then, *that* doctor marched down the hallway to the first doctor's room. "What is wrong with you?" he said. "This woman is 63 years old. She has two grown children and several grandchildren... and you told her she was pregnant?!!"

The new doctor continued writing notes on his laptop and without looking up he said: "Does she still have the hiccups?"

If we are clever, we can master this *technique* when we are dealing with young ones who are throwing a tantrum...by totally changing the subject, or by directing their attention to another task. Actually, we might already be an experts at **redirecting**...when talking to our parents...our friends...our partners...our spouses.

One day Jesus was walking with his disciples. The disciples were talking among themselves and didn't realize that he had overheard their conversation. The topic of their concern was, "Who is the greatest among us?" Exactly what they said we do not know, but one author, Brett Blair, imagined that the conversation went something like this...

Simon Peter said: "Well, I am his righthand man. I am a part of the *inner circle*. I am the spokesman of the group. Therefore, I am the greatest."

Andrew spoke up: "Well, dear big brother, **let me remind you** of something which you have conveniently forgotten. I was called first. I was the one who invited *you* to follow Jesus. I got you here. So, that makes me the greatest."

The brothers, James and John, speak up: "You both miss the point. Greatness is measured by what you have sacrificed. We were supposed to inherit our father Zebedee's fishing business. We gave all of that up."

And Matthew says: "Well, if you want to talk about giving up money, I can play *that* game. I was a tax collector. None of *you* had as much money as I did. Therefore, I am the greatest."

Jesus waits until they arrive in Capernaum and then asks “What were you talking about back there on the road, although he already **knew**. The disciples became strangely quiet. It is at this point that Jesus tells them what it takes to be great in the eyes of God.

“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all. If you want to be great,” he said, “be a servant.”

And then, just as the disciples perhaps were looking at one another as children who have just been caught eating the Christmas cookies that their grandmother had hidden...

Jesus takes it one step further. He takes a small child in his arms, and he says to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me."

The disciples never say another word about who is the greatest. They realize, perhaps, how foolish their conversation was, as Jesus, the *master teacher*, redirects them.

Jesus is turning upside-down what first-century and *21st century* men and women had been taught about becoming upright and outstanding citizens. He points out that greatness is only found in the humble acts of love shown by people who are not interested in self-promotion.

Jesus applauds being a servant and insists, as interpreted in “The Message:” “So you want first place? Then take the last place. Be the servant of all.” and this: “Whoever embraces one of these children as I do embraces me, and far more than me—God who sent me.” (The Message translation)

How appropriate are these words as we welcome the children into the Faith formation time each week and today, welcoming them in a special Call to Worship. In October, we will be welcoming another group of 6,7 and 8th graders as they begin Confirmation classes. The welcoming does not end at 11 am on Sundays nor does it end as the students finish Confirmation classes. This welcoming has life-long effects.

Parents promise to share their faith with their children on the day of their baptisms and instill in them the foundations of faith. It is a privilege and obligation of each one of us in this congregation to offer and *model* Christianity for the children. It is up to us to share the beloved traditions of this church, the history of Christianity and the stories about Jesus that none of us dare to let fade away. I believe that is what Jesus is talking about today.

OH, and did you happen to notice that when Jesus asked the disciples what they were talking about, they were suddenly very quiet? Maybe they were hoping that he hadn't heard them. It dawned on me that if Jesus were to overhear our conversations, he might be **confronting us, too**.

Redirecting is not a technique that was invented recently. Jesus often uses it as a teaching tool. It is possible that we also are being redirected by God and reminded that the words that we speak and our actions are being noticed by the children and by others. Maya Angelou once said: Act in such a manner that you are living proof of a loving God.

Since we are all **children of the heavenly Father**, give a little thought to how we will we meet the challenge to welcome **one another** in his name? If others look at us and your manner of our living, will they be able to tell that we are Christians? Will the children live their lives as disciples of Jesus because of the way you and I “do church”?

Next time you get the hiccups, or wait, anytime...give that some thought...and be watchful for any redirection that comes along. **Take a deep breath. Now, let it out.**

Morning Prayer and The Lord's Prayer:

Please 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 lift to you: the children of our family of faith and the children in our communities.

We commend to your loving care, those who are hurting and healing, those who face testing and surgery

and those who are in recovery. *Hear our prayer* especially for those who are suffering with the Covid virus and its after effects. Bless, heal and strengthen those who are living with other illnesses, those who continue with chemotherapy and antibody infusions. We lift our prayers to you, loving God, for those who serve as caretakers and CNAs and the first responders, those who serve as doctors and nurses and all those who you would lovingly embrace as “servants.” Bless medical workers and scientists who devote their lives to our better health.

We ask your blessings on the Afghan asylum seekers whose dreams of freedom and a better life are getting off to a difficult start. Let the welcoming continue and the assistance be graciously given as you direct us in ways that we can help.

Bless all who are grieving the loss of loved ones, especially Lisa Hart as her family grieves the passing of her mother-in-law; and Tracy Hauge and her family as they grieve the passing of her mother.

We bring before you now the joys and concerns of our hearts...

Merciful God, you know our every joy and sadness, and our every need...but, we still need to share them with you in our hearts... 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.

We will sing a Hymn from the early 1900's: "Children of the Heavenly Father" 83

1. Children of the heavenly Father safely in His bosom gather:
Nestling bird nor star in Heaven such a refuge ne'er was given.
2. God, His own doth tend and nourish; in His holy courts they flourish.
From all evil things He spares them; in His mighty arms He bears them.
3. Neither life nor death shall ever from the Lord, His children sever;
Unto them His grace He showeth, and their sorrows all He knoweth.
4. Though He giveth or He taketh, God His children ne'er forsaketh;
His the loving purpose solely to preserve them, pure and holy.

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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: *"I Love to Tell the Story" 560*

1. I love to tell the story of unseen things above: of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story, because I know 'tis true. It satisfies my longings as nothing else could do.

Refrain: I love to tell the story, 'twill be my theme in glory to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

2. I love to tell the story. 'Tis pleasant to repeat what seems, each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet.
I love to tell the story, for some have never heard the message of salvation from God's own holy word.

[Refrain]

3. I love to tell the story, for those who know it best seem hungering and thirsting to hear it, like the rest.
And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song, 'twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long.

[Refrain]

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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