

**AUGUST 27, 2023**  
**THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
***"IDENTITY"***



**ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
10207 Lincoln Trail  
Fairview Heights, IL  
Telephone 618-397-6323

Website: [www.stjohnfairview.org](http://www.stjohnfairview.org)  
e-mail – [stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com](mailto:stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com)  
Rev. Rosemary Captain

*Organist – Sharon Banjavcic*  
*Liturgy – Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay,*  
*Ushers –*

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431  
\*Please stand if comfortably able  
Respond when words are in bold

**ANNOUCEMENTS:**

**PRELUDE: "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"**  
William Croft

**PENNIES FOR MISSION: Food Pantry**

**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

Inspired by Psalm 138

One: Give thanks and praise to the Holy One!

**MANY: We bow down in reverence as we, the temple of the Living God, gather for worship.**

One: Sing praises with your whole heart!

**MANY: We exalt our God who is faithful and steadfast in love.**

One: Hear the word of our great and glorious God!

**MANY: We listen in anticipation for the Sovereign One remembers God's people.**

**\*INVOCATION:**

God of Many Names, we gather as a people formed by you. You drew us from the primordial and gestational waters. You give us breath and life and being. You meet us in the sanctuary and on the sofa. You call us by name with purpose, care, and love. May our time together in this space, online or onsite, remind us of our connectedness to you, each other, and all creation. May you be glorified, honored, and worshiped in spirit and in truth. May we be rooted, challenged, and encouraged in love. We welcome

your presence among us. We seek your guiding Spirit. We place our trust in you. Amen.

**OPENING HYMN: NCH 307**

**“Glorious Things of You are Spoken”**

**\*CALL TO CONFESSION:** Let us confess in our own way that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. This is no longer a secret to be locked up, but a door to be opened. Tell him your sins and come to him with a clean heart.

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESION:**

**Renewing God, we confess that all too often we conform to this world. The voices we prioritize are far removed from you. We drown out your Still Speaking Voice with the noise of consumerism and commercialism. We ignore your gentle nudge in favor of our own desires and comfort. We fail to actively love our neighbor, care for your creation, or even honor ourselves as your divine crafting. We resist transformation through the renewing of our minds and settle for echo chambers of thoughts and ideas that deplete and deprive our souls of abundant life. Forgive us and continually challenge us to be the people you have empowered and equipped us to be.**

**\*WORDS OF GRACE:**

The One who created you knows your struggles. God

is still speaking, renewing, and transforming. God’s grace is still sufficient and made new each and every day. God has faith in you and abides with you in the journey of new life and transformation.

**\*GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat two more times.) (end) One God always here. One God always here.**

**SCRIPTURE LESSON: Exodus 1:8-2: 10**

**Israel is oppressed**

<sup>8</sup> Now a new king came to power in Egypt who didn’t know Joseph. <sup>9</sup> He said to his people, “The Israelite people are now larger in number and stronger than we are. <sup>10</sup> Come on, let’s be smart and deal with them. Otherwise, they will only grow in number. And if war breaks out, they will join our enemies, fight against us, and then escape from the land.” <sup>11</sup> As a result, the Egyptians put foremen of forced work gangs over the Israelites to harass them with hard work. They had to build storage cities named Pithom and Rameses for Pharaoh. <sup>12</sup> But the more they were oppressed, the more they grew and spread, so much so that the Egyptians started to look at the Israelites with disgust and dread. <sup>13</sup> So the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. <sup>14</sup> They made their lives miserable with hard labor, making mortar and bricks, doing field

work, and by forcing them to do all kinds of other cruel work.

<sup>15</sup> The king of Egypt spoke to two Hebrew midwives named Shiphrah and Puah: <sup>16</sup> “When you are helping the Hebrew women give birth and you see the baby being born, if it’s a boy, kill him. But if it’s a girl, you can let her live.” <sup>17</sup> Now the two midwives respected God so they didn’t obey the Egyptian king’s order. Instead, they let the baby boys live.

<sup>18</sup> So the king of Egypt called the two midwives and said to them, “Why are you doing this? Why are you letting the baby boys live?” <sup>17</sup> Now the two midwives respected God so they didn’t obey the Egyptian king’s order. Instead, they let the baby boys live.

<sup>18</sup> So the king of Egypt called the two midwives and said to them, “Why are you doing this? Why are you letting the baby boys live?”

<sup>19</sup> The two midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because Hebrew women aren’t like Egyptian women. They’re much stronger and give birth before any midwives can get to them.” <sup>20</sup> So God treated the midwives well, and the people kept on multiplying and became very strong. <sup>21</sup> And because the midwives respected God, God gave them households of their own.

<sup>22</sup> Then Pharaoh gave an order to all his people: “Throw every baby boy born to the Hebrews into the Nile River, but you can let all the girls live.”

### **Moses’ birth**

<sup>2</sup> Now a man from Levi’s household married a Levite woman. <sup>2</sup> The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She saw that the baby was healthy and beautiful, so she hid him for three months. <sup>3</sup> When she couldn’t hide him any longer, she took a reed basket and sealed it up with black tar. She put the child in the basket and set the basket among the reeds at the riverbank. <sup>4</sup> The baby’s older sister stood watch nearby to see what would happen to him. <sup>5</sup> Pharaoh’s daughter came down to bathe in the river, while her women servants walked along beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds, and she sent one of her servants to bring it to her. <sup>6</sup> When she opened it, she saw the child. The boy was crying, and she felt sorry for him. She said, “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children.”

<sup>7</sup> Then the baby’s sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Would you like me to go and find one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?”

