



# First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation  
June 11, 2023 ♦ 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 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](mailto:office@uccanoka.org) and ask to be added.*

Prelude

Jan Scovill

The Church Bell Rings

\* Opening Hymn

“Morning Has Broken”

*In one of the biggest mysteries of the New Century Hymnal, this beloved song wasn't included, even though it's #38 in the old Congregational Pilgrim Hymnal!*

**Morning has broken like the first morning,  
blackbird has spoken like the first bird.  
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!  
Praise for them, springing fresh from the Word!**

**Sweet the rain's new fall sunlit from heaven,  
like the first dew-fall on the first grass.  
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden,  
sprung in completeness where his feet pass.**

**Mine is the sunlight! Mine is the morning  
born of the one light Eden saw play!  
Praise with elation, praise every morning,  
God's re-creation of the new day!**

\* Call to Worship and Opening Prayer (*drawn in part from Psalm 65*)

One: Through wondrous deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation,

**Many: hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.**

One: They who live at the farthest reaches are awed by your signs;

**Many: you make the dawnings of morning and evening sing for joy.**

One: You crown the year with your goodness;

**Many: your paths overflow with plenty.**

One: The meadows are clothed with flocks, the valleys arrayed in grain,

**Many: indeed, they shout for joy.**

One: Let us pray.

**Many: Blessed Jesus, did we make you into an idol? Did we miss the whole point?**

**We confess that it feels blasphemous to even ask, but we have nagging doubts. You told us our loyalty was supposed to be to God alone, but then we made you into God, too. Is that what you wanted? Is that what you meant? Give us a heart of humility to answer these questions with care and deep discernment. Send the Spirit to prod us when we start to step off the path, or even more, when we get too focused on who you are instead of what you called us to do and be. We still pray it in your name; 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.*

Prayer of Preparation

“Pour Out Your Spirit”

C. Grundy

From the sac - red wa - ters of my birth  
to the sac - red wa - ters of this hour,  
I have leaned up - on You who knit me in my  
moth - er's womb. O pour out Your Spir - it now.

Special Music

Cole Marshall

*100 years have passed by / my bones still ache*

*running through the front yard / cuz i am late  
quickly down the same path / that's near the cape  
I don't want to miss what / was worth the wait*

*[refrain] and we are going down / to the place where the water is so cold  
and we will stay a while / til there is no more feeling in our toes*

*now we are both right here / what do you say  
you know that i love you / please never change  
you said that you miss me / when i'm away  
I know dear, things take time / but I'm here to stay [refrain]*

*this is and always will be / the place where I can calm my nerves  
cuz i have locked all my problems in the car*

*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 – Acts 5:12-16

Now many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. <sup>13</sup> None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. <sup>14</sup> Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women, <sup>15</sup> so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by. <sup>16</sup> A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

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

**Many: Thanks be to God.**

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Hymn

“O Jesus, I Have Promised” #493

**O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end;  
remain forever near me, my Savior and my Friend:  
I shall not fear life's struggles if you are by my side,  
nor wander from the pathway if you will be my guide.**

**O let me hear you speaking in accents clear and still,  
above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self will!**

**O speak to reassure me, to hasten or control!  
O speak, and make me listen, O guardian of my soul!**

**O Jesus, you have promised to all who follow you  
that where you are in glory your servant shall be, too;  
and, Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end;  
O give me grace to follow my Savior and my Friend!**

## 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**

*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](http://uccanoka.org/donate)).*

*You can support the church further through the RaiseRight program:  
[www.raiseright.com](http://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!**

\* 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

Jan Scovill

*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

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Sermon Text

I’m going to apologize right now, because this sermon starts with a tiny little spoiler about *Ted Lasso*. To prep you, you should know the following. *Ted Lasso* is a just-completed three-season show on the Apple streaming channel. Ted’s a winning college football coach from Kansas who ends up getting hired to coach AFC Richmond, a fictional football club in the English Premier League, despite the fact that he doesn’t know a single thing about soccer. But Ted does know about people, and he knows how to build a healthy, loving community that ultimately transforms AFC Richmond from a losing business into a winning family of choice.

Here’s the spoiler: at the end of the series, a character writes a book titled, *The Ted Lasso Way*. When the author asks Ted for his feedback, Ted offers only, “Change the title. It was never about me.” *It was never about me.*

A friend of mine deliberately tweaked that question and asked a new one: would Jesus say the same thing? If he came back today and someone handed him a New Testament, would he write in Sharpie on the cover, “It wasn’t ever about me”? The question might be considered heretical in some churches, but I would imagine not so much here. We love questions, right? Hard ones in particular. Questions that

challenge orthodoxy. Questions that destigmatize any notion that doubts are bad. Questions that affirm our certainty that Christianity has never been monolithic.

*It was never about Jesus.*

That's obviously a nontraditional claim. So many ask, "Have you accepted Jesus as your personal Lord and savior?" So many give ultimate authority to John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." So many lift up signs promoting John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." So many know by heart the Apostles' Creed which opens with a single line about God, ends with six individual lines about the Spirit, the Church, the saints, forgiveness, resurrection, and everlasting life. But in the middle of all of that? Thirteen Christological claims: he's the Son, he's the Lord, he was born by the Spirit, born by the virgin Mary, suffered under Pilate, was crucified, died, was buried, descended to Hell, rose again on the third day, ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of God, and will eventually judge everyone.

It's almost all about Jesus.

