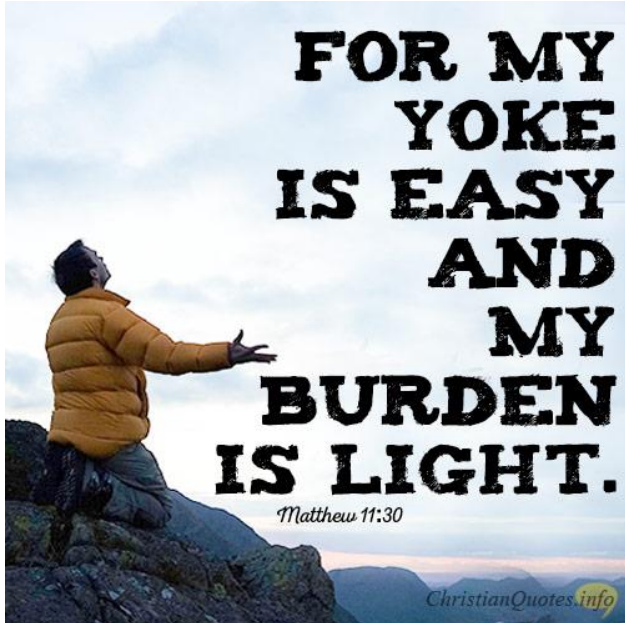


**23RD SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST
NOVEMBER 5, 2023**



**ST. JOHN UNITED
CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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Rev. Rosemary Captain

*Organist – Sharon Banjavcic
Liturgy – Rev. Thom Shuman*

(NCH) New Century Hymnal
CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRELUDE: “Where He Leads Me”

David Paxton

PENNIES FOR MISSION:

Open and Affirming Coalition

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP**

ONE: When we stand at the edge of fear and worry,

MANY: God invites us to step into the waters of faith and trust.

ONE: When we stand at the edge of the world's pain and need,

MANY: Jesus invites us to step into the land of humble service.

ONE: When we stand at the edge of our hunger and thirst:

MANY: the Spirit invites us to sit at the Table of grace.

***PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

God-ever-with-us: you draw us near to your heart, so that, cradled in compassion, we might see the brokenness of all who are around us.

Teacher-beside-us: you draw us near to yourself, so that, by following you, we may discover the deep joy of serving the broken of the world. As we draw near to you in this time, we invite the Holy Spirit to be with us. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: NCH 332**

“As We Gather at Your Table”

***CALL TO CONFESSION:**

We know how easy it is to do exactly the opposite of what we learn from our Teacher, Jesus. So, let us draw near to our God, for in confessing our failures, we will discover the grace and mercy

God has in store for us. Join me as we pray, saying,

***UNISON PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS:**

When we come to the edge of your holiness, Constant Love, we know how we have not lived as your children. We dam up for ourselves your rivers of love, while the lives around us turn into deserts of loneliness. All too quickly, we place our feet on the quicksand of fear, not wanting to step across to your faith. We tie up our angers and worries and burden our families and friends with them.

Forgive us, Listener to our hearts. By your patient grace, give us more time to practice our calling to discipleship, so we might learn all we need to live as sisters and brothers of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. *Silence is kept*

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON:**

ONE: This is the good news: God hears you, God forgives you, God is with you as you journey into that land called Promise.

MANY: Let the redeemed of God say: **this is indeed great news!**

Accepting God's word of joy and grace, we will live as God's children in all the days to come. Amen.

***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: Joshua 3:7-17

⁷The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to make you great in the opinion of all Israel. Then they will know that I will be with you in the same way that I was with Moses. ⁸You are to command the priests who carry the covenant chest, 'As soon as you come to the bank of the Jordan, stand still in the Jordan.'"

