



First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation
April 21, 2024 ♦ 4th Sunday of Easter



This bulletin is designed to assist you as you watch our livestreamed worship service, whether you follow along live or view it at a later time. The stream can be found on our YouTube channel at this location:

<https://www.youtube.com/@AnokaUCC>

Welcome & Announcements

Centering Music

Diana Holister

The Church Bell Rings

* Opening Hymn "Rejoice, You Pure in Heart" #55 (*alt word in v.5*)

**Rejoice, you pure in heart; lift praises to the sky;
your festal banner wave with joy, the cross of Christ raise high!
[refrain] Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, give thanks and sing!**

**Bright youth and seasoned age, strong souls and spirits meek,
raise high your free, exulting song, God's wondrous praises speak. [refrain]**

**With voice as full and strong as ocean's surging praise,
send forth the hymns the saints have loved, the psalms of ancient days. [refrain]**

**Yes, on through life's long path, still chanting as you go,
from youth to age, by night and day, in gladness and in woe: [refrain]**

**Praise God who [loves] all worlds, the risen Christ adore,
praise God the Spirit, Holy Fire, one God forevermore! [refrain]**

* Call to Worship and Opening Prayer (*drawn in part from Psalm 68*)

One: Sing to God; sing praises to her name;

Many: praise her who rides upon the clouds!

One: Holy is her name; rejoice before her!

Many: Mother of orphans and defender of widows, in God is her holy habitation!

One: God settles the solitary in a home bringing prisoners into prosperity.

Many: God, when you marched before your people, when you moved out through the wilderness, the earth trembled at your presence.

One: You showered rain in abundance, and when your people grew weary, you prepared rest.

Many: Your creatures have found a dwelling in you, Holy One, who provides in your goodness for the oppressed.

One: The Author of Life gave the word;

Many: Those who proclaim the good news are a multitude!

One: Let us pray.

Many: The prophets are always talking about widows and orphans, God. We know that you mean anyone who lacks security, anyone who knows oppression, anyone who is told that they aren't worthy. Give us the strength to live out that call to protect widows and orphans in all that we do. Give us the courage to use our power in ways that spread Good News to all who cry out in pain. Help us to always walk in the Way of Jesus! Amen.

A Time for Children (10:30)

Prayer of Preparation

“Amen, Amen” #161 (*alt lyrics*)

(refrain) Amen, amen, amen, amen, amen!

Jesus died and rose again **(amen)** / Mary found him waiting **(amen)**
on Easter morning! **(amen, amen, amen!)**

Easter brings us joy **(amen)** / joy and laughter **(amen)**
Let us all rejoice! **(amen, amen, amen!)**

Like a fiery phoenix **(amen)** / Jesus lives again **(amen)**
This is truly Good News! **(amen, amen, amen!)**

Choir Anthem

“Jesus Walked this Lonesome Valley”
Anoka UCC Chancel Choir; Don Shier, Director

arr. Schrader

*Jesus walked this lonesome valley; he had to walk it by himself.
Oh, nobody else could walk it for him; he had to walk it by himself.
Jesus prayed for his disciples; he prayed alone for you and me.
Oh nobody else, could bear such sorrow; he prayed alone for you and me.
Jesus died on Calv'ry's mountain; he died alone for you and me.*

*Oh nobody else could die for sinners; he had to die for you and me.
Jesus rose from death's dark prison; he lives again for you and me.
Oh, nobody else could bring us vict'ry; he is alive to set us free.*

Scripture Reading – Jeremiah 7:1-7

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah, you that enter these gates to worship the LORD. ³ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place. ⁴ Do not trust in these deceptive words: "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD." ⁵ For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, ⁶ if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, ⁷ then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Many: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Hymn

*"Standing at the Future's Threshold" (#538 vv. 1-4)
We will sing this to NETTLETON ("Come, Thou Fount" #459)*

**Standing at the future's threshold, grateful for God's guiding hand,
asking no protected stronghold, called to be a pilgrim band.
Seeking every for new vision of the gospel for our day.
We move forward in God's mission with our faith to show the way.**

**Midst the teeming cities' millions, witness to God's boundless love.
Reaching for each system's lost ones, seeking justice with each move.
Grant us courage, strength, and patience to contend with vicious power,
lead us forward in the faith that gives us hope in testing's hour.**

**Open-hearted in exchanges with the faithful not our own,
trusting God's way with these strangers not to leave the truth unknown,
joining them in shared endeavor where we have Christ's clear command,
we have faith that calls us ever toward this good earth's promised land.**

**Building justice as the bulwark of the peace that God would give.
Making sacrifice the hallmark of the life we're called to live:
grant us, God, to bear our witness to this peace in Christ, and move
forward with our faith's own access to the life of hope and love.**

Prayers of the People

Sung Prayer



Hear our prayer, O God, hear our prayer, O God; in -
cline your ear to us, and grant us your peace.

