



First Congregational Church of Anoka
United Church of Christ
An Open and Affirming Congregation
April 30, 2023 ♦ 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

If you are a guest with us today, welcome! If you are comfortable sharing your information with us or would like to be added to our email list, please email office@uccanoka.org.

Prelude

Koki Sato

The Church Bell Rings

* Opening Hymn

“Listen to Your Savior Call” #250

Listen to your Savior call, “Do you love me most of all?”

Jesus speaks, and speaks to you: “Love me as I first loved you.”

**“I delivered you when bound, and, when bleeding, healed your wound.
Sought you wandering, set you right, for your pathway gave you light.”**

**“Mine is an unchanging love, higher than the heights above, deeper
than the depths beneath, free and faithful, strong as death.”**

**O my Savior, hear my need: though my love is faint indeed, still
I love you and adore—oh, for grace to love you more!**

* Call to Worship and Opening Prayer (drawn in part from Psalm 119:97-103)

One: Oh, how I love your teaching, O God!

Many: All day long it is my meditation.

One: Your commandments make me wiser than those who oppose me, for it is
always with me.

**Many: I have more understanding than I could ever receive from my instructors, for
your decrees are my meditation.**

One: I understand like one who is aged, for I observe your precepts.

Many: I restrain my feet from evil ways, all in keeping to your word.

One: From your decrees I don't turn away, for you have taught me.

Many: How sweet are your words, sweeter than honey!

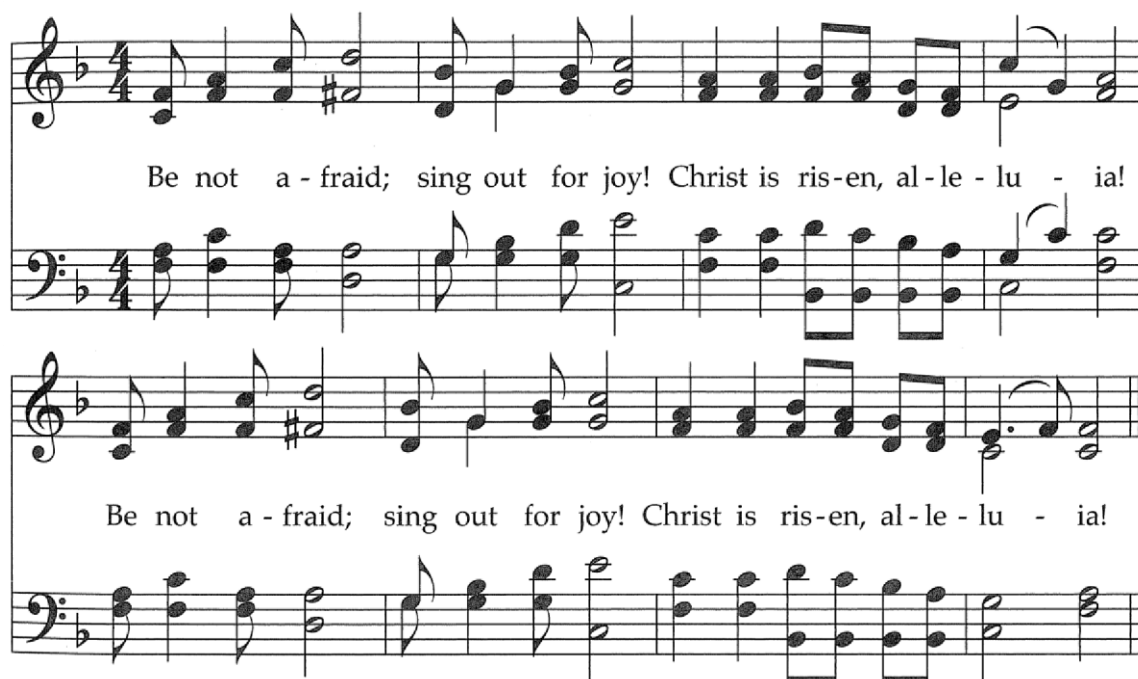
One: Let us pray.

Many: Teach us, Holy One! Teach us to hear the voice of your Spirit singing to us through Scriptures ancient and new. Help us to encounter your Word through the experiences and stories of others, especially those whose voices are muted within the pages of the Bible. Give us the holy imagination to live out your teachings with humility and repentance for the ways our texts have been used to uphold injustice; grant us holy joy to read and proclaim them in ways always strengthened by Love. This we ask in the name of Jesus; amen!

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!

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The image shows a musical score for the Easter Acclamation. It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Be not a - fraid; sing out for joy! Christ is ris-en, al-le - lu - ia!". The first system ends with a double bar line, and the second system also ends with a double bar line.

