



First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation
July 30, 2023 ♦ 9th Sunday after Pentecost



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

Gideon Scheeler

The Church Bell Rings

* Opening Hymn

“Holy, Holy, Holy” #277

**Holy, holy, holy, God the Almighty!
Early in the morning we praise your majesty.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!**

**Holy, holy, holy! Saints adore you truly,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim bow before you only,
from the beginning, God eternally.**

**Holy, holy, holy! Though we know but dimly,
though the eyes of humankind your glory may not see,
you alone are holy, you alone are worthy,
perfect in power, in love, and purity.**

**Holy, holy, holy, God the Almighty!
All your works shall praise your name in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!**

Children's Time

We Welcome New Members

Invitation

One: We invite to come forward those who wish to unite with us in the ongoing worship of our Still Speaking God.

Introductions

Affirmation

One: The church is a community of people with varied gifts, united by Holy Spirit. We gather to celebrate God's presence, to discern God's truths, and to follow the way of Jesus. And so we ask you, those who seek membership in this congregation: as we covenant with God and each other...

One: will you join with us to affirm the uniqueness of every kind of individual person with diverse, compatible, and conflicting characteristics?

Candidates: We will, with God's help.

One: will you join with us to work at accepting and fully encountering the nature of our individual humanness?

Candidates: We will, with God's help.

One: will you join with us to provide an experience of a community always struggling to become more caring, open, inclusive, affirming, and celebratory?

Candidates: We will, with God's help.

One: will you join with us to expose and examine our individuality and community in the light of the truth of Jesus and the Christian approach of redemptive love?

Candidates: We will, with God's help.

Congregational Promise

One: Beloved, let us pledge to these persons our support and care.

Congregation: As your companions along the Way of Christ, we rejoice in the gifts you bring to us. We pledge to you our love and support. With God's help, we will together live out the mission and ministry of Christ's Church.

Prayer of Our Savior

*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.

Welcome and Gift-Giving

One: In the name of Jesus Christ, we welcome you to the privileges and responsibilities of membership in this congregation. We give thanks to God for your witness among us.

The congregation may express welcome through applause while gifts of welcome are presented to the church's newest members.

Hymn

“Help Us Accept Each Other” #388

**Help us accept each other as Christ accepted us;
teach us as sister, brother, each person to embrace.
Be present, God, among us, and bring us to believe
we are ourselves accepted and meant to love and live.**

**Teach us, O God, your lessons, as in our daily life
we struggle to be human and search for hope and faith.
Teach us to care for people, for all, not just for some,
to love them as we find them, or as they may become.**

**Let your acceptance change us, so that we may be moved
in living situations to do the truth in love;
to practice your acceptance, until we know by heart
the table of forgiveness and laughter's healing art.**

**God, for today's encounters with all who are in need,
who hunger for acceptance, for righteousness and bread,
bring us new eyes for seeing, new hands for holding on;
renew us with your Spirit; God! Free us, make us one!**

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 – Lamentations 3:22-24

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, their mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in them."

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

Many: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Special Music

“Some Things Never Change”

Heather Sorenson

Laurie Elvig, Soloist

Some things never change. / The clouds still bring the rain, the seasons still remain.

Some things never change.

When all the things we planned are gone, and all that's left are prayers and songs,

God you are the same. / Some things never change.

Some things never change. / Every midnight brings the dawn, time keeps moving on.

Some things never change.

When everything we built is gone, I'll trust what I've claimed all along,

God you are the same. / Some things never change.

I will lift my eyes upon the hills from where my help is come. / I choose to live in faith, not fear.

You're before me, You're behind me, right beside me you will guide me.

In darkness you shine brighter than the day.

In this emptiness You're leading me, back to where I need to be.

Lord, you're with me every day. / Lord, you're with me every day.

Some things never change. / Your mercies are still new, the things You said are true.

Some things never change. / When everything is said and done, You call me Your beloved one,

God you are the same. / Some things never change.

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 gWKLGX8TRZCN.

* 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!

* Hymn

“Let There Be Peace on Earth” (pages 9-10)

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me;

let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.

With God our creator, children all are we.

Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me; let this be the moment now.

With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow:

to take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally.

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me!

A Farewell

One: Our church family is constantly changing. People come and go. Babies are born. Children grow up. People commit themselves to one another. Loved ones and friends among us come to the end of their lives. Individuals move into our community and church life. Others leave us, moving away to new places, new experiences, and new opportunities.

Many: It is important and right that we recognize these times of passage, of endings and beginnings. Today we share the time of farewell with friends who are leaving.

Invitation to the Departing; Remembrances

Prayer

One: Let us pray.

Many: God, whose everlasting love for all is trustworthy, help each of us to trust the future which rests in your care. The time we were together in your name saw our laughter and tears, our hopes and disappointments. Guide us as we hold these cherished memories but move in new directions, until that time to

come when we are completely one with you and with each other; in the name of Jesus the Christ we pray. Amen.

One: Kay and Roger, go now, surrounded by our love and led by the promises of God, the presence of Jesus, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Many: Amen.

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

Gideon Scheeler

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.

COFFEE HOUR IS SERVED AFTER WORSHIP!

A reception for new members and for Kay and Roger will be served!

Acknowledgements

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Sermon Text

Give me a grumble or a mumble or a “heck yeah!” if you’re not a fan of change.

[response]

I’m with y’all. Change isn’t my favorite thing in the world, though of course there are degrees and types of change. For instance, I LOVE greeting new folks to this church. I love learning your names and watching as you come back again and again until it becomes clear that we “fishers of people” have reeled you in. That’s good change, yeah?