<sup>8</sup> Pharaoh's daughter agreed, "Yes, do that." So the girl went and called the child's mother. <sup>9</sup> Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I'll pay you for your work." So the woman took the child and nursed it. <sup>10</sup> After the child had grown up, she brought him back to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I pulled him out<sup>[a]</sup> of the water."

**RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 124: 1-8**

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**EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 12:1-8**

**Living sacrifice and transformed lives**

**12** So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. <sup>2</sup> Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

**Transformed relationships**

<sup>3</sup> Because of the grace that God gave me, I can say to each one of you: don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Instead, be reasonable since God has measured out a portion of faith to each one of you. <sup>4</sup> We have many parts in one body, but the parts don't all have the same function. <sup>5</sup> In the same

way, though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other. <sup>6</sup> We have different gifts that are consistent with God's grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, you should prophesy in proportion to your faith. <sup>7</sup> If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching. <sup>8</sup> If your gift is encouragement, devote yourself to encouraging. The one giving should do it with no strings attached. The leader should lead with passion. The one showing mercy should be cheerful.

**\*GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 16:3-20**

**Peter's declaration about Jesus**

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Human One is?" <sup>14</sup> They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the other prophets." <sup>15</sup> He said, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> I tell you that you are Peter.<sup>[b]</sup> And I'll build my church on this rock. The gates of the underworld won't be able to stand against it. <sup>19</sup> 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.”<sup>20</sup> Then he ordered the disciples not to tell anybody that he was the Christ.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**MESSAGE: “Who is He? Who are you”**

This is one of the most dramatic scenes in the Gospel of Matthew. In a stirring exchange of speeches, Peter names the mystery and declares that Jesus is “the Messiah. The Son of the living God,” and Jesus responds by blessing Peter and announcing that he is the “rock” upon which Jesus will establish his church. Occurring near the midpoint in this Gospel, this encounter has the feel of a turning point, a telling event of recognition upon which the story of Jesus pivots.

You might ask, “these men have been with Jesus for almost three years. They saw his healings and miracles and heard his teachings to them. Did they still not understand who he is?” That’s an excellent question.

We, the readers of this Gospel, have known who he was since the first sentence of this Gospel. Many times throughout the Gospel of Matthew, events and the disciples have made hints but it seems to me that they never really put it altogether. But this passage does. This passage is a culmination of prior elements in the Gospel. To speak metaphorically, streams that

have sprung forth earlier in Matthew now flow together into a deep and refreshing pool, from which the rest of the Gospel will draw.

No matter who the disciples confess that Jesus is, Jesus wants to know who others say Jesus is? To the popular mind, Jesus is *de’ja vu*: John, Jeremiah, Elijah or whoever they know about from the Torah are all the same. They might say “we’ve seen all this before. Nothing about Jesus is new, unique, or challenging; he is merely one of the old prophets recycled.” The people have turned Jesus, who is a window to the kingdom of heaven into a mirror. They look at Jesus but see only the reflection of religious ideas from the past.

What about today? It would be interesting to go out in the streets and ask people who Jesus is? And then ask them who is Jesus to you? To me, that is the key that can unlock the door to compassion, forgiveness, love, comfort, companionship, and so much more.

We all need to open that door to see who Jesus is to you? Or do we want to shut that door because of fear, misunderstanding, preconceived ideas, judgment, or because we just don’t have the time and we run away past this door blindly.

What do you think?

Amen.

**HYN OF RESPONSE: NCH 507**

**“Jesus, the very Thought to Me”**

**PASTORAL PRAYER:**

God of all generations, God of prophets and apostles, God of royalty and commoners, you are worshipped in tent and temple, in chapel and cathedral. Your great glory is sung by the simple and the wise, by poets and hymnists, by the untrained voice and the cultured singer. Your wisdom is sought by the illiterate and the widely-read under the open heavens and in libraries and places of learning. We rejoice that, though you are beyond our grasp, you have come within our reach in Jesus of Nazareth. Though your ways are untraceable, we may come to you by the way of Jesus, your Son, the Messiah.

And because of who you are, we can freely bring our problems and concerns to you. Today we lift up all the people on Maui who are mourning the loss of loved ones, their homes, and their community and town. May they know that you are with them in those struggles.

We pray for those who are ill or are facing surgery. Be with them to comfort them. We pray for all their care givers that they may care for these people with gentleness and compassion.

We pray for all people on our earth that suffer from the lack of food, water, shelter, and safety. May bullets and bombs cease and peace begin.

We also pray for ourselves. Help us in our struggle to do your will and serve others in any way we can.

Encourage us to pray more, read more, meditate more, give more to straighten our faith.

We pray all these things in the name of the one who taught us to pray . . .

**THE LORD'S PRAYER: 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

**PRAYER RESPONSE: NCH 327**

**“Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong; they are weak but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so.”**

**INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:**

Jesus promised, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” With such an unimaginable gift, we may be assured that our generous response will be greeted with more abundance. Let us devote the resources of our lives to the advancement of the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

**OFFERTORY: “In Times Like These”** Stewart Landon

**\*DOXOLOGY:**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures here below;  
Praise God above you heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

**PRAYER LIST:**

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND  
THANKSGIVING**

Giver of every gift, we give thanks for your provision that allows us to live a generous life. Use our offerings of time, talent, and treasure to expand your kingdom. May these gifts be magnified and meet the needs of this community and your world. Amen.

**\*CLOSING HYMN: NCH 52 "O, How I Love Jesus"**

**\*BENEDICTION**

As you go, take the keys of heaven with you. Unlock hope in a world in need of encouragement. Loose joy where there is despair. Give peace room to grow. Release love with every encounter. And the God of hope, joy, peace, and love will be with you.

**BENEDICTION RESPONSE:**

**"Let There Be Peace on Earth"**

**POSTLUDE: "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"**

Benton Price