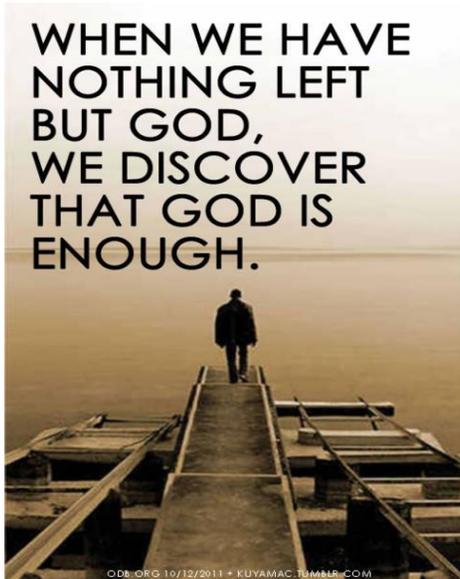


February 7, 2021

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany



St. John United Church of Christ

10207 Lincoln Trail
Fairview Heights, IL
Telephone 397-6323
Secretary – Judy Hartman
Rev. Rosemary Captain
Prayers and Liturgy by
Rev. Kaji Douša

This is Communion Sunday
so have your “elements” handy.

*Isaiah 40:21–31 * Psalm 147:1–11, 20c,
1 Corinthians 9:16–23 * Mark 1:29–39*

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Good people of the church, lift up your eyes and see.

Have you not seen? Have you not heard?

Our God greets us here.

Good servants of the Most High,

Open your ears to hear.

Have you not seen? Have you not heard?

Our God meets us here.

Good children of the light, open your hearts and know
what it means to delight in God.

For we have seen, heard and known

From the beginning to the end, Our God...is.

GATHERING PRAYER:

Eternal God, Creator of the universe...and then some.

We call on you, you who greet us here.

We give you thanks for making it possible to gather,
and to ponder your eternal mysteries.

Make us, creatures of this time and space,
ready collaborators with your endless grace. **Amen.**

CONFESSION:

What do we hold and treasure most?

Is it the promises of God?

What captivates our attention?

Is it the grace of God?

God of mercy and grace:

We are vulnerable people

**who sometimes ignore the vulnerable.
We are broken people who don't always pay
attention to the world's brokenness.**

Heal us, O God, to make us better healers.
Mend our rifts, that we might be better builders.
Cleanse our hearts, so we can clear out the damage of
hurt and oppression.
We are yours, loving God. Help us to live and to know
this better.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

Have you known? Have you heard?
Our God lifts us up on eagle's wings
Strengthening us so that we won't be weary.
The burden of sin is but a far and distant memory
For, through Christ, our sins – all of them – are
forgiven.

**God is great in strength, mighty in power, and
full of endless love for us all.**

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 40:21-31

²¹ Don't you know? Haven't you heard?
Wasn't it announced to you from the beginning?
Haven't you understood since the earth was
founded?

²² God inhabits the earth's horizon—
its inhabitants are like locusts—
stretches out the skies like a curtain
and spreads it out like a tent for dwelling.

²³ God makes dignitaries useless
and the earth's judges into nothing.

²⁴ Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely is their shoot rooted in the earth
when God breathes on them, and they dry up;
the windstorm carries them off like straw.

²⁵ So to whom will you compare me,
and who is my equal? says the holy one.

²⁶ Look up at the sky and consider:
Who created these?
The one who brings out their attendants one by
one, summoning each of them by name.

²⁷ Because of God's great strength
and mighty power, not one is missing.

²⁷ Why do you say, Jacob, and declare, Israel,
"My way is hidden from the LORD,
my God ignores my predicament"?

²⁸ Don't you know? Haven't you heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the creator of the ends of the earth.
He doesn't grow tired or weary.

His understanding is beyond human reach,
²⁹ giving power to the tired
and reviving the exhausted.

³⁰ Youths will become tired and weary,
young men will certainly stumble;

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength;
they will fly up on wings like eagles;
they will run and not be tired;
they will walk and not be weary.

MESSAGE: “Wait for the Lord”

(with thoughts from John H. Hayes)

I believe the words of this text are beautiful and comforting on their own, however I thought you might like some back ground information.

The controlling message of this text from Second Isaiah, is the good news of the end of the Babylonian Exile. The unknown prophetic author proclaims over and over that the Judeans who live in the foreign nation are about to be released and allowed to return home. That central proclamation rests on a strong theological foundation, the prophetic poet’s confidence in both the power and gracious will of Yahweh, who alone deserves to be called God.

The style and structure of our passage are dominated by questions, mainly rhetorical questions. As rhetorical questions, they both make assertions, for they assume answers, and lay the foundation for the responses that follow. Mainly, these questions are addressed directly to the audience, originally the dispirited Judean captives in Babylon.

What is it that the audience has not known, that they have or should have known from the beginning? Answer: that the one who sits above the circle of the earth – the one over all space – is also the one who brings down princes and rulers – is ruler over historical events (verse 23). Indeed, before the Lord, they – the rulers – are like stubble before the wind (verse 24).

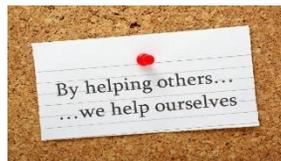
Verses 25-26 also begin with rhetorical questions. “To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal?” means that the Lord is incomparable, without equal. But the question is answered, first with a command to look to the heavens, then with another rhetorical question (“Who created these?”), and then with an assertion of God’s creation and control of the hosts of heaven. Are the stars, identified in Babylon with divinities, comparable to Yahweh? By no means, for Yahweh created them and calls them out to their appointed places every night. Though they can hardly be counted, the Lord knows them all by name.