Special Music

“God’s Unchanging Hand”

Franz Family

Anoka UCC String Band

*Time is filled with swift transition; naught of earth unmoved can stand.
Build your hopes on things eternal, and hold to God’s unchanging hand.*

*Trust in him; he will not leave you whatsoever years may bring. If
our earthly friends forsake him still more closely to him cling.*

*Hold to his hand, to God's unchanging hand.
Build your hopes on things eternal and hold to God's unchanging hand.*

*Covet not this world's vain riches that so rapidly decay.
Seek to gain the heavenly treasures; they will never pass away.*

*When your journey is completed, if to God you have been true, fair
and bright the home in glory your enraptured soul will view.*

*(10:30) Children ages 3 and up may depart at this time for faith formation activities.
Activity bags are available in the back of the sanctuary for those who might enjoy them.*

Scripture Reading – Matthew 22:23-33

Lector, **Congregation**

The same day some Sadducees came to him, saying there is no resurrection; and they asked him a question, saying, ²⁴ "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies childless, his brother shall marry the widow, and raise up children for his brother.' ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us; the first married, and died childless, leaving the widow to his brother. ²⁶ The second did the same, so also the third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ Last of all, the woman herself died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, then, whose wife of the seven will she be? For all of them had married her." ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹ And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is God not of the dead, but of the living." ³³ **And when the crowd heard it, they were astounded at his teaching.**

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

Many: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Hymn

“Jesus, You Once Called Disciples”

Sung to IN BABILONE, which we sing on “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy” #23

Jesus, you once called disciples, choosing twelve to follow you:

Simon (also known as Peter), Andrew, and Bartholomew.

Philip, Thomas, James, and Matthew, Simon, Thaddaeus, John, and James— then there was the one called Judas. These were your disciples' names.

Women, too, were your disciples, sitting, learning at your feet.

Mary knew your word was precious, even more than food to eat.

Martha trusted in your power when her brother Laz'rus died.

Women shared your journey, Lord, and stayed when you were crucified.

Lord, so many heard and followed, like the woman at the well.

Meeting you, the living water, she sought others she could tell. Like the boy with loaves and fishes, like Zacchaeus in the tree, many gladly heard your message; many shared your ministry.

Jesus, still you call your people, "Come and follow me today!"

Some, like Paul, feel sudden wonder; some are brought up in your way.

Lord, no matter how meet you, by your Spirit, make us new.

May we know your living presence; may we daily follow you.

Prayers of the People

If you wish to share a prayer with the congregation (joy, concern, hope, worry, or anything at all), raise your hand and a Deacon will bring you a microphone. Offer your prayer and finish by saying, "God in your love" to which we will all respond, "Hear our prayer."

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**

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

Koki Sato

* Doxology

LASST UNS ERFREUEN (#17)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Praise God, all creatures here below. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Praise God for all that love has done; Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One. Alleluia!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

* 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

“Jesus, You Once Called Disciples” is written by the Rev. Carolyn Winfrey Gillette and used with permission.

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Sermon Text

Mawidge. Mawidge is what bwings us togewer today. Mawidge, the bwessed awwangement, that dweam wiffim a dweam...

I do have marriage on my mind this morning, certainly because the Gospel reading suggested to me this week by Dr. Wil Gafney's *Women's Lectionary* goes there. Certainly also because in the last year, as I've named from this pulpit as recently as Easter, I've done something like four short-notice weddings in the last year, each of them for pairs of women.

I'm troubled by this reading. Dr. Gafney invites us to center the women in the story, and in this one we've got a woman to center. As is so often the case, she's nameless, though in this instance it's because she's the object of an intellectual debate. That's common, yes? The powerful will often objectify the marginal and then, when told their words are causing harm, defend themselves by saying, "We're just having a conversation! We're just being intellectual!" But that's neither here nor there. Let's consider the woman in question, especially her objectification.

Let me be clear. She's not the subject of what's going on. She's not an actor, but one upon whom others are acting, and the whole story is a reminder of the second-class status of women in the Bible and in the ancient world. The children of which the Sadducees speak are not hers; they belong to her husband—in this case, her first husband—though I acknowledge there are no actual children born to any of these seven marriages. That's not the point. The point is to *whom does she belong?* That's what "whose wife of the seven will she be?" means. It's a reminder to us that throughout human history, women have been considered property.

Now, perhaps you're thinking that's not the case anymore—at least not around here. But let's unpack that. How often have you been to a wedding, or as may be more likely, watched one play out on television, and the officiant says, "Who gives this woman to this man?" (Mind you, these are almost always heterosexual weddings.) That's a statement of property transfer, and even though people might not truly mean it that way, words have power, and those words preserve that old status quo. A father owns his daughter, and he transfers ownership of her to a husband. Sometimes the dad also passes on a designated amount of wealth, too. The woman is veiled like an object to be revealed. The father walks the daughter down the aisle, symbolically transferring that ownership when he hands her off to the groom. I confess it leaves me craving Tums.

