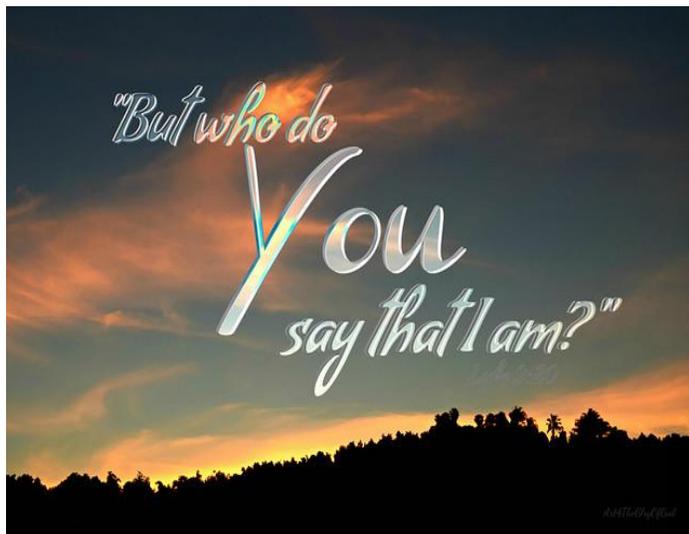


August 23, 2020 12th Sunday after Pentecost



St. John United Church of Christ

10207 Lincoln Trail
Fairview Heights, IL
Telephone 397-6323

Rev. Rosemary Captain

Prayers and Liturgy by Rev. Elsa A. Cook

ORGANIST/PIANIST – Sharon Banjavcic

Exodus 1:8-2:10 -- Psalm 138

Romans 12:1-8 — Matthew 16:13-20

**Scripture texts quoted below are from
the New Revised Standard Version**

ANNOUNCEMENTS: As you read through today's liturgy, you may notice that Rev. Elsa A. Cook has expertly crafted all of the 4 suggested scripture readings into our worship service. The common thread I perceive through these texts is the question of "identity." Who are "Shiphrah and Puah" from Exodus 1:15? Who praises God in Psalm 138? Who are Christians in the eyes of the Apostle Paul? Who is Jesus to the disciples? And who are we to our family, our friends, our church, and more importantly, who is God to us and who are we to God?

We look to our sacred texts for answers.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

*(Inspired by Matthew 16:13-20;
Romans 12:1-8)*

Who do you say I am?

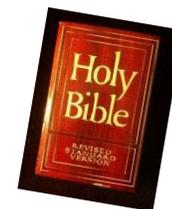
**Some say Moses, some say Elijah,
Prophet who comes with a word from the Holy.**

Who do you say I am?

**Some say Messiah, some say "Human One"
Healer who shares the life of the Holy.**

Who do you say I am?

Some say Emmanuel, God-with-us,



**Some say Wisdom, teacher of truth,
Some say Ruler of Peace, Bringer of Justice.**
And you, St. John United Church of Christ, Who do
you say I am?
**You are the Body to which we belong;
We are your members, each needed, treasured.
In you we are transformed
into your Hope, your Love, your Vision,
You are the One we long for, the One we seek here
today, the One who empowers our lives.**
Come, Let us worship!

UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

(Inspired by Exodus 1:8-2:10)

**Holy One, we tell your story today as a conspiracy
of hearts; the defiant midwives, the laboring
women, the daughter of power and the daughter of
poverty join forces to protect the children of Israel
and so set the stage for liberation.**

**Meet us here today and show us the gifts we
have to offer in the service of your kingdom--
resilience, clear-sightedness, courage,
compassion— setting the stage for a
Just World for All. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.**

*GOSPEL READING: **Matthew 16:13-20**

¹³ Now when Jesus came to the area of Caesarea
Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say
the Human One^[a] is?"¹⁴ They replied, "Some say
John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others
Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

¹⁵ He said, "And what about you? Who do
you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter said, "You are
the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ Then Jesus replied, "Happy are you, Simon
son of Jonah, because no human has shown this to
you. Rather my Father who is in heaven has shown



you. ¹⁸ I tell you that you are
Peter. And I'll build my church
on this rock. The gates of the
under-world won't be able to
stand against it. ¹⁹ I'll give you
the keys of the kingdom of
heaven. Anything you fasten

on earth will be fastened in heaven. Anything you
loosen on earth will be loosened in
heaven." ²⁰ Then he ordered the disciples not to
tell anybody that he was the Christ."

