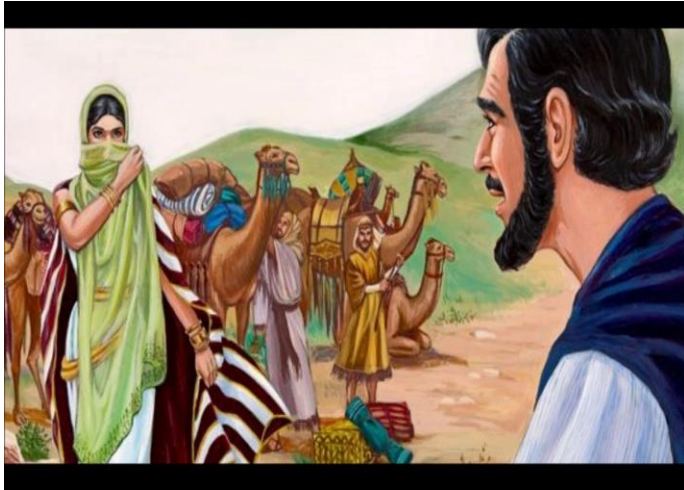


SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
JULY 9, 2023



ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Rev. Rosemary Captain

Organist – Sharon Banjavcic

Liturgy – Rev. Lavon Bayler

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: Come with joy and gladness to praise and honor God.
Come to the refreshing waters that God provides.

**MANY: God is gracious and merciful and full of
compassion. All creation joins us in giving thanks.**

ONE: Give ear, all people, to the law of God. Give thanks
for all the guidance of God gives us.

**MANY: God upholds all who are falling. God raises us up
when we are bowed down.**

ONE: Come, all who are weary and carry heavy burdens.
Come, for Christ has promised rest.

**MANY: The gentle spirit of Christ invites us. We have
come to find rest for our souls.**

***PRAYER OF INVOCATION:** We come together, gracious
God, because we have heard your invitation. We sense that
you alone know the burdens we carry. You understand our
weariness. Sometimes our journey seems long and without
respite. We long for the refreshment you provide as we
come to worship you. The anticipation of this hour of rest
and nourishment fills us with renewed joy and gladness.
We thank you, God, that your revelation comes to us, not
because we are worthy, but because we are open to your
word. Open our hearts to receive all you offer. Amen.

***CALL TO CONFESSION:** We live in a generation of
complainers, rich in things but poor in spirit. Increasingly
isolated in our abundance, we have denied the community
of mutual caring into which God has called us. It is easier
for us to find fault with others than to celebrate their
goodness. Let us seek God's mercy.

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

God, we do not understand our own actions. We turn away from the good we are intent on doing. Yet, we find wisdom in your law. We delight in the idea of mutual caring and celebrating life together, but we get bogged down in our own concerns. We are too busy to seek community and too preoccupied to ponder your will for us. We go our own way, cutting ourselves off from you and one another. O God, help us to put away this sin. Amen.

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:** God's forgiveness is realized most profoundly by those who understand their own emptiness and seek the refreshment God alone can provide. We are drawn to God and to one another by the Eternal Spirit who wills our unity, who offers help with the burdens we carry and invites us to find rest for our souls. Christ assures us: "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

***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 LESSONS: Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

³⁴ The man said, "I am Abraham's servant. ³⁵ The LORD has richly blessed my master, has made him a great man, and has given him flocks, cattle, silver, gold, men servants, women servants, camels, and donkeys. ³⁶ My master's wife Sarah gave birth to a son for my master in her old age, and he's given him everything he owns. ³⁷ My master made me

give him my word: 'Don't choose a wife for my son from the Canaanite women, in whose land I'm living. ³⁸ No, instead, go to my father's household and to my relatives and choose a wife for my son.'

