



First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation
April 23, 2023 ♦ Third 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

If you would like to join our mailing list, email office@uccanoka.org and ask to be added.

Prelude

Koki Sato

The Church Bell Rings

* Psalm of Praise (*drawn from Psalm 107*)

One: O give thanks to the Ancient of Days, for God is good;

Many: God's steadfast love endures forever!

One: Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those God has redeemed from trouble:

Many: God's steadfast love endures forever!

One: There are those who go down to the sea in ships, doing business on the mighty waters.

Many: They saw the deeds of the Holy One, God's wondrous works in the deep.

One: For God commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea.

Many: The waves mounted up to heaven and went down to the depths.

One: The people's courage melted away in their calamity; they reeled and staggered at their wits' end.

Many: Then we cried to the LORD in our trouble, and God brought us out of distress.

One: God made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

Many: Let us thank the Mothering One for her steadfast love, for her wonderful works to us;

One: Let us extol God in the congregation of the people and praise God in the assembly.

Many: God's steadfast love endures forever; alleluia!

* Opening Hymn

“Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You” #4

Joyful, joyful, we adore you, God of glory, God of love;
hearts unfold like flowers before you, opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, drive the storms of doubt away;
giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day.

All your works with joy surround you, earth and heaven reflect your rays,
stars and angels sing around you, center of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain, flowery meadow, flashing sea,
chanting bird and flowing fountain, teach us what our praise should be.

You are giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blessed,
wellspring of the joy of living, ocean depth of happy rest!
Loving Spirit, Father, Mother, all who love belong to you;
teach us how to love each other; by that love our joy renew!

Mortals, join the mighty chorus which the morning stars began,
boundless love is reigning o’er us, reconciling race and clan.
Ever singing, move we forward, faithful in the midst of strife,
joyful music leads us onward in the triumph song of life.

A Time for Children (10:30)

*ADVISORY: The livestream of the service continues during the Children’s Time;
if your child sits facing the Pastor their face shouldn’t appear on camera.*

Easter Acclamation

Be not a - fraid; sing out for joy! Christ is ris-en, al - le - lu - ia!

Be not a - fraid; sing out for joy! Christ is ris-en, al - le - lu - ia!

The image shows two systems of musical notation for the Easter Acclamation. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The music is in 4/4 time and the key signature has one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are: "Be not a - fraid; sing out for joy! Christ is ris-en, al - le - lu - ia!". The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line with chords that support the vocal melody.

Alice and Randy Getchell, Kari Johnson, and Mike Benz

*Here I stand alone again / Reachin' out across the room
Quietly the sun's gone down / The sailors seek the harbor
Look at us sailin' in / Decks awash but still afloat
And now the wind's come up / To rock us on the water*

*Ridin' out the storm / Like a ship safe at anchor
Waitin' out the long voyage / Round the Cape of Hope will take her*

*In the calm before the storm / Sunny days and smoother waters
When we hit the seventh wave / We found a line and caught her
Look into my eyes / Let me see where you've been sailin'
Like you I've felt the storm / Heard the wild waves wailin'*

*Steer clear of the shore / The coast is rough and rocky
It's the deepest channel that runs most true / The brightest stars that mark her
Steady as she goes / There's no turnin' back the sailors
With the ship on course and the sea wind fair / There's no need to fail her*

Scripture Reading – Luke 8:22-25

One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they put out, ²³ and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. ²⁴ They went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵ He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?"

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

Many: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Hymn

“Like a Tree beside the Waters”

We will sing this to HYFRYDOL (#182)

Like a tree beside the waters, nurtured by your loving care,
we, O God, your precious children, your enduring witness bear.
In each passing generation may your voice of love be heard.
Bless, we pray, O God, your people with your holy, living Word.

Like a tree beside the river, drawing life from holy streams.
Fill us with your love forever; re-create our hopes and dreams.
Through the storms of life sustain us by the wisdom of your grace.
May the changing of the seasons find us in your warm embrace.