SERMON: "**Who Are You?**"

To answer the first question that I posted in
the announcements, we turn to the book of
Exodus. This book starts by telling us that a new
king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph,
the son of Jacob (the one who was thrown into a
pit by his brothers but who eventually became a
powerful man in Egypt, even though he was
Jewish). That was generations before this story.

That's why the new king doesn't recognize
Jews as anything but slaves to build his
monuments out of bricks. The king tried to
oppress these Jews in any way he could. He

decided to command the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, to do the following; “when you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.” (Exodus 1:16).

However, the midwives knew that was against what God would want, so they conspired against the king, and let all babies live. The excuse they gave to the king is found in verses 18-19.

“¹⁸So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?” ¹⁹The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and

give birth before the midwife comes to them.” The reward for their faithfulness to God, was to gain families and children of their own.

That’s who these ladies were: faithful servants of God.

Psalm 138 is a song of thanksgiving for deliverance by God. “⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.⁸ The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.”



The author of this Psalm acknowledges that he/she was created by God and with God’s help, his/her purpose will be fulfilled.

In the letter to the Romans written by Paul he describes his followers in many ways. He encourages all of them to “present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.” Then he describes the different gifts each of the followers may have. The one thing they each have in common, however, is that the gifts should be used for God’s purposes. Paul sees all his followers as servants of God.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus asks the disciples directly, “who am I?” After repeating what they heard from others, Jesus asks them again, “but who do YOU say that I am?” With God’s help, Peter is given the words to answer this piercing question. Jesus knows where Peter’s answer came from, yet by saying the answer out-loud for all to hear, the answer speaks volumes, not just 10 words. **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** There is power in this acclamation and declaration of Peter. Once the words are said out-loud, the whole world can hear them!

The midwives were given families and children of their own because they were faithful servants. The Psalmist was given deliverance because he/she gave thanksgiving and praise to God. The followers of Paul gained strength and

courage when Paul pointed out the gifts they each had. And Peter was given the keys to the kingdom because he declared who Jesus was.

When someone calls you by name, how do you feel? And if those words speak of endearment and acknowledgement of who you are, how do you feel? Everyone likes to be recognized as a good person, and even better, when others recognize you as a Christian. How do you think God sees **you**? Do you think it matters to God how you recognize, proclaim, and declare who **God is**?

Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: God of 20/20 vision, how do you see us? We perceive you in the light of who your Son Jesus is to us. Jesus opens our eyes to your goodness, your love, your compassion, your faithfulness to us, no matter what we mortals do. We are broken creatures, yet you, faithful God, have the tools and make the time to glue us back together each time we fall and break. And we are grateful.

We pray that you give us better sight and hearts of compassion that we see those who need our help. Open our eyes to see those who are different from us. Open our eyes to see those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, in pain, in despair, and lonely. As we remember how you see us and call us, guide our steps to answers those cries for help.

We pray for the students and teachers who are returning to school. We pray for good health for all and days of excitement as the students learn new skills and information.

We pray for those we know who are suffering from physical ailments and those who suffer from mental health issues. We pray for our country that we all might see the rest of us as neighbors near and far. As you reach out your hand to save us from our enemies, may we also reach out our hands to help others, as we pray in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. The kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR OFFERING:

With praise and thanks, we create new life.



With vigor and sweat, we deliver our love.

With care and hope, we stretch out our hands.

We give our gifts of tithes and offerings to renew the world again.

UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

Mother God, with praise and thanks, vigor and sweat, care and hope, we bless these gifts in your love. In Christ Jesus, we pray. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

(inspired by Psalm 138, Romans 12:1-8)

We go into the world as parents of your love.

**We will be transformed
by the renewing of our minds.**

We will not think more highly of ourselves
than we ought.

We will go to remember we can't do it alone.

We stretch out our hands.

Our Midwife God delivers.



ST. JOHN PRAYER LIST: Rich Schmitt, Tom Petroff,
Nelson Libell, Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess,
Charles Chamberlin, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie,
Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Carol Meyer,
Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess,
Shari Hamilton, Charlotte Watson, Becky Ballard.

(If there are names on this list that you believe can be
removed, call the church secretary.)

The Evening Circle will be selling custom face masks. You may find that friends and family would like a mask for fall, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas or of a favorite color. On Sunday, September 13, there will be cut fabrics available. All you have to do is to choose two fabrics (one for either side of the mask) and pin them together along with a form with your contact info on it. The masks will be ready for pickup two weeks later, September 27. A donation will be asked for each mask. If you are unable to come to church or are quarantined, call Nancy Eisenhauer at 233-5894 for ordering information.

