

OCTOBER 29, 2023
TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY
AFTER PENTECOST
“LOVE”



ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF
CHRIST

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Liturgy – Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay
Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal

CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.
Respond with words in bold print.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

**PRELUDE: “More Love to Thee/
I Love Thee” Tom Fettke**

PENNIES FOR MISSION:

Neighbors in Need

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

(Inspired by Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17)

One: The Holy One has been our hope
and our home.

**Many: God has been with us from
generation to generation.**

One: We flourish and fade, bloom and
renew in God’s time.

**Many: Our lives are temporal and
precious and glorious.**

One: May the compassion and favor of
the Holy One be with us.

**Many: May we be glad and prosperous
in our work for our God!**

***INVOCATION:**

Righteous God, your law is love. Your
message is love. Your presence is love.
May Love fill our atmosphere and our
interactions as we gather together in
your name. May Love transform us,
renew us, and revive us. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: NCH 12**

“I Sing the Mighty Power of God”

***UNISON PRAYER FOR**

TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:

**Loving God, forgive us for the paths we
seek that steer us away from you. We
confess that we have embraced
animosity over understanding, self-**

righteousness over grace, hopelessness over empowered action. Demonstrate the power of love to us anew. Help us to be loving agents of your kingdom for your glory and the restoration of the world. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE**

Beloved, know that your path evolves and the Creator cuts through the wilderness to make the rough ways smooth. The Holy One is Companion and Guide gently and firmly encouraging us to the path of righteous love, justice, and peace.

***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:

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Moses' death

34 Then Moses hiked up from the Moabite plains to Mount Nebo, the peak of the Pisgah slope, which faces Jericho. The LORD showed him the whole land: the Gilead region as far as Dan's territory; ² all the parts belonging to Naphtali along with the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, as well as the entirety of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea; ³ also the arid southern plain, and

the plain—including the Jericho Valley, Palm City—as far as Zoar.

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses: "This is the land that I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I promised: 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have shown it to you with your own eyes; however, you will not cross over into it."

⁵ Then Moses, the LORD's servant, died—right there in the land of Moab, according to the LORD's command. ⁶ The Lord buried him in a valley in Moabite country across from Beth-peor. Even now, no one knows where Moses' grave is.

⁷ Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eyesight wasn't impaired, and his vigor hadn't diminished a bit.

⁸ Back down in the Moabite plains, the Israelites mourned Moses' death for thirty days. At that point, the time for weeping and for mourning Moses was over.

⁹ Joshua, Nun's son, was filled with wisdom because Moses had placed his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to Joshua, and they did exactly what the LORD commanded Moses.

¹⁰ No prophet like Moses has yet emerged in Israel; Moses knew the LORD face-to-face! ¹¹ That's not even to mention all those signs and wonders that the LORD sent Moses to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh, to all his servants,

and to his entire land— ¹² as well as all the extraordinary power that Moses displayed before Israel’s own eyes!

RESPONSORIAL PSALM:

Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17 Page 680-681

EPISTLE LESSON: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8
Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica

2 As you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, our visit with you wasn’t a waste of time. ² On the contrary, we had the courage through God to speak God’s good news in spite of a lot of opposition, although we had already suffered and were publicly insulted in Philippi, as you know. ³ Our appeal isn’t based on false information, the wrong motives, or deception. ⁴ Rather, we have been examined and approved by God to be trusted with the good news, and that’s exactly how we speak. We aren’t trying to please people, but we are trying to please God, who continues to examine our hearts. ⁵ As you know, we never used flattery, and God is our witness that we didn’t have greedy motives. ⁶ We didn’t ask for special treatment from people— not from you or from others— ⁷ although we could have thrown our weight around as Christ’s apostles. Instead, we were gentle with you like a nursing mother caring for her own children. ⁸ We were glad to share not only God’s good news with you but also our very lives because we cared for you so much.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 22:34-46**
Great commandment

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had left the Sadducees speechless, they met together. ³⁵ One of them, a legal expert, tested him. ³⁶ “Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷ He replied, “*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.*” ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: *You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.* ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

Question about David’s son

⁴¹ Now as the Pharisees were gathering, Jesus asked them, ⁴² “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” “David’s son,” they replied.

⁴³ He said, “Then how is it that David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, called him Lord when he said, ⁴⁴ *The Lord said to my lord, ‘Sit at my right side until I turn your enemies into your footstool’?*” ⁴⁵ If David calls him Lord, how can he be David’s son?” ⁴⁶ Nobody was able to answer him. And from that day forward nobody dared to ask him anything.

These are the ancient words
revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “Who wins the match?”

With thoughts from Rev. N.T. Wright.