Prayer of Our Savior (unison)

*The Prayer has many versions; pray whichever you desire (debts, sins, trespasses, etc.).
We affirm that God has many names, so use one of the suggested or another of your choosing.*

Our Father/Mother/Creator, 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. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Offering

Text-to-Give: [844-334-1477](tel:844-334-1477)

*Thank you for your gifts to our ministries!
If you are watching from home (live or later), please consider adding to the Offering
by sending your gifts by mail, text, or online (uccanoka.org/donate).
You can support the church further through the RaiseRight program:
www.raiseright.com. Our unique church ID is 9WKLGX8TRZCN.*

Offertory

Diana Holister

“For the Beauty of the Earth” #28 v.4

**For the good that love inspires, for a world where none exclude,
For a faith that never tires, and for every heart renewed.
God of all, to you we raise this our hymn of grateful praise!**

* Benediction

* Easter Acclamation

“Now the Green Blade Rises” #238 (v.1)

**Now the green blade rises from the buried grain;
Wheat that in dark earth for many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again like wheat that rises green!**

Postlude

Diana Holister

Acknowledgements

Reprinted music is covered under OneLicense.net #A-715296.

The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright ©1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Sermon Text

At most points in my life, if you asked me who my favorite singer was, I'd tell you the same thing: Broadway legend Mandy Patinkin. If you asked who my favorite actor was, I'd tell you the same: Mandy Patinkin, also known as *The Princess Bride's* Inigo Montoya, famously known for saying—all together now: **“Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die.”** After last Friday night, I'm half-inclined to say that my favorite prophet is also Mandy Patinkin.

Erin and I went to the Ordway on Friday where we got to see Mandy in concert. The show was called “Being Alive,” and it had a lot of nostalgic stuff in it, ranging from old time children's songs to “Being Green” by Kermit the Frog to two different songs sung on Broadway originally by Robert Preston. He sang a few Sondheim songs, talked about his dad's love for Angela Lansbury—who they both got to meet—and a few other things I'll get to.

I've been longing to see Mandy Patinkin in concert for thirty years ever since one of the first CDs I ever bought was his album “Experiment.” He's so dear to my heart, and not just because of *The Princess Bride*, but because he stars in my favorite musical, an adaptation of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* where he plays Archibald, Mary Lennox's hunchbacked uncle. I was particularly looking forward to this concert because I was feeling really discombobulated. Out of sorts. Restless and disturbed in my spirit. The reason was twofold: one, I'm still feeling righteously indignant over the shenanigans being pulled in our school district by half of the Board members. Two, I wrote a sermon on Friday morning—it went out with the weekend email—and I didn't like it. I think it just works fine as a Bible study, but I

wasn't feeling it from a preaching point of view. That happens from time to time, and when I does, I just write a second one on Saturday. Except that I was troubled. So, with full intention, I decided to put my faith in Mandy and trust that he would calm my spirit and speak to it.

Oh, did he.

Mandy doesn't do anything by half-measures. On stage and screen he "chews the scenery" as they say, meaning that he acts the ever-living daylights out of his role. He injects into both his acting and his singing so much pathos, so much energy, so much feeling that you can't help but be moved. And this isn't acting when he does it; the guy's just that *real*. I think part of it is because he has a simmering core of rage that he knows how to tap, a passion that grows from his heart for social justice and activism. He's long been known for being active in the ACLU and a whole host of other justice efforts, and he throws himself into those things just as passionately as he does his music and his acting. It's as if his heart bleeds constantly for the world, as he longs for the coming of the Beloved Community with his every atom—though, it should be noted, he's Jewish. That just means we call it "the Messianic age."

After spending several hours on Friday morning with Jeremiah, I feel like I saw him on stage on Friday. Jeremiah appears to have been active during the last few reigns of Israel's kings and then for some time into the Babylonian Exile. He regularly preached to the people that God was upset with them. In the earliest chapters, this is largely about forsaking God and refusing to repent. In chapters 7 through 10, it's about Israel's failure to ensure the security of its most vulnerable, named in typical fashion as "widows and orphans," and also sometimes "aliens" or "strangers," which are interchangeable words for immigrants.

I don't think Jeremiah could have leveled these charges against the people without some pathos of his own, without some holy rage at the ways that God's people had forsaken their Creator. He was a Hebrew; he didn't want their nation to fail. He wanted health and safety for his people. As a prophet, he longed for them to return to God, to stop turning away to the Baals, to stop thinking that they were safe from all danger simply because they believed God's literal home on earth was in the Temple, and that would keep them safe.

