



First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation

February 19, 2023 ♦ Transfiguration Sunday



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>

Bell Fanfare

“Crusader’s Hymn”

arr. Westcott

Anoka UCC Bell Choir; Don Shier, Director

Welcome & Announcements

If you are a guest with us today, welcome! If you are comfortable sharing your information with us, there are cards in the pew holders that you can use for that purpose (place them in the offering plate).

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

Prelude

“Be Thou My Vision”

arr. Larson

Anoka UCC Bell Choir; Don Shier, Director

* Opening Hymn

“I Love to Tell the Story” #522 (vv. 1-3)

I love to tell the story of unseen things above.

Of Jesus’ radiant glory, of Jesus’ endless love.

I love to tell the story, because I know it’s true;

it satisfies my longing as nothing else can do.

[refrain] **I love to tell the story; and when I am in glory**

I’ll tell the old, old story of Jesus’ endless love.

**I love to tell the story; more wonderful it seems
than all the golden visions of all our golden dreams.**

**I love to tell the story, I tell it now to you
because I want to share it, because I know it’s true. *[refrain]***

**I love to tell the story; it’s pleasant to repeat
what seems, each time I hear it, more wonderfully sweet.**

**I love to tell the story, for some have never heard
the message of salvation from God’s own holy Word. *[refrain]***

* Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: On a mountaintop, Jesus was transfigured before his friends as he sang,

Many: “I’m coming out! I want the world to know!”

One: In a gathering fifty days after Jesus died, Peter gathered with those upon whom tongues of fire had settled,

Many: “I want the world to know; I’ve got to let it show!”

One: In our baptisms and in our bearing witness to the world of the love of Jesus, we sing out as a congregation,

Many: “I’m spreadin’ love, and there’s no need to fear. I feel so good every time I hear: ‘I’m coming out!’”

One: Let us pray.

Many: Transfigure us, Holy One! Transform us, Mother of All! Help us to set aside the masks and the costumes that we don in order to hide who we truly are and those things for which we lovingly stand. Embolden us to step out from behind the walls of fear and anxiety that keep us turned inward, that keep our light from shining out for the whole world to know. Just as Jesus dazzled on the mountain, let us sparkle in the world as witnesses of your steadfast love for all of creation. Amen!

Choir Anthem

“Lift Every Voice and Sing”

arr. Gilpin

Anoka UCC Chancel Choir; Don Shier, Director

Lift every voice and sing till earth and heaven ring ring with the harmonies of liberty.

Let our rejoicing rise high as the list'ning skies, let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of faith that the dark past has taught us.

Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.

Facing the rising sun of our new day begun, let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod, bitter the chast'ning rod, felt in the days when hope unborn had died.

Yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet come to the place for which our fathers sighed?

Sing a song full of faith that the dark past has taught us.

Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.

Facing the rising sun of our new day begun, let us march on till victory is won.

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.

An Argentine folk song.



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly. My heart, my heart a - dores you! My
¡San - to, san - to, san - to, mi co - ra - zón te a - do - ra! Mi



heart knows how to say to you: You are ho - ly, Lord!
co - ra - zón te sa - be de - cir: ¡San - to e - res, Dios!

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

Scripture Reading – Matthew 17:1-9

Lector, **Congregation**

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

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

Many: **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

First we sing from #525

This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine. (x3)

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Then we energetically sing from #524 after a brief transition.

This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine! (x3)

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Everywhere I go, I’m gonna let it shine! (x3)

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

All through the night, I’m gonna let it shine! (x3)

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

We might sing verse 1 another time; be ready!

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

“Trumpet Tune”
Anoka UCC Bell Choir; Don Shier, Director

Purcell, arr. Sherman

* Doxology

NUN DANKET

“Now Thank We All Our God” #419 v. 3
**All praise and thanks to God our Maker now be given,
to Christ, and Spirit, too, our help in highest heaven.
The one, eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore,
for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore!**

* Benediction

* Congregational Blessing

“God Be With You” (#809)

Dorsey/Hutchins

**God be with you. God be with you. God be with you ‘til we meet again.
O God be with you. God be with you. God be with you ‘til we meet again.**

Postlude

Koki Sato

Acknowledgements

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Sermon Text

I'm not sure it matters a whole lot whether the Transfiguration story is chronologically, historically, or any other kind of accurate. Does it really matter that some scholars think the story arose as a post-Resurrection appearance that got repurposed and included by the author of Mark and subsequently the authors of Matthew and Luke? Probably not. Does it matter whether Jesus really appeared on a mountaintop with the ghosts of Elijah and Moses, or if the voice of God really did ring out and say, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"? Maybe not. What does matter is that this story is significant enough to have been included in all of the Synoptic Gospels and to have been given a special day of its own in the church year—the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday.