During the last few weeks we have seen Jesus and the Temple officials go back

and forth with questions. It is sort of like a tennis match; back and forth the ball goes and so do the heads of the spectators. It's enough to give a person a stiff neck. But that's how the end of Matthew 22 is meant to strike us. The answer the opponents couldn't question was followed by the question they couldn't answer.

Which is the greatest commandment, they asked? Jesus' answer was so traditional that nobody could challenge him on it, and so deeply searching that everyone else would be challenged by it. Then it was Jesus' turn; is the Messiah David's son or David's Master – or perhaps both? The Pharisees had never been asked that question before, and they certainly didn't know the answer, even though it was standing in front of them in flesh and blood.

The next occasions when Jesus will meet his opponents will be in the garden when they arrest him, in the Council when they accuse him, and on the cross when they mock him. But each time they will know, he will know, and we, as Matthew's readers, will know, that Jesus knows the answers to these questions and they do not. Jesus also knows, and Matthew wants us to know as well, that his arrest, trial, and crucifixion are precisely the way in which Jesus is fulfilling the two great commandments, and the way in which he is being enthroned both as David's son, the true king of Israel, and David's master, David's Lord. This is how, as the son of

God in a still fuller sense, he has come to rescue his people.

The greatest commandment that both Jesus and all Jews know is *"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind."* Even Jews today repeat this commandment everyday as a prayer. The question is do they and we keep this commandment?

In chapter 15 of the Gospel of Matthew Jesus has already spoken of the need for the heart to be renewed. So by this commandment and others, people will produce words and deeds which are appropriate, rather than making people impure by not following the commandments. Pharisees consider those who do not follow the commandments impure. They miss the true importance of ignoring the commandments to love God and others. The importance of these commandments is to renew our hearts. Jesus challenges us to renew our hearts, not just that our outward actions should conform with the proper standard. In other words, are we "showing up" or "showing off?"

Even those of us who have spent our whole lives trying to follow Jesus and live by his grace and love know that the heart doesn't seem to get renewed all in one swing of the tennis racket. Many, many bits of darkness and impurity still lurk in its depths, and sometimes take a lot of work, prayer and counsel to dig out and replace with the love which we

all agree should be there. When these commandments about love are seen not as orders to be obeyed in our own strength, but as invitations and promises to a new way of life in which, bit by bit, hatred and pride can be left behind and love can become a reality.

Game, set, and match. Don't get hurt jumping over the net when you win.
Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC:

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

"The Gift of Love" Video

"THE GIFT OF LOVE"

**Though I may speak with bravest fire,
And have the gift to all inspire,
And have not love, my words are vain,
As sounding brass, and hopeless gain.**

**Though I may give all I possess,
And striving so my love profess,
But not be given by love within,
The profit soon turns strangely thin.**

**Come, Spirit, come, our hearts control,
Our spirits long to be made whole.
Let inward love guide every deed;
By this we worship, and are freed.**

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Ever gracious God, we thank you for teaching us about love by sending your son to be our example. And by sending your Holy Spirit to be with us, we have a guide to help us renew our hearts and we learn to love everyone, even those we thought were unlovable.

Thank you, loving God, for lifting up and carrying those without strength. You restore the health and strengthen those who are sick and suffering. Continue to be present to those who are close to death, that they may be reassured of your grace with strong hope to pass beyond seeing you now in a mirror, dimly, but afterwards to see you face to face, knowing fully what now they know in part.

Today we continue to pray for all those in harm's way in the wars in the Ukraine and in Palestine. May those in charge of battles remember that if everything and everyone is destroyed, there is nothing left to fight for.

To Jesus your faithful witness, to you our heavenly parent, and to your loving Holy Spirit be given all honor and glory, time without end. As we pray your prayer together . . .

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:

Sharing of the abundance we receive is a tangible way to love our neighbor as ourselves. May we give with generous and empathetic hearts stirred to compassion and to companion to meet the needs before us.

OFFERTORY: "In His Presence"

Bertha R. Frick

***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 AND THANKSGIVING:**

Giving God, we follow your example of the ministry of presence in the sharing of our resources. Prosper the work of our hands and minds and enable us to make a difference and participate in your kingdom through generosity. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: NCH 456**

"More Love to You, O Christ"

***BENEDICTION:**

May the love of God dispel the gloom, ease the disquiet, and fill your soul with gladness.

You are loved. You are love.

Go in peace and the love of God for the glory of God and the hope for creation.

***BENEDICTION RESONSE: "Let There Be Peace on Earth"**

POSTLUDE: "In God We Trust"

R.J. Hughes

PRAYER LIST: Steve Miller, Carson Edwards, Yvonne Weber, Marilyn Paul, Syd Safriet, Ronald Bopp, Rosemary Williams, Becky Ballard, David Seneczyn, Urban Baum, Amy Smith, Dawn Cipponeri family, Jackie Canterbury.