⁹Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come close. Listen to the words of the LORD your God." ¹⁰Then Joshua said, "This is how you will know that the living God is among you and will completely remove the Canaanites, and all the others who stand before you. ¹¹Look! The covenant chest of the ruler of the entire earth is going to cross over in front of you in the Jordan. ¹²Now pick twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one per tribe. ¹³The soles of the priests' feet, who are carrying the chest of the LORD, ruler of the whole earth, will come to rest in the water of the Jordan. At that moment, the water of the Jordan will be cut off. The water flowing downstream will stand still in a single heap."

Marching across the Jordan

¹⁴The people marched out from their tents to cross over the Jordan. The priests carrying the covenant chest were in front of the people. ¹⁵When the priests who were carrying the chest came to the Jordan, their feet touched the edge of the water. The Jordan had overflowed its banks completely, the way it does during the entire harvest

season. ¹⁶ But at that moment the water of the Jordan coming downstream stood still. It rose up as a single heap very far off, just below Adam, which is the city next to Zarethan. The water going down to the desert sea (that is, the Dead Sea) was cut off completely. The people crossed opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ So the priests carrying the LORD's covenant chest stood firmly on dry land in the middle of the Jordan. Meanwhile, all Israel crossed over on dry land, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM:

Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37 Page 93

EPISTLE LESSON: 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13 The Words of Paul

⁹ You remember, brothers and sisters, our efforts and hard work. We preached God's good news to you, while we worked night and day so we wouldn't be a burden on any of you. ¹⁰ You and God are witnesses of how holy, just, and blameless we were toward you believers. ¹¹ Likewise, you know how we treated each of you like a father treats his own children. ¹² We appealed to you, encouraged you, and pleaded with you to live lives worthy of the God who is calling you into his own kingdom and glory.

How the Thessalonians received God's message

¹³ We also thank God constantly for this: when you accepted God's word that you heard from us, you welcomed it for what

it truly is. Instead of accepting it as a human message, you accepted it as God's message, and it continues to work in you who are believers.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 23:1-12**

Ways of the legal experts and the Pharisees

23 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and his disciples, ² "The legal experts and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat. ³ Therefore, you must take care to do everything they say. But don't do what they do. ⁴ For they tie together heavy packs that are impossible to carry. They put them on the shoulders of others, but are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵ Everything they do, they do to be noticed by others. They make extra-wide prayer bands for their arms and long tassels for their clothes. ⁶ They love to sit in places of honor at banquets and in the synagogues. ⁷ They love to be greeted with honor in the markets and to be addressed as 'Rabbi.'

⁸ "But you shouldn't be called *Rabbi*, because you have one teacher, and all of you are brothers and sisters. ⁹ Don't call anybody on earth your father, because you have one Father, who is heavenly. ¹⁰ Don't be called *teacher*, because Christ is your one teacher. ¹¹ But the one who is greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² All who lift themselves up will be brought low. But all who make themselves low will be lifted up.

These are the ancient words

revealed to us anew.
Thanks be to God, Amen.

MESSAGE: “Burdens”

A few months ago I decided that I wanted to sew a dress for my granddaughter. My mother used to make a quilt for each of the grandchildren. I don't know how to quilt, so I thought a cute dress for each of the girls would be something they would remember from me. After all, I learned to sew in the Girl Scouts and in Home Ec many years ago. However, since I moved recently, I have no supplies so I went to a store to get help from experts.

The very nice lady at the store was good at her job. She reminded me of every step in the process as we filled up my cart. We found a pattern, some fabric and matching thread. Of course, I also needed shears, pins, a pin cushion, needles, marking chalk, and an iron and ironing board to keep the wrinkles out as I worked. And then I also needed a portable sewing machine, bobbins and all that goes with it. My cart overflowed and it was heavy. When I paid for everything and started to lug this heavy pack to my car, I thanked her for her knowledge and expertise. I said to her, “I bet you have sewn some beautiful garments.” She looked at me and said, “Are you kidding me? I don't sew anything. I go buy everything I need from ready-wear at Walmart. It's easier and faster.”

I think it was a case of “do as I say, not as I do.” That's exactly how I would describe Pharisees and scribes.

With this new chapter we are launched into the last of the five great blocks of teaching in the Gospel of Matthew. These blocks were constructed by the author of Matthew as the backbone of his gospel.