I get it. We're always looking for heroes, aren't we? People we can lift up and glorify? If we're all sheep—and Jesus evidently said the good ones were sheep—we're *followers*. We need a head-sheep, a sheepdog, or a Shepherd to tell us what to do. Where to go. What to believe. How to love. To give us orders, yes? Goats don't need orders. They do their own thing. They eat what they want. Or at least, that's how we think about them. So the early church decided that Jesus was the point of it all. The hero of heroes, the prophet above all prophets, the literal Son of God who was actually God all along.

But what about Peter?

I'm struck by this little snippet about Peter in Acts 5. "... *they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by.*" That's not Jesus, friends! It's the one who betrayed him three times before the rooster crowed! Now it's not just the bleeding woman from Luke 8 (also Mark 5) who pushes through the crowd because she believes that if she could just touch the hem of Jesus's garment she would be made well. Now EVERYONE is doing it, but it's for Peter! Now it's not the hem of the garment, but his mere *shadow* that has enough power, enough authority, enough glory to make the sick well. And before you start to think, "Oh sure, but did Peter raise the dead?" Yes! He did! He resurrected a woman named Dorcas, and he did that right after ended the paralysis of a man named Aeneas. He could do all the things Jesus did—and he wasn't alone. All of the twelve were granted authority over evil spirits and given the ability to cure diseases. Paul picked up some of that too, including the power to resurrect, which he uses once.

So why isn't it all about Peter, or Paul, or as I would prefer, all about Mary?

If Jesus came back today and saw the New Testament, what would he say?

Would he say we missed the point?

Would he say, "It wasn't about me. It was about God. It was always about God, and by extension, it was about YOU. It was about YOU, following God, living in a way that would help bring about on earth things as they get done in heaven. I told you that, remember? *Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*"

Did we make an idol of Jesus?

Did we get so wrapped up in arguing about WHO he was that we forgot what he told us about who WE are?

I think the answer is YES.

The Sermon on the Plain isn't about who he was, you know (I'm using Luke's version; it's the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew). Jesus doesn't say anything about his parentage or powers. He just says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." He blesses the hungry, the mourning, and the persecuted. Then he proclaims woe on the rich (who aren't helping the poor), the full (for not sharing their food with the hungry), and those who are laughing (for not showing compassion to the mourners). He proclaims woe "to you when all speak well of you" (for not using that social clout to help everyone else). Then he goes on about so much more: pray for your enemies, don't hit back, give to those in need, love EVERYONE—especially sinners, lend without expectation of repayment, and so on.

None of it is about him.

It was about US.

My old church didn't have the *New Century Hymnal* until I made it happen. They had considered it, and like many UCC churches, they opted for something else (probably because it didn't have "Morning Has Broken," am I right??). In their instance, they chose a hymnal from a decidedly more evangelical publisher, and I was always struck by how many hymns celebrate blood while driving home the point that we are lower than the waste products of worms. There's this one song called "Nothing but the Blood of Jesus" that I definitely didn't learn as a child even though it's from Robert Lowry who *also* wrote amazing hymns like "Shall We Gather at the River" and "How Can I Keep from Singing?" But this one strikes a different tone.

*... what can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*... Nothing can for sin atone—nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*O! Precious is the flow that makes me white as snow;*

*no other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

How the church got from the Beatitudes to the Blood is in some ways a mystery I'll never quite unravel. For wasn't it also Jesus who told this tale of the end, the one with the sheep and goats, the one where he says that the defining line between the two was based on what ***we did for others?*** The one where he says that what we did for the hurting among us we also did for him? That it wasn't about him at all and what he did for us, but about what we did for each other that really mattered?

The parables weren't about him. He told us that God will throw aside all concerns about appearances or shame and instead run to us in rapturous reunion. He told us that the hated outsider who does the right thing is better than the righteous insider who ignores the needy.

Jesus spent much of his time building community with those the world had rejected, be they children, women, strangers, and anyone else told that they weren't wealthy enough, good enough, whole enough.

*It was never about HIM.* It was about who God was, and what it meant for us to be God's people.

Would he tell us that his name and his blood were never meant to be a magical incantation that put us right with God?

Would he tell us that thoughts and prayers didn't much matter if we didn't back them up with rebuilding and restoring each other?

Ted Lasso transformed the AFC Richmond community, and a lot of the time he did it by doing NOT what everyone expected him to do as the head coach. He didn't condemn or punish. He didn't berate or guilt-trip. As often as not, he didn't even answer questions—he just let people get to the best answer in their own time. Granted, he did it with a plethora of memorable lines that always drew laughs even as

they dripped wisdom. Sometimes those things sounded awfully Jesusy. So I'll leave you with one of those in that same spirit as "It was never about me."

"For me, success is not about the wins and losses. It's about helping these young fellas be the best versions of themselves on and off the field."

Hear what the coach is saying to the church.

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](mailto: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.*



# Morning Has Broken

38

Eleanor Farjeon, 1881-

BUNESSAN 5.5.5.4.D.

Gaelic Melody

Harm. by David Evans, 1874-1948

*In unison*

1 Morn-ing has bro - ken Like the first morn - ing, Black-bird has  
2 Sweet the rain's new fall Sun - lit from heav - en, Like the first  
3 Mine is the sun - light! Mine is the morn - ing Born of the

spo - ken Like the first bird. Praise for the sing - ing!  
dew - fall On the first grass. Praise for the sweet - ness  
one light E - den saw play! Praise with e - la - tion,

Praise for the morn - ing! Praise for them, spring - ing Fresh from the Word!  
Of the wet gar - den, Sprung in com-plete - ness Where his feet pass.  
Praise ev - ery morn - ing, God's re - cre - a - tion Of the new day!