For what it's worth, when I do a wedding where someone is being walked down the aisle by a parent, I always have them stop about six to ten feet away from the other person. Then, they proceed forward on their own, and the other approaches to meet them half way. In that way, I do what I can to deconstruct the pieces of our traditional marriage liturgies that perpetuate even today the idea that a woman is property. That's my effort to "center the woman" in her own story, which is what Dr. Gafney asks us to do with this lectionary. Lift up the stories of women. Place them in the prime spot. Consider what the text—and the world—might be like if we did that all the time.

Consider the ramifications. If women were centered in the abortion debate, would there be such a vigorous pro-birth faction in our public life? Or might we remember that, as part of our discernment on this deeply complex topic, pregnancy is often a dangerous reality that subjects a woman's body to enormous stress. The physical and emotional aftereffects of pregnancy can follow women for the rest of their lives. Would that change the nature of the debate?

Dr. Gafney wonders how the Church might have been different if women were centered more often. What if instead of ritually acknowledging the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" we intentionally invoked the "God of Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel?" Or if we want to be really thorough and faithful, the "God of Hagar, Sarah, Keturah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Zilpah, and Bilhah?" Those are the matriarchs, after all. Those are all the named women connected to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Those are the women who took care of those boys who gave their names to the twelve tribes. Those are the women who cooked and cleaned and stayed out of the limelight in their tents and in the text.

What if we talked about God with that name? Perhaps we would remember that three of those named women—Hagar, Zilpah, and Bilhah—were slaves who were "given" to the men, that the men might non-consensually father sons upon them (note that objectifying language). If the church had paid attention to such things from the beginning, what might be different? Might Mary have been remembered as the foremost of the Apostles? Might women not have been barred from pastoral ministry? Might the Church have remembered that God created women to be full and equal partners in living and not decided that they were to be subject to their husbands? Might we have understood millennia ago that sexual harassment is criminally negligent of God's commandment to serve and protect the earth and everything that lives within and upon it—including the women? But back to marriage.

I'm grateful to pastor a congregation that doesn't rise up in rebellion when I speak out in the public sphere on all manner of issues, particularly marriage. One of the couples I recently married had asked their own pastor to officiate their wedding, but he had to decline under the certainty that he would lose his job if he did it. In multiple weddings, careful discernment of how to move forward was necessary because not all the families were supportive of two women marrying. I long to live in a world where consenting adults who love each other are free to marry without suffering social, political, or economic threats. For that matter, I long to live in a world where people who choose NOT to marry for whatever reason aren't looked at like they're weird or aberrant. I long to live in a world where women who choose to get pregnant without any partner at all aren't told from pulpits that they're not really families. I long to live in a world where married couples without children aren't told that they're less than whole because they didn't reproduce. If the Church had centered women from the beginning, would we be living in that world now?

I want to share with you one new joy that is tempered by some reality. The United Church of Christ's board of directors has formally nominated a woman to become our next General Minister and President. Her name is the Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, and she currently serves as our Associate General Minister for Wider Church Ministries and Co-Executive for Global Ministries. Our denomination rejoices at this news, even as we grapple with the reality that it's 2023, our denomination has been around since 1957, and every General Minister and President we've had except for one has been a white man (the exception was a black man, the Rev. Geoffrey Black). Even in a denomination that embraces social justice and a radical love for all God's children, we've got lots of room to grow.

Even in 2023, we remain the inheritors of this enduring religious tradition that says women aren't wired to be leaders, even though the most casual readings of the Bible suggest otherwise. There would be no Twelve Tribes without Sarah and the other women. There would be no great liberation from Egypt if

Shiphrah, Puah, Jochebed, Miriam, and Pharaoh's daughter hadn't all acted to ensure Moses's safety. According to our Story, there would be no Church if Mary had not said yes to the Holy Spirit. Perhaps there would be no church if Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and so many other women hadn't provided for Jesus's wellbeing out of their own resources.

Back in 2018, the pop artist Ariana Grande released a song called "God Is a Woman," that was, as you might assume, received in certain quarters by folks who called it sacrilegious or blasphemous. In fact, I had some fun Googling that. While I'm sure some aren't all that keen on the title, much of the backlash concerned the song's celebration of women's embodied sexuality, something that most assuredly subjectifies women instead of objectifying them. The song celebrates the agency of women—meaning their right to make their own decisions and own their own bodies. To delight in pleasure for the sake of pleasure. To enjoy embodied, enfleshed humanity for its own sake rather than simply being a function of marriage-confined reproduction.

If we had centered women from the start, would Christians even think of Grande's song as anything other than a fun pop song?

If we had centered women from the start, would the Church be widely recognized as an affirming and loving place where everyone experiences radical hospitality instead of a place where women are objectified and marginalized?

I confidently say that if that were so, we would definitely be living a *dweam wiffin a dweam*.

Amen!