The Sermon on the Mount came first, then the commissioning of the disciples. Then the parables of the kingdom and the material on living in community in obedience to Jesus' teaching. As we begin chapter 23, we have another long, final block of teaching, balancing the Sermon on the Mount as we look ahead to the future and warning of what is to come.

In all of this, Matthew is saying, we are to regard Jesus as being like Moses, only more so. Moses, they believed, gave the people the five books of the law; Jesus gives them the five books of the new covenant, the new relationship between God and the world. Moses brought the people through the desert and led them to the point where they were ready to cross over the Jordan and go into the promised land. Jesus is leading his people through the desert to the point where he will lead them through death itself and on into the new world which God is going to make. Only, unlike Moses, he won't stay on this side of the river, leaving someone else to take the people across. He will go ahead, like his namesake Joshua, and lead them himself into the new world.

And now he finds himself surrounded with people who are telling fellow Jews about the heavy packs they need to carry on their back for the journey – but who never dream of carrying such things themselves. These legal experts, who are always going on about Moses: Moses said this, and Moses said that, do this, don't do that, watch out for this danger, remember to do this every day, and so on and on. From one point of view it looks like wonderful devotion, a lavish attention to the detail of the commandments which God gave to Israel. But from another point of view it looks like a saleslady telling a novice to sewing all the things she should carry, but never venturing to the sewing machine herself.

Jesus' charge against the scribes and Pharisees, which builds up through this chapter as a devastating catalogue of indictments, is not that they were wrong to pay attention to Moses. Matthew has made it clear all along that the Mosaic law, the Torah, was good and God-given. It should be observed. But what really mattered in it, as he said in chapter 22:37-39, were the big central matters loving God and loving your neighbor, which means justice and mercy and faithfulness. When it came to those, Jesus declared the legal experts who were so good at telling other people what to do but never lifted a finger to move the really heavy burdens.

Instead, they concentrated on outward show; how long the fringes on their prayer shawls were, how pious and

loud were their prayers, their titles of honor and places of honor, all the fame that a small society could afford. Jesus throws it all to the winds. It shows they haven't understood what Moses was all about. As I see it, their noses were so high in the air, they could trip over the "little people".

What about in our world today? I'm sure we could name a few people in or out of the church who think they "know it all" but its all words, no action to follow Jesus by helping and loving others. Instead, they make others do the heavy lifting. Some people get stuck doing all the work others should do, that they have too many heavy burdens and get burn-out.

What matters is the huge and humbling principle of today's last two verses. ¹¹But the one who is greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²All who lift themselves up will be brought low. But all who make themselves low will be lifted up."

When we look at those verses we realize, not for the first or last time, that we are indeed called to follow Jesus himself, who issued these condemnations not from a great or pompous height, but on the way to the cross. Jesus had seen that on the journey he and his true followers had to make there would be no room for inflated shopping bags. Jesus had already promised that his load was easy and his burden was light, and that people carrying heavy loads should take his instead. Now he was on the way to shoulder the heaviest

burden of all, so that his people would never be weighed down by it. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC: “Come to Me”
Christopher Grundy video

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Our God, you are good to all and your compassion is over all that you have made. Your universal Spirit prompts our prayers for all that you have made, both animate and inanimate.

Preserve your creation with the dedication of human ecologists guiding us in our stewardship of the good world that you have made and that continually needs to be gardened with your guidance and blessing. Help us undo whatever we may have done that has ravaged the land, that it may be restored for the enjoyment of generations yet unborn.

Sustain your church in every generation. Give wisdom to parents and teachers who hand down to children the tradition of the biblical revelation preserved from the beginning of the church. May your church always be open to new truths coming out of your word.

As in the spring the bloom of the first crocus gives us hope of the end of winter, so grant a sign of better days to those in days of discouragement and in the dry land of grief. Grant that their present wilderness and desert shall rejoice and blossom with new life. Send your healing Spirit to treat the sick and encourage those who care for them.