⁴² "Today I arrived at the spring, and I said, 'LORD, God of my master Abraham, if you wish to make the trip I'm taking successful, ⁴³ when I'm standing by the spring and the young woman who comes out to draw water and to whom I say, "Please give me a little drink of water from your jar," ⁴⁴ and she responds to me, "Drink, and I will draw water for your camels too," may she be the woman the LORD has selected for my master's son.' ⁴⁵ Before I finished saying this to myself, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder and went down to the spring to draw water. And I said to her, 'Please give me something to drink.' ⁴⁶ She immediately lowered her water jar and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels something to drink too.' So I drank and she also gave water to the camels. ⁴⁷ Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son whom Milcah bore him.' I put a ring in her nose and bracelets on her arms. ⁴⁸ I bowed and worshipped the LORD and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who led me in the right direction to choose the granddaughter of my master's brother for his son. ⁴⁹ Now if you're loyal and faithful to my master, tell me. If not, tell me so I will know where I stand either way." ⁵⁸ They called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will go."

⁵⁹ So they sent off their sister Rebekah, her nurse, Abraham's servant, and his men. ⁶⁰ And they blessed Rebekah, saying to her, "May you, our sister, become thousands of ten thousand; may your children possess their enemies' cities."

⁶¹ Rebekah and her young women got up, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left.

⁶² Now Isaac had come from the region of Beer-lahai-roi and had settled in the arid southern plain. ⁶³ One evening, Isaac went out to inspect the pasture, and while staring he saw camels approaching. ⁶⁴ Rebekah stared at Isaac. She got down from the camel ⁶⁵ and said to the servant, "Who is this man walking through the pasture to meet us?"

The servant said, "He's my master." So she took her headscarf and covered herself. ⁶⁶ The servant told Isaac everything that had happened. ⁶⁷ Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent. He received Rebekah as his wife and loved her. So Isaac found comfort after his mother's death.

EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 7:15-25a

¹⁵ I don't know what I'm doing, because I don't do what I want to do. Instead, I do the thing that I hate. ¹⁶ But if I'm doing the thing that I don't want to do, I'm agreeing that the Law is right. ¹⁷ But now I'm not the one doing it anymore. Instead, it's sin that lives in me. ¹⁸ I know that good doesn't live in me—that is, in my body. The desire to do good is inside of me, but I can't do it. ¹⁹ I don't do the good that I want to do, but I do the evil that I don't want to

do. ²⁰ But if I do the very thing that I don't want to do, then I'm not the one doing it anymore. Instead, it is sin that lives in me that is doing it.

²¹ So I find that, as a rule, when I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me. ²² I gladly agree with the Law on the inside, ²³ but I see a different law at work in my body. It wages a war against the law of my mind and takes me prisoner with the law of sin that is in my body. ²⁴ I'm a miserable human being. Who will deliver me from this dead corpse? ²⁵ Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then I'm a slave to God's Law in my mind, but I'm a slave to sin's law in my body.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: From Fear to Love

In the last several weeks we have read two harrowing stories – the near deaths of both Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was exiled into the wilderness with his mother Hagar, but they were saved by God. Abraham was about to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, when angels of the Lord stopped him. Today we can take a deep breathe because we have a love story.

At the age of 127, Sarah, Isaac's mother, has died. The death of one generation moves to the promise of a new generation; but to fulfill that promise, Isaac needs a wife.

It was important to Father Abraham that Isaac's wife must not be a daughter of the Canaanites, among whom they were presently living. He had his trusted servant, whose name we never learn, take an oath that he would find a wife for Isaac back in the "old" country where

Abraham had family. We are not informed of the reason for this concern, for example, whether it relates to purity of genealogy or of religion. But the servant anticipates a problem. “Perhaps the woman will not want to leave her family and come with me. Do I move your son back there?” Abraham absolves the servant of the oath if that would happen.

Here we are reminded of the promise of the land in Canaan and of the call to leave that “old” homeland. It is clear that human action makes possible the fulfillment of the promise, just as Abraham and Sarah had set out in Genesis 12.