Then, of course, there’s the change I hate: goodbyes. I’m actually better with the goodbyes that come with death, perhaps because that’s the very epitome of something I can’t control. Something I can’t change back. But when it’s folks leaving? Beloved ones moving away? BLECH! I’m really gonna miss Kay and Roger who are leaving us today—but more about that later in the service. I’ve missed for some time the Willoughby family—Mike and Beth—who sold the house to live out an RV. Now that I mention it, both Roger and Mike were on my search committee. They were the ones who asked if I wanted to work with the Youth Group when I said I wanted to sing in the choir. (They met at the same time back then.) I answered in the affirmative and then just sort of shrugged as if to say, “Figure it out.” They immediately looked at each other and said, “Well, we’ve never considered changing our times before.” A few days

later, Mike called me and said, “The choir is going to start rehearsing at 7:30 and the Youth Group will meet at 6:30.” Problem solved! Mike and Beth, by the way, are moving to Columbus, Ohio, due to Mike’s employer moving his job and requiring in-person work. He asked me to let y’all know.

I remember always hating goodbyes. In high school, there was a guy two years ahead of me, Mark, of whom I was fond. Mark taught me how to drive by letting me drive his car to my house after school! One day in choir—we both sang in the tenor section—our teacher pulled out the song that the seniors wanted to sing at graduation: “Friends” by Michael W. Smith. As we started singing it, Mark and I there right beside each other, I just lost it. I couldn’t stop crying. The same thing happened after the Christmas concert my senior year. At graduation a few months later. I cried because of the unwanted change on my pastor’s last Sunday somewhere roundabout 1987, and during my last sermon at my last church even though that was a wanted change. I cried with so many of you at Dave Morse’s funeral—another member of my search committee.

Israel was beset by change, perhaps moreso than many of its neighbors. Because they occupied the narrow, habitable strip of land we know as Palestine, the only land-passage through which armies could reasonably pass, they were constantly beat up by their neighbors: Egypt from the south, and a rotating cast of conquerors from the north, the most famous of which were the Philistines, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians.

It wasn’t supposed to be like that, at least not according to Israel’s faith. They were the chosen people of a God who had given them a Promised Land, albeit one in which they displaced a bunch of native peoples. And yet the changes just kept on coming. Something that is remembered in story as the Exodus. The transition from judges to kings, and in short order after that the fracturing of the kingdom. Dynasties that rose and fell in the north so that there was no semblance of inherited monarchy, and a one-family dynasty in Judah with kings and one queen of widely varying quality. A final conquest in the north, a final conquest in the south. Seventy years of captivity, and then a return. A new Temple, gussied up and decked out generations later, only to have the Romans burn it down in the year 70 (CE). Fast forward to today, and there’s a contemporary Israel that was founded by United Nations fiat and attacked by its neighbors. It has endured attacks from within, and it has committed even greater attacks against some of its own residents. Even now they are beset by change as the conservative coalition government has passed a law, granting the executive and legislative branches enormous power over the judicial branch, a change that is marching straight into the maw of authoritarianism.

Change. We can neither live with it nor without it!

In response to all of that change, our spiritual ancestors concluded that while the earth might change, God does not. The Psalmist sings: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult” (Ps 46:1-3). Our ancestors decided that God was the one constant in a life full of variables.

But then we took that and made it into something idolatrous, and a refusal to revisit change upon it has caused all manner of harm. God’s constancy was reframed as changelessness, despite the Scriptural evidence to the contrary. Didn’t God decide to change after the flood? In the run-up to Sodom and Gomorrah? After the golden calf? Isn’t the Resurrection God’s decision to follow Jesus’s own teaching about forswearing violence and going totally in the opposite direction everyone expected? Despite all of that, we decided that God is changeless, the Bible was changeless, and the commandments of God—both clear and wholly unclear—were similarly changeless (and without fault, to boot).

Amidst all of this, though, the power of the Holy Spirit is almost by definition the power of change: the power to draw order out of chaos, hope out of despair, love out of apathy. The Spirit is the power of surprise, the ultimate manifestation of change, and it enjoins, cajoles, begs, lures, and beseeches us to not be so changeless as our traditional beliefs about God. And so we struggle to learn that lesson. To say, “I was mistaken. I was wrong.” To admit that not only is God changeable, so must we be. Because in the end, change is nothing more than the instinct to grow.

We are growing today. We are growing by the addition of new members who have already changed us by their presence, their gifts, their enthusiasm, their talents, their love. And we are growing in a more grudging way as we have no choice but to look forward and discern who we are even when beloved members leave. It’s a day of joy, and a day of melancholy.

Thankfully, and maybe we just leave it here, we know that there’s one thing about God that never changes:

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, their mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness!

Amen?

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

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Pastor – Rev. Chris McArdle

Minister of Visitation – Pastor Kelsey Renk

Director of Health Ministries – Jessie Waks, NP

Director of Music Ministries – Don Shier

Keyboardist – Koki Sato

Moderator – Terja Larsen

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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.

Let There Be Peace on Earth

C Am Dm7 G7 C F C Dm G7

Let there be peace on earth, and let it be - gin with me;

C B7 Em B7 G G7

let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.

Am Em C7 F G7 C

*With God our cre - a - tor, chil - dren all are we.

Am7 D7 G Am7 D7 G7

Let us walk with each oth - er in per - fect har - mo - ny.

C Am Dm7 G7 C F C Dm G7

Let peace be - gin with me; let this be the mo - ment now.

C B7 Em B7 G

With ev - ery step I take, let this be my sol - emn vow:

C C+ F D7 D°7

to take each mo - ment and live each mo - ment in peace e - ter - nal - ly.

C E7 F C F G7 C

Let there be peace on earth, and let it be - gin with me.