Mandy Patinkin sang on Friday with the rage and agony of the prophet who longs for that restoration but wonders if it will come. I could hear it in his aging voice, one where his natural and pronounced vibrato has evolved into a gravelly wobble that the sound system didn't know how to accommodate. In fact, I found that rather distracting for about half of the show, until he began singing a mashup of "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" and "Children Will Listen," the former by Rodgers and Hammerstein and the latter by Stephen Sondheim. You'll recognize them both because I've either preached or referenced of them on multiple occasions and because they're just that well known:

**You've got to be taught to hate and fear
You've got to be taught from year to year.
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear—
You've got to be carefully taught!**

**Careful the things you say
Children will listen.
Careful the things you do
Children will see... and learn...**

**You've got to be taught before it's too late.
Before you are six or seven or eight.
To hate all the people your relatives hate—
You've got to be carefully taught!**

**Children may not obey
But children will listen.
Children will look to you
For which way to turn
To learn what to be
Careful before you say; listen to me:
Children will listen.**

Inigo Montoya once revealed to the Man in Black that he was a “leaper.” That performance made me a weeper. I wept all through Mandy’s performance of it. I wept for the passion with which he sang. I wept at his sincerity. I wept at his rage, because it was a rage born of his love of the world, a rage born of knowing in his bones how we’ve gotten so many things wrong, a rage at knowing we’re capable of doing more even though we keep failing. I wept because I knew that the School Board stuff really had gotten in my grill, and here was Mandy reminding me of it—but not in a way that made my tears ones of grief. No, he reminded me to weep for joy, because thank God for the children.

Jesus once said (Mark 10:15), “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” Or, in this case, older children, because tomorrow night, a passel of kids from Coon Rapids High School and who knows where else are going to gather on this block to go rally before the School Board meeting. They’re going to go and cry out to anyone who will listen that THEY’VE been carefully taught. They’ve been carefully taught by loving teachers and staff to think with empathy about their differences. They’ve been given the freedom to explore ideas and experiences about race, sexuality and gender, and American history in ways that seek to faithfully grapple with our national sins even as they learn to embrace the promise that we might, one day, yet achieve a more perfect union. They’re going to rally to demand that the Board NOT eliminate social-emotional learning, anti-racism education, and diversity and equity initiatives. They’re rallying to preserve the right of their teachers to shower their students with welcome and affirmation so that school is a place of safety that teaches students the folly of bullying. Our children have been listening. Will the Board?

Mandy Patinkin was a prophet on Friday night. For me, for an hour or so, he was Jeremiah, railing against injustice and calling the people back to God and to goodness. He was issuing the same call to us all that the prophets and Jesus have always done: to return to God. To care for the widows, orphans, and strangers. To not settle for a social order that forces conformity and erases cultural distinctiveness. To not act as if simply bearing the name “Christian” removes our obligation to amend our ways and doings and act justly with one another.

At the end of the concert, Mandy prefaced his last song by telling us about its composers, “two Jewish sons of immigrants who escaped the pogroms of Eastern Europe to ‘a land they only imagined in their dreams.’ The song was released two months after Kristallnacht.”¹ That song is “Over the Rainbow,” and it’s about so much more than Oz. He began with the not-always-performed opening words in English, but when he got to the main part everyone knows, he switched to Yiddish. Cue the waterworks again, folks. To hear this Jewish man reference anti-Semitic Soviet pogroms in a present-day context of violence in both Ukraine and Gaza? To hear him speak it in the language of those who were nearly exterminated by Stalin and Hitler? Uffda. And then, to top it all off, he ended once again in English in a most prophetic way:

**If happy little bluebirds fly
beyond the rainbow,
why, oh why, can’t we?
Amen.**

¹ <https://www.kveller.com/mandy-patinkin-yiddish-somewhere-over-the-rainbow-is-everything/>

♦ **First Congregational Church UCC, Anoka, MN** ♦



1923 Third Avenue, Anoka, MN 55303 ♦ (763) 421-3375

Pastor – Rev. Chris McArdle

Minister of Visitation – Pastor Kelsey Renk

Director of Health Ministries – Jessie Waks, NP

Director of Music Ministries – Don Shier

Today’s Keyboardist – Diana Holister

Moderator – Terja Larsen

Website: <http://www.uccanoka.org> ♦ Email: office@uccanoka.org

Text-to-Give: 844-334-1477



First Congregational Church, UCC of Anoka is an Open and Affirming Christian Community for all. We affirm that the image of God is most fully reflected in diversity. We invite all people to share their energy and talents in full participation with our community. We welcome all individuals and families of any sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, relationship status, race, national origin, socioeconomic status, age, mental and physical health or ability, or belief. Together, we celebrate these and all other facets of one’s essential being.