We, beside the living waters, drink from your eternal life.
Give to all your grateful people faith that rises over strife.
O-o Living God, most glorious, strengthen us for life today.
By the hope of timeless promise guide us all upon the Way.

Acts of Prayer

*If you wish to share a prayer with the congregation (joy, concern, hope, worry, or anything at all),
you may write it upon the supplied index card and give it to a Deacon during the Interlude.
Write "SILENT" on the card if you want the Pastor to see it but not say it aloud.*

Offering

Text-to-Give: **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.*

Interlude

Koki Sato

Prayers of the People

*The Pastor will read aloud the prayers of the congregation, occasionally including the call/response:
God in your love // **Hear our prayer.** Prayers marked "SILENT" will not be read aloud.*

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.

Benediction

Easter Blessing

“The Day of Resurrection” #245 (v .3)

**Now let the heavens be joyful, let earth its song begin,
the whole world keep high triumph, and all that is there in.
Let all things seen and unseen their notes of gladness blend,
for Christ again has risen, our joy that has no end!**

Postlude

Koki Sato

You may be seated as you listen to the Postlude. If you choose to depart at this time, please speak gently as you exit out of respect for those who choose to listen.

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

The episode of On Being which is referenced in the sermon can be found at:

<https://onbeing.org/programs/vivek-murthy-to-be-a-healer/>

I don't want you to think of today's Scripture in a literal way. Don't imagine it playing out like a movie. Think of it as a metaphor. Think of the storm as if it were a season in your life when you were in tumult, in anxiety, in despair. Because in this story, out on the water, we could think of the disciples as being in this uncertain place, unmoored from the solid ground, incapable of controlling their environment. The winds rise, the waves roll, the boat rocks, and they are afraid. Jesus, at least for the moment, is not with them. They are frightened. Above all other things, they're *lonely*. I don't mean *alone*. There's a difference between lonely and alone. Alone is geographic. It's about proximity to others. *Lonely* is a state of being. It's an emotion. It's about feeling *disconnected*.

The Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. Vivek Murthy, was recently on the *On Being* show with Krista Tippett (you can find a link to it in the digital bulletin). Dr. Murthy has spent many years studying the concept of loneliness, and he has come to believe that it is endemic in the United States, and it has been since before the pandemic. This epidemic of loneliness is particularly prevalent among younger Americans, and Dr. Murthy notes several reasons why he thinks this is happening. One is the “extraordinary pace of change that we are living through.” The second is the “information environment we're surrounded by” which he describes as “profoundly negative.” The third is that our ability to talk to one another is broken. He calls all of this a recipe for despair.

The despair of loneliness arises in all of us, in all manner of ways. Early in my first pastorate, I officiated the funeral of a wonderful woman named Lorena who had lived to be 100. When I gathered with her children and their families to plan the service, they told me that she didn't want the service to be at the church. The explicit reason was that she didn't want the church ladies to have to prep a meal for her. The underlying reason was that she thought she had outlived everyone who loved her and that no one would come to her funeral, so she didn't want the church to go to any trouble on her behalf. She was wrong, of course, but she didn't know that. She didn't realize she still had an enormous community.

Dr. Murthy notes what many other scientists have found: we are communal creatures. Our nervous systems are actually wired for connection, for relationship. He says, "that person who thousands of years ago when we were hunters and gatherers tried to do everything on their own and go it alone—we know what happened to that person. That person got eaten by a predator or they died from an insufficient food supply. We learned over time that it's when we built trusted relationships with one another that we all did better, that we lived longer, that we were safer, we were more fulfilled." Dr. Murthy argues that loneliness is a bodily reaction much like hunger or thirst. He says, "It's a signal our body sends us when we're missing something we need for survival. And if we respond to it by seeking out connection and experiencing it, then we are okay."

On two occasions in my life, my body went into overdrive, sending me loneliness signals. In both cases, it was a struggle to listen to them. The world teaches us that independence is a virtue. Handling things on our own is a sign of strength. Giving help is a blessing, but asking for it is a sign of weakness. We should be able to go it alone. But the world is so wrong about that.