So, the “search” party was on. Can you imagine the anxiety of that servant? Where in the world will he find the perfect wife for Isaac? They didn’t have dating services back then. There was no bachelorette TV shows. Arranged marriages were very prevalent in those days and it is still a practice in some cultures. Many times couples were brought together for political reasons. That practice was definitely done in medieval times and even Queen Victoria’s daughters were shipped out to different countries to be wives of kings and princes. I can’t imagine having to marry who mommy says I have to. Unfortunately, women were seen as “producers” of heirs for the kings. That was their sole purpose in life. Did the couple learn to love each other? Maybe. Maybe not. And we all know what happened when the wife could not produce an heir. Think of Henry VIII.

Today, at least in our country, most young men and women have a choice of whom to marry. Do they find love? Maybe. Maybe not. In our Bible stories it is very rare for us

to read about couples who do love each other. However, verse 67 says Isaac loved Rebekah. You could say that was a match made in heaven and literally that would be true.

Abraham trusted God to find Isaac the perfect match. Rebekah trusted the servant who was a stranger to her as she agreed to follow him through the desert to marry a man she has never met. Rebekah said “yes” to God, just as Mary, the mother of Jesus, did.

It was all very important for the promise to be fulfilled. It depended on generations of faithful people, like us. It is evident that throughout each generation, God’s faithfulness has to be discovered anew.

Christianity survives when we discover God’s faithfulness anew. So, keep reading these Bible stories. They have something to tell us. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Founder of all nations, from one ancestor you have made all nations to inhabit the whole earth and allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live. It is appropriate then for us to pray to you not only for ourselves in this place but for all your family of nations everywhere.

We are grateful for giving us the opportunity to worship in peace and safety. Our forefathers fought for our liberties and we celebrated that event last Tuesday.

Today we remember those in our community who take care of us such as the police officers, EMT’s, fire fighters, and medical staff in emergency rooms. We also remember our leaders in offices that serve their constituents. May they serve with clarity and charity to all.

We pray for those who use guns and violence when they are confused, depressed, angry, and disagree with those around them. We remember all the victims and families of those affected by violence in this past week. Help us find solutions to these events of terror.

Today we lift up all those who struggle for their health and wellbeing. Mari Ella, Carson, Yvonne, Jackie, Marilyn, Beth, Mary, Syd, Ronald, Rosemary, Becky, David, and Urban. May they know your comfort as you stay with them in all their sufferings.

We thank you for sending your Son to show us how to love each other as we pray in his name. . .

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 769 "Hear Our Prayer"

**Hear our prayer, O God, hear our prayer, O God;
Incline your ear to us, and grant us your peace.**

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY: God has greatly blessed us with many kinds of wealth. Let our joy and gladness overflow as we express gratitude to God with our offerings. As we support the ministries of the church, let us consider those whose lives are grievously burdened, reaching out to them in practical acts of mercy.

***UNISON BLESSING OF THE GIFTS:**

With all the gifts of creation, you have blessed us, gracious God. We give thanks for all your works. Gratitude is our first impulse for giving. Accept our grateful hearts, along with our gifts. We ask for wisdom as our church determines priorities for the use of resources. May we be as concerned about outreach and mission as we are about programs for ourselves. As you are faithful to us, O God, may we be faithful in all things, seeking always to live by your gracious will. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: NCH 451 "Be Now Our Vision"**

***COMMISSION AND BLESSING:**

ONE: Carry with you, in your innermost selves, delight in God's law. Meditate day by day on God's purpose for you lives.

MANY: We rejoice that God dwells with us every day. We want to know and do God's will for us.

ONE: We encounter God in unexpected places. God surprises us in the life and witness of people.

MANY: We learn from the youngest in our midst. Simple and humble persons have much to teach us.

ONE: Take Christ's yoke upon you, for that yoke is easy. It imparts confidence that lightens our burdens.

MANY: We will find rest and renewal through Christ. We seek to express the same humility and gentleness.

Amen. **Amen.**

PRAYER LIST: