

Acts 10:44-48 • Psalm 98 • 1 John 5:1-6 • John 15:9-17

the Sixth Sunday of Easter May 9, 2021

A Day to celebrate those who have mothered us



St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail
Fairview Heights, IL 62208
Telephone 397-6323
Secretary – Judy Hartman
Rev. Rosemary Captain

Prayers and Liturgy by Rev. Ellis Arnold
Organist – Sharon Banjavcic

WORDS OF WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

VIDEO: “What is love?”

PRELUDE: “How Majestic Is Your Name”

Michael W. Smith and Joel Rainey

Flute/Piano Duet Stacie and Sharon

CALL TO WORSHIP:

God speaks to the heart,

Offering compassion and hope.

God enlivens the mind,

Inviting curiosity and wonder.

God awakens all spirits,

Fostering sacred connection.

God nurtures our strength,

Creating unimagined possibilities.

God calls the whole world,

Inspiring extravagant love.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

Creating Spirit, we join with the chorus of all of creation to celebrate your wondrous deeds.

Fill us with your joy and train our ears for harmony, so that we may contribute to the world You are already creating. All this we pray in the name of Jesus, who revealed what is possible through love. Amen.



RESPONSIVE PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

Unwavering God, we keep asking what is it that you most want us to do with our lives in hope you might tell us something easier. Instead, You offer the same answer every time: Love one another as I have loved you.

We confess that our love for others is not always what we hope it would be.

We are quick to judge and slow to offer grace.

We are swift to anger and resistant to make amends.

We are prone to suspicion and resistant to build trust.

We hear the greatest commandment, and if we are honest, we are filled with hesitation because it means we must change. Unwavering God, in these moments of stillness, hear our struggles with the love you call us to practice... *Silence for personal confession.*

ASSURANCE OF GRACE:

Friends, hear the good news. God's love is so extravagant and inclusive that it knows no bounds. It transcends borders and speaks a universal language. Abide in that love. Find joy in that love. Be renewed by that love. Replicate that love in the world. Amen.

GLORIA PATRI: Music only

Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, Three-in-One, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

HYMN: Music only **"In Christ There is No East or West"****SCRIPTURE: John 15:9-17**

⁹ "As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete. ¹² This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I don't call you servants any longer, because servants don't know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last. As a result, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. ¹⁷ I give you these commandments so that you can love each other.

These are the Ancient Words given to us
so we may hear them anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: "Love Will Keep Us Together"

(With thoughts from John Barclay)

The last few weeks we have read how Jesus is conveying to us his vision of a relationship with us. We were sheep who knew their good shepherds. We were invited to stay in the fold. Last week we were branches on the vine; Jesus being the vine. If the branch was "dead" or ignored God, the branch is to be cut off and destroyed. Stay on the vine.

Jesus says that his followers are like that. Some of them are lovely fruit-bearing branches of himself; others are useless because they bear no fruit. Who was Jesus thinking of when he spoke of the fruitless branches? There are two answers.

First, he was thinking of the Jews. They were branches of God's vine, according to the Old Testament and the words of the prophets. But the Jews of Jesus' time refused to listen to him; they refused to accept him. Therefore, they were withered and useless branches.

Second, Jesus was thinking of something more general. He was thinking of Christians whose Christianity consisted of professing their faith without practice, words without deeds; he was thinking of Christians who were useless branches, all leaves and no fruit. And he was thinking of Christians who heard the message and accepted it and then fell away, renouncing their beliefs and becoming traitors to the Master they had once pledged themselves to serve. (Sound familiar?)

According to scholar William Barclay, there are three ways we can be useless branches. We can refuse to listen to Jesus Christ at all. We can listen to him, and then render him a lip-service unsupported by any deeds. We can accept him as Master, and then, in the face of the difficulties of the way or the desire to do as we like, abandon him. (Does this sound even MORE familiar?)

All of this describes how we can and cannot abide in Christ. Here's one more analogy that might bring clarity to this message, according to William Barclay. "This is a human analogy. All analogies are imperfect but we must work with the ideas which we possess."