When I was a graduate student in Boston, it was the first time I had ever truly left the nest because I went to college in my hometown. My people were there. My communities were there. But in Boston? I knew no one. I flew out there one morning, away from everything familiar. I signed a piece of paper to borrow \$18,000 and had no one to reassure me that I wasn't making a huge mistake. I had a roommate, but that's all we were. We never really connected.

In my mid twenties, I moved one hundred miles away from my friends for a job in Grand Island, Nebraska. I had no support system in that new town. Even though I would often drive back to where I lived before on the weekends, for the rest of the week I was lonely. There were a few people where I worked that I could connect with, but that wasn't really community. For me, it made living alone a lot harder.

In both of those instances, I reached back into myself to discern what had calmed the stormy seas for me in the past. As Dr. Murthy notes, it was always those moments when I was surrounded by love in a community of people to whom I meant something and who meant something to me. Though your personal mileage will vary, in my case, that community always involved church. I had my friends, some of whom came and went. I did Boy Scouts for a while, but camping and tying knots and getting all smoky by a fire has never really been my thing. But there was always church, that building where my friends and I played sardines. That congregation where retired women treated me like their own grandson, sending me clippings from the paper and cards on special events. I walked there every Wednesday afternoon after school from first grade through sixth grade for choir practice. I helped carry people's food at the annual Smorgasbord and went up front during the children's time to sit with Pastor Wayne and so much more.

In both of those instances, I looked again for a church community. In Boston, I found it at Boston University's Marsh Chapel. In Grand Island, I found it at the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). In neither case was it really about religion, though certainly that was part of it. It was about finding new

people to love and by whom I was loved. It was about connection. It was about going down to wake up Jesus and say, “Calm these stormy seas!” It was about riding out the storm like a ship safe at anchor, about finding the deepest channel that runs the most true.

The song gets that part so very right. When we’re feeling disconnected and lonely, it’s like sailing down the river entirely too close to the rough and rocky shore. The bottom is too close to the keel. The odds of running aground are so much greater. We need to navigate back to the center, to the deep water, to the place where the world and the water are no longer fighting for control. We turn to the swift, flowing current and surrender our inhibitions, our fear, our reliance upon the world’s false teachings, and let ourselves be buoyed by something greater than us.

Just like we in the Church do, Dr. Murthy calls that Love.

I found love at Marsh Chapel and at First Christian Church, and in both cases it saved my life. I mean that figuratively, but it’s entirely possible it’s a literal thing, too. We all know too well the tragic consequences of unrelieved loneliness. Premature death, sometimes through stress-induced ill health, and sometimes by suicide. Addiction and self-destructive behaviors. Even mass shootings can be clearly linked to a pandemic of loneliness. Given my own family’s history with mental distress, I’m so glad I followed the Spirit’s call—or whatever someone else might call it—and found my way back into community.

The senior pastor of a gigantic church once tried to talk up to me a career path that I think many people in the church assume is normative for white, straight, male pastors like me. You start in a small church, stay a few years, and then move up to something bigger. Eventually, you end up the Senior Pastor of a multistaff church with a membership numbered in four digits. At the time, I thought that perhaps that was a doable thing for me, but I’ve learned otherwise. I have a sinking suspicion that senior pastors of enormous churches get lonely more easily. Maybe that’s not right, but I suspect it would be for me. The church I grew up in is about the same size as both this one and the one I was in before. None were so large that you couldn’t eventually get to know each and every person in the room by name. Why would I ever think of going bigger?

That’s just me, of course. As I said, another person’s mileage will vary, and Dr. Murthy says that in the end, it’s not about how many people you have around you; it’s about whether you feel like you belong. He’s right. The most important thing is to find community and revel in the joy of belonging. Of Love. For some of us that’s Church. For others it’ll be something else. But no matter who you are or where you are on your life’s journey, when you find it, it’s as if Jesus just came up out of the hold and rebuked the wind and the raging waves. The ship lets down its anchor and creates a place of safety amidst a tumultuous world.

Amen.

♦ **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 Music Ministries – Don Shier

Keyboardist – Koki Sato

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.