

SUNDAY, MAY 26, 2024
TRINITY SUNDAY
JOHN 3:1-17

"BORN OF WATER AND SPIRIT"



Born of water and the Spirit - John 3:5

ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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(NCH) New Century Hymnal CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

PRELUDE: "Breathe on Me, Breath of God"

Mark Hayes

PENNIES FOR MISSION: UCC Strengthen the Church

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

(Inspired by Psalm 29)

One: Credit the Holy One with glory and power!

Many: Give God the honor due with worshipful reverence!

One: The Voice speaks and we hear. The Voice thunders and creation moves.

Many: The Voice is strong and mighty, secure and majestic.

One: The Living Water refreshes us. The Holy Spirit strengthens us.

Many: Bless the name of our God!

***INVOCATION:**

Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh upon us. Renew us by your continued creative acts in the world. Your presence among us is a blessing and a gift. Open us to receive, ponder, and grow as you communicate with your people. In Voice, Body, and Spirit, we worship you and invite your transformative power to

be alive among us and at work in us. Here we are, O Triune God, here we are. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 293 "Sweet, Sweet Spirit"**

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

God of mercy and grace, you come to us with loving compassion. You know our shortcomings and our willfulness. Make us new as we seek to become the people you have called us to be. Help us live according to the spirit and in union with you and community with our neighbors. Give us a burden to be instruments and witnesses of your loving kindness in the world. Hold us accountable as your empowered people. Let repentance and hope for new life overcome any sense of shame that may paralyze us in our past mistakes and misdeeds as we turn toward you with wonder and expectation that you will lead us into life abundantly for all. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Beloved, you are known by the Holy One and invited to live into the life shaped for you in the divine image. Shame and discouragement are not your portion. Holy Love meets you with grace and gladness with the gift of new life in Christ. Receive it

for the glory of God, our Source, Friend, and Counselor. 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 twice) (end) One God always here. One God always here.**

**SCRIPTURE LESSONS: First Testament Isaiah 6:1-8
The divine throne room**

6 In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a high and exalted throne, the edges of his robe filling the temple. ²Winged creatures were stationed around him. Each had six wings: with two they veiled their faces, with two their feet, and with two they flew about. ³They shouted to each other, saying:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of heavenly forces!
All the earth is filled with God's glory!"

⁴The doorframe shook at the sound of their shouting, and the house was filled with smoke.

⁵I said, "Mourn for me; I'm ruined! I'm a man with unclean lips, and I live among a people with unclean lips. Yet I've seen the king, the LORD of heavenly forces!"

⁶Then one of the winged creatures flew to me, holding a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷He touched my mouth and said,

“See, this has touched your lips. Your guilt has departed, and your sin is removed.”

⁸ Then I heard the Lord’s voice saying, “Whom should I send, and who will go for us?” I said, “I’m here; send me.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 29 Page 638

EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 8:12-17

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it isn’t an obligation to ourselves to live our lives on the basis of selfishness. ¹³ If you live on the basis of selfishness, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the actions of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ All who are led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons and daughters. ¹⁵ You didn’t receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children. With this Spirit, we cry, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶ The same Spirit agrees with our spirit, that we are God’s children. ¹⁷ But if we are children, we are also heirs. We are God’s heirs and fellow heirs with Christ, if we really suffer with him so that we can also be glorified with him.

***GOSPEL LESSON: John 3:1-17** Jesus and Nicodemus

³ There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. ² He came to Jesus at night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could do these miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him.”

³ Jesus answered, “I assure you, unless someone is born anew, (*or from above*) it’s not possible to see God’s kingdom.”

⁴ Nicodemus asked, “How is it possible for an adult to be born? It’s impossible to enter the mother’s womb for a second time and be born, isn’t it?”

⁵ Jesus answered, “I assure you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom. ⁶ Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Don’t be surprised that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ ⁸ God’s Spirit (*or wind*) blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. It’s the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹ Nicodemus said, “How are these things possible?”

¹⁰ “Jesus answered, “You are a teacher of Israel and you don’t know these things? ¹¹ I assure you that we speak about what we know and testify about what we have seen, but you don’t receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell

you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Human One (*or Son of Man*). ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so must the Human One (*or Son of Man*) be lifted up ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. ¹⁶ God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life. ¹⁷ God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: "Who are you from home?"

I have been told that is how some people in the deep south address a new person in their community. If they find out they do your family, the next appropriate question is "How's your mama?" That is always the perfect and accepting way to greet someone in the south. Having people know who you are, where you are from, and what family you come from is very important.

When Jesus talks to Nicodemus about the new birth, and when the Gospel of John highlights this conversation by making it the first of several in-depth discussions Jesus has in this gospel, we

shouldn't suppose that this means that we should spend all our time thinking about the moment of our own spiritual birth. (I'll talk more about that later.)

What does it matter where we came from? The Judaism that Nicodemus and Jesus both knew had a good deal to do with *being born into the right family*. What mattered was being a child of Abraham. Of course, other things mattered too, but this was basic. Now, Jesus is saying, God is starting a new family in which this ordinary birth isn't enough. You need to be born all over again, born "from above". (The same word here, can mean "a second time" and "from above. We should probably understand both with the emphasis on "from above": the point, as with John 1:12-13, is that THE INITIATIVE REMAINS GOD'S.)

The new birth Jesus is talking about is the same thing that has been spoken of in 1:33. "Water and spirit" here must mean the double baptism: baptism in water, which brings people into the kingdom movement begun by John the Baptist and continued by Jesus' disciples (3:22, 4:1-2), and baptism in the spirit, the new life, bubbling up from within, that Jesus offers, which is the main thing that this whole book is about.

The point of this passage is that this double-sided new birth, which brings you into the visible

community of Jesus' followers (water-baptism) and gives you the new life of the spirit welling up like a spring of water inside you (spirit-baptism), was now required for membership in God's kingdom. Indeed (as Jesus says in verse 3), without it you can't even see God's kingdom. You can't glimpse it, let alone get into it.

If you are like me, you want to know more about this spirit-baptism. Did I miss something? I searched for an answer and found lots of different answers. Some denominations consider receiving the Holy Spirit as a sacrament. The UCC does not. The UCC has two sacraments; water baptism and the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion.

You are welcome to research this subject yourself. I don't know if I have the correct answer as for as belonging to the United Church of Christ. But here's a try. When we are baptized with water, the water is blessed and the Pastor calls for the Holy Spirit to enter the water. The words the pastor uses include, "I baptize you in the name of God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

When we celebrate Holy Communion, the Pastor prays for the Holy Spirit to enter into the elements. (Next time, listen for those words.) So when we partake of the elements, the Holy Spirit and Jesus himself comes within us. As often as we participate

in communion, we receive the spirit-baptism over and over and over again.

In the UCC Statement of Faith it reads, "We believe in the triune God: Creator, resurrected Christ, the sole Head of the church, and the Holy Spirit, who guides and brings about the creative and redemptive work of God in the world."

IN other words, whenever we receive communion we are reenergized with the Holy Spirit, so WE AREN'T MISSING ANYTHING.

So, according to our denomination's statement of faith, which I believe we all adhere to, as long as we are baptized and participate in Holy Communion, we have met "the requirements" for membership in God's kingdom. Thanks be to God. Amen

PS At the end of this bulletin I included another voice in our search for the Holy Spirit. This was written by Andy Lang who was the first Executive Director of the Open and Affirming Coalition for the United Church of Christ. After years of encouraging churches to become Open and Affirming, he has retired.

SPECIAL MUSIC: "Holy, Holy, Holy" Video Anthem Lights

PASTORAL PRAYER:

God of all times and places, we give thanks to you for all that you have created for us to share in our world. We celebrate any victory accomplished in justice over oppression. Help us continue to make a just world for all.

Bless and extend the church of your Son, our Savior. Inspire all members of your church that they may continue to care for each other in our difficult world. Sustain all members of our faith family including those who cannot be with us in person.

First Creator, by your love we are given children through the miracle of birth. May we greet each new child with joy and surround them with your love so they may know who you are and want to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Bless every agency that seeks to serve children who have had difficult events in their short lives.

Loving Christ, send your healing spirit to the sick in body, mind, or spirit, renew them in strength and in the trust that your power will keep them in your care, that, in life and in death, underneath are your everlasting arms.

We ask that your Holy Spirit be with us every day to give us the courage to spread your love to all

people in all places. We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus . . .

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: "O How He Loves You and Me"

**O how he loves you and me,
O how he loves you and me;
He gave his life – what more could he give?
O how he loves you, O how he loves me,
O how he loves you and me!**

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

The Triune God gives with abundance for the flourishing of community. We do not receive gifts, blessings, favors, and resources for ourselves without sharing them with others. We are created to be communal, compassionate, and generous. Let us bring our gifts forward with gladness and gratitude that we have the honor of participating in God's liberating and redemptive activity in the world.

OFFERTORY: "Walking with the Master" L. E. Stairs

***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

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION:**

Generous God, May we give gifts that are sufficient and abundant as you have provided creation with all that we need to flourish. May the fear of scarcity give way to the joy of sharing. Magnify the resources we bring as well cultivate generosity within us so that all needs are met, and all your people may be well and whole in your name. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 499 “When We are Living”**

BENEDICTION:

Go forth having heard the call of the Holy One.
Go forth loved by the Creator, Redeemer, and Companion.
Go forth strengthened by the Sender, the Sent, and the Spirit.
Receive the gift of new birth and eternal life.
Testify to these things.
Enter the kingdom of God.

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE:**

“Let There Be Peace on Earth”

POSTLUDE: “Echo Fanfare” Lani Smith

COME, HOLY SPIRIT

by [Andy Lang](#) | published on May 28, 2020

As Christian churches prepare to celebrate the feast of Pentecost, unlike the disciples in Acts 2:1, we will not be “gathered in one place.” But in our homes on Sunday, the Spirit still has the power it had then to fill the Church with Pentecostal fire.

Our ancestors in faith experienced the Spirit not only as an overwhelming experience that transformed their lives, but as the beginning of a life-long journey. They understood the Holy Spirit as the giver of gifts that helped and accompanied them on that journey – seven spiritual gifts that we need to reclaim.

Six of the seven gifts are identified in Isaiah 11:2 (The Inclusive Bible, adapted):

*The Spirit of the Lord will rest on you—
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a spirit of counsel and strength,
a spirit of knowledge and reverence for the Lord.*

To this, the ancient Greek translation of Isaiah added a seventh gift of piety, which means more than folded hands and a bowed head, but a life completely open to God and therefore to others. The gift of piety is a way of life that says “yes” to God’s compassion and “no” to narcissism, greed, and self-righteousness.

In an age when lies obscure truth and denial of science threatens the future of human life, Isaiah offers a vision of life empowered by the gifts of God’s spirit, where wisdom and understanding overcome unthinking hatred, where counsel and strength empower us in the struggle for justice and peace, where knowledge and reverence show us the way that leads us out of despair towards trust in the power of God’s love.

This means that a Spirit-filled life has ethical and political consequences. The gifts of the spirit demand equity and justice:

*You will delight in obeying the Lord,
and you won’t judge by appearances
or make decisions by hearsay.*

*You will treat the poor with fairness
and will uphold the rights of the land’s
downtrodden...*

Justice will be the belt around your waist—

faithfulness will gird you up. (Isaiah 11:3-5, TIB, adapted)

Life in the power of the spirit leads step-by-step to God’s future, an amazing future in which:

*There will be no harm, no destruction
anywhere on my holy mountain;
for as water fills the sea,*

*so the land will be filled with the knowledge of the
Lord.* (Isaiah 11:9, TIB, adapted)

Isaiah’s vision of a Spirit-filled life is a leap of faith. It is impossible to believe God’s future could be real when the current crisis has not only filled our lives with fear, but revealed the cruelty of the systemic injustices that have left hundreds of millions in this emergency without sufficient health care, work, food and basic services. The struggles we face can crush our hope and paralyze our spirits. But Pentecost is a chance for us to open our minds and hearts to the Holy Spirit’s gifts. The Spirit can liberate us from fear and show the way that leads to God’s future reign.

In the words of an ancient song: “Come, Holy Spirit, inflame the light of our senses, pour love into our hearts, strengthen our weakness with lasting power.”

Andy Lang