Suppose in a moment of weakness we have fallen to temptation; we have made a mess of things; we are on the way down to corruption or immorality of mind and heart and mental strength. Now suppose that we have friends of a strong and loving nature, who rescue us from our degraded situation. There is only one way in which we can retain our reformation and keep ourselves on the right way. **We must keep contact with our friends.** If we lose that contact, chances are that our weakness will overcome us; the old temptations will rear their heads again; and we will fall. Our salvation lies in continual contact with the strength of our friends.

Abiding in Christ means something like that. The secret of the life of Jesus was his contact with God; again and again he withdrew into a solitary place to meet him. We must keep contact with Jesus. We cannot do that unless we deliberately take steps to do it. To take one example – to pray in the morning, even if it is for only a few moments, is to have an antiseptic for the whole day; sort of like a shot in the arm. It may mean arranging life, arranging prayer, arranging silence in such a way that there is never a day when we give ourselves a chance to forget Jesus.

We must keep contact with Jesus.

Finally, we must note that here there are two things laid down about good disciples. First, they enrich their own lives; their contact makes them fruitful branches. Second, they bring glory to God; the sight of their lives turns the thoughts of others to the God who made them like that.

The greatest glory of the Christian life is that by our life and conduct we can bring glory to God.

I hope this teaching from Mr. Barclay was as compelling for you as it was for me. Amen.

MUSIC: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

Robert J. Hughes

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: Mother of us all, Father of us all, Brother of us all, hear our prayer for the whole human family. We need your good grace in the whole human race. We need to search for ways to promote justice in our world. We need wisdom and patience. Most of all we need love for our neighbors and all who live on this earth with us.

We pray that all may go well with our mothers today and that they may be in good health physically and spiritually. We recognize that some mothers are not the same as shown on our TV’s, yet we love whomever mothered us throughout our lives.

We pray for the diversity of experiences of mothering and parenting, including also those who are struggling; those remembering children who have died; those who have experienced miscarriage; those who decided to let their children be adopted and those who adopted children; those experiencing infertility; those who chose not to raise children of their own but have helped shape the next generation; those healing from parents who did not show love; and those remembering mothers or children they are not in contact with.

We lift up all those on our prayer list who are struggling with their health. May they seek solace in knowing God is with them in all circumstances and will send medical workers to serve them as they recover or find wholeness.

To your name Fatherly, Brotherly, Motherly God, we ascribe all majesty and perfection and love, as we pray together the Lord’s Prayer . . .

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.

THREE-FOLD AMEN: Amen, Amen, Amen.

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING:

It is one thing to memorize the words of Jesus. But it is another thing to let those words transform us and rearrange our priorities and our lives. In these moments for quiet and reflection, what is it that God is inviting you to rearrange about your priorities? What is it that you want to offer to the Church and to the world as a practice of God’s love?

DOXOLOGY:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done;
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION: We serve you, Great God, with whatever we have, with our financial resources, with our musical skills, with our voices and our pens, with hands that can be folded in prayer and open in the service of others, with our feet that bring us here and take us out again into

the world for which you gave your Son Jesus in life and resurrection. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Friends, imagine what is possible. Imagine what our community would feel like if our own hearts embraced the unconditional love God has for us. Imagine what the nation would sound like if our words echoed the inclusive love God has for us. Imagine what the world would look like if our actions reflected the unwavering love God has for us. Go forth from this place, to transform possibility into reality and to join alongside God in transforming the world through love.

POSTLUDE: “Be Thou Exalted” Chester Nordman

PRAYER LIST: We pray for the health and well-being of all affected by the pandemic and we especially pray for:

Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, Becky Ballard, P.J. Bennett, Nelson Libell, Joe Knapp, Danny Ballard, Jim Garrett, Allan Pickens (father-in-law of Stacie Pickens), Durrelene, Marlene, Kathy and Linda (friends of Jackie Canterbury, Ronald Bopp (husband of Pastor’s friend)).