I've had to preach this text just about every year for thirteen years, and sometimes I despair at what to say about it. Once, I remember looking at the story from the perspective of the disciples, who greeted this amazing sight with abject fear. I thought that fear made sense—it's a ghost story! Another time, I talked about Jesus's kind response to that fear. On yet another occasion, I used it as an example of how blessedly human Peter is, because it seems as if he doesn't really understand what's happening or why, and so he builds booths for the ghosts, that they might perhaps stick around a while. If I wanted to talk about how often Jesus tells people not to talk about what they've seen, this story gives me another example to draw upon.

But does he really want no one to know? Because if you ask me, this fantastic scene on the mountaintop reads a lot like Jesus's coming out story, even if he's only coming out in this moment to James, Peter, and John. Consider what precedes it. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, only one chapter earlier, Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do the people say that I am?" The disciples reply, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:14). Then Jesus asks, "But who do YOU say that I am?" and Peter replies, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." This is the first time anyone makes that claim, and Jesus blesses Peter for saying so.

But see, that's not really the coming out moment. That arrives on the mountain, when Jesus is Transfigured before them while in the ghostly presence of Elijah and Moses—thereby indicating that he is not, in fact, Elijah come again, nor is he Moses, the greatest of the prophets. He's something and someone else, and now it's his turn to tell his friends who HE says he is. He does it by stepping out from behind the curtain, if you will. By taking off the mask. By showing them exactly who he is without obfuscation, without dissembling, without telling only part of the truth. They see that he is something beyond their mortal expectations.

I think it's important for Jesus to come out to his friends at that time, because the whole point of coming out is to be true to oneself and the world—in Shakespearean words, "to thine own self be true." As Shakespeare goes on to note (this is in Hamlet), "and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." (Please pardon the gendered speech.) I don't know if anyone really wants to live in disguise, for all that the world sometimes makes it so tragically necessary. When we're safe enough to take off those disguises, though, we open a path to wholeness in ourselves and for others, because we're being that much more authentic in our relationships.

To some degree, I've experienced this myself, in two ways that are important to me. The first is that in my early adulthood I went through a period of time in which I shamed myself for being nerdy, for wearing geeky t-shirts, for enjoying as an adult the toys of my childhood. So, I stopped wearing those shirts. I sold many of my collectible toys. And you know what? I think it just made me miserable. Eventually, I came to realize that there was no shame in loving things, and that if I was true to that love, others would recognize that. They'd honor me, and they'd maybe even be encouraged to be truer to themselves, too. So now I just let my nerd flag fly. Those of you who have been in my office certainly

know this, and I promise you, the geeky stuff that litters my office has been as successful an evangelist as any sermon I've preached!

The other time I came out was in my first interview with my first church. The most conservative person in the room was asking me how I would navigate conversations within the church about LGBTQ matters, and he admitted right there that he "didn't agree with" being gay or something like that. In reply, I came out—as a straight person. Because one, no one ever talks about straight folks having to come out. Two, lots of people in my life have assumed I was gay (including that man, even after I announced I was marrying my wife, according to another church member). And last, this guy needed to know that I was a straight pastor who was 100% supportive of queer inclusion and love. And for the record, while I identify as straight I'm not saying I'm a zero on the Kinsey scale!

Both of those "coming out" moments enabled me to be a more authentic person in life and in ministry, and I deeply believe that's what the Transfiguration story is getting at. Because if we want to understand the Transfiguration, we have to also recognize the Incarnation: that God so deeply loved the world and all that's in it that God actually took on flesh to be among us. To love us in the flesh. To touch us. To experience our infirmities and share in our suffering. To be as fully present as possible. That matters. It matters to me that God is not just some distant, mountaintop deity, but one who gets down in the mud and plunges toilets with us. Who was a baby who had diaper blowouts that made his mama wonder what on earth she was thinking when she said yes to the Spirit.

Of course, "coming out" is still predominantly about coming out as queer, and we should never forget: that kind of coming out is still dangerous. I support my neighbors who do that because in so doing I help create a new world where that kind of coming out is safer. I support my neighbors who do that because when they choose to be true to themselves, they deserve for the rest of us to be true to them too. It's why I so passionately care about this church truly living out its covenant commitment to being Open and Affirming, because it is through that very witness that we inch the world ever closer to becoming Transfigured itself, a Beloved Community where we affirm, celebrate, and put our bodies and treasures on the line to ensure that all of God's children can safely be their true, dazzling selves each and every day. So shine like the sun, friends. Let your light shine, so that others may do the same.

Amen.

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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.