Bring hope to all who are in harm’s way as their governments disagree on who should rule the world. May peace prevail.

All these things we pray in the name of your son, Jesus the Christ . . .

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 772

Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten. Those who seek God shall never go wanting. Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten. God alone fills us.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

We bring the first fruits of our labor and toil to honor our Creator and give thanks for the wonder of life. We want to share the steadfast love of God through the ministries of this church and through our mission for others near and far. Let us give with joy.

OFFERTORY: “Make Me a Servant”

Kelly Willard

***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.

***UNISON PRAYER OF**

DEDICATION/OFFERING:

We offer our gifts in gratitude, Holy One, for all your blessings in our lives. Use them to touch the lives of all who stand on the edge of hope, of peace, of community that they might step into these promises of yours with confidence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

***HOLY COMMUNION:**

May creation's Guide be with you!

And also with you!

Weary wanderers,
offer your hearts to God;
who takes us by the heart to lead us back to faithfulness.

Do not hesitate,
but step forward in joy into God's life.
We will do so, singing to the One who immerses us in hope.

Standing at the edge of chaos, you cried out, Exalted Love, and all creation sprang forth from the goodness of your Word. Grace overflowed from your heart, racing through the deep valleys of hope. Creating us in your image, breathing life and joy into us, you drew us near to you, so we could live in joy with you. But we chose to wander through the deserts of death, paving over Eden's promise with our sins. Like a parent with her children, you encouraged us to change, sending the prophets to bring us back. But we would not listen, tying up the burdens of our lives and putting them on their

backs. Then you chose to send Jesus, to be the Witness to your never-ending love for us.

So, with wanderers and witnesses, with those who cried out to you, and those who followed your promises, we lift our praises with our sisters and brothers who forever sing your praises: **Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of steadfast love. All creation overflows with your grace and mercy. Hosanna in the highest!**

Blessed is the One who calls us to humble service. Hosanna in the highest!

You are holy, Creation's Guide, and Jesus Christ, your Son, our Teacher, is the One who comes to redeem us. Seeing the barren lives we lead, he came to till the rich soil of your hopes and dreams, that it might bear life in us. Watching us stumble along sin's side streets, he takes us by the hand, to lead us to your feast. When we would allow our pride to become entangled with death, he gently takes this burden from off our shoulders, carrying it to the cross, and leaving it behind in the tomb, as he strides forth into the promised land of resurrection.

As we remember his words and witness, as we would let his teachings shape our lives, we speak of what we believe, great is the mystery of faith:

**Christ was sent to be God's Witness.
Christ is our Teacher of the Way.
Christ will come to welcome us home.**

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon those

gathered from every corner of the world, and upon the gifts of the bread and the cup. As your grace fills us, may we go forth, in thanksgiving and humility, to feed the hungry around us. As the cup turns our parched souls into fountains of hope, may we overflow in service to those who wander in our midst.

Then, when all time has ended, when the truly humble find themselves seated beside you at the Table in eternity, we will join our voices in thanksgiving to you, Most Holy. Amen.

SHARING THE ELEMENTS

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**
Eternal God, we thank you for your presence in the simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. By the power of your Holy Spirit, unite us with all whom Christ welcomes, that we may be the servant church of the servant Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: NCH 531**
“God, Speak to Me”

***BENEDICTION: Sending**
Go forth as God's people into the world.
We will go to serve those who stand at the edges of life.
Go forth as sisters and brothers of Jesus.
We will go to teach the world the ways of peace and hope.
Go forth as those filled with the Spirit.
We will go to share our lives with everyone we meet.

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE:**
“Let There Be Peace on Earth”

POSTLUDE: “Sing and Rejoice”
Randolph Johnston

PRAYER LIST: Carson Edwards, Yvonne Weber, Marilyn Paul, Syd Safriet, Ronald Bopp, Rosemary Williams, Becky Ballard, David Seneczyn, Urban Baum, Amy Smith, Dawn Cipponeri family, all care givers who perform the work of God to those who need help.