Verses 27-31 begin with an actual question addressed to Israel’s sense of the absence of God. Why do the people say that Yahweh is unaware of their plight (“My way is hidden from the Lord”) or that God ignores their just cause (“my right”)? But this is also a rhetorical question asserting that the people are mistaken. Its response begins with the repetition of the questions of verse 21 (“Have you not known? Have you not heard?”) followed by assertions and promises.

The assertions move from the cosmic to the personal. Yahweh is the everlasting God, the creator of the whole earth who never tires and whose understanding is beyond human comprehension (verse 28.) This same One “gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.” Then the promises draw the conclusion for the people of God, for those who now are saying that they have been abandoned by God.

One of the messages for us today is waiting for the Lord, as in verse 31. To “wait for the Lord” is to have confidence, or faith, in the sense of committing oneself to God in hopeful expectation. This passage as a whole, amounts to an argument that the dispirited and despondent exiles have good reason to be hopeful, and who among us has never felt dispirited or despondent in our lives? The One who calls us to freedom is the God who created the earth, who calls out the stars, whose strength knows no limits, and who gives that strength to the faint and the powerless, giving those who wait for God the power to fly. Thanks be to God who takes care of us and never leaves us. Amen.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR OFFERING:



All of us have our thresholds – places beyond which it can be so difficult to move. For many of us, generous giving represents such a threshold. Some of us have given in the same way (sometimes even giving the same amount) as we did when we were little children. Some of us have never given before. Some of us want to give, but have no idea how. Giving takes so many shapes – but, like any spiritual discipline, the key is for that gift to grow. We grow in our knowledge of God, we grow in our faith. If we aren’t already, may we now seek to grow in our giving, as well? In the time we give? In the money we give? In the love we give?

Let us ponder this growth, and may God shine God’s light across the threshold so that nothing can hold us back from this growth.

(Consider sending a gift to the church for the Food Pantry, since we are unable to bring our food directly to worship service.)

DEDICATION:

God of all that is, all we have, all we are – we give. We give these gifts as we reach across the thresholds of our concerns. We give these gifts, knowing that they will give so much more. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.

HOLY COMMUNION:

May God be with you
And also with you.

Lift your hearts.

We lift them up to God.

Let us give thanks to the God we love.

We freely give God thanks and praise.



We give you thanks, Holy One, almighty and eternal God, always and everywhere, through Jesus Christ, the only one begotten by you before all time, by whom you made the world and all things. And so, in grateful procession of endless praise, with the church, we glorify you, joining this unending song:

SANCTUS: Holy, holy, holy God of love and majesty, the whole universe speaks of your glory, O God Most High. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God! Hosanna in the highest.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER:

Holy are you, Eternal One. You sit above, through, and within the circle of the earth setting light into being, casting the stars in the sky, founding the evolving earth and all that dwell within it.

Limitless is your power, and great is your wisdom. You look upon the lowly as your most cherished creatures. You visit upon the downtrodden with presence, grace, and the promise of eternal justice.

You sent to us your own child, Jesus, who reached into unexpected places, calling women beyond the limits of their times equipping men for nurturing love welcoming children into your holy embrace.

And so we recall that on the night of betrayal and desertion, the light of the world took bread, broke and gave it to the disciples, saying: *(Lift the bread.)*

“This is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.”

And, in like manner, after supper, Jesus took the cup and after giving thanks gave it to them saying, *(Lift the cup.)*

“This is the cup of the new covenant [in my blood]

poured out for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink of it, for the remembrance of me.”

Life’s greatest feast before us, we excitedly proclaim:

Christ has died

Christ is risen

Christ will come again.

Dear God, you transform, all that is before you so that at the touch of your grace we are never the same.

Dear God, you illumine.
You bring light to all peoples
Light to the nations,
Light into our hearts,
Light on your Way.



Dear God, we pray for your Spirit.
Transform, illumine, bless.
Make these ordinary gifts of bread and cup
Into the extraordinary presence of Christ with us.

In so doing,

Hold us as your own

Renew us as your people

For the sake of the world you love. *(Lift both the bread and the cup.)*

For all honor and glory are yours, O God,
Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you

and the Holy Spirit in your glorious creation
Both now and forever. **Amen.**

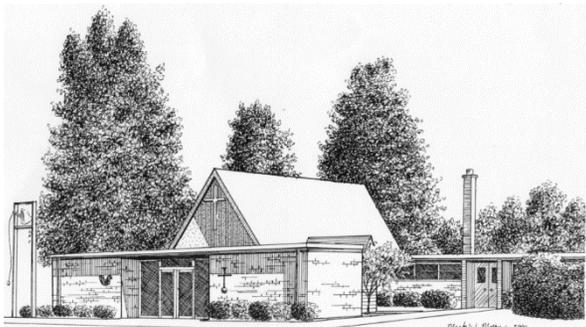
LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PARTAKE OF YOUR ELEMENTS:

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER: Let us pray:
We have been fed, Holy One, by your presence.
We have been led, Eternal One, by your light.
May we bask in this glow now and forever. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May God bless and keep you
May God's face shine through yours.
And may the glorious, Triune God
Protect and keep you all the days long. **Amen.**



PRAYER LIST: We pray for the health and well-being of all affected by the pandemic and we especially pray for: Ginny Ganschinietz, Rich Schmitt, Donna Isselhard, Shari Hamilton, Becky Ballard, Pam (Belleville) Bierman, Ronald Bopp, P.J. Bennett, and **all the people of the United States of America and our leaders in Washington, D.C. and Springfield.**

ANNOUNCEMENT: At our virtual Annual Congregational meeting last Sunday, the question was asked regarding the balance owed for the parking lot loan (from ourselves). \$7466.23 is left on the original cost of \$11,784.