



First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation

March 10, 2024 ♦ 4th Sunday in Lent



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

Centering Music

Koki Sato

The Church Bell Rings

A Time for Children (10:30)

The Baptism of [REDACTED] (10:30)

Parents: [REDACTED]

Godparents: [REDACTED]

For the sake of the family's privacy, their names have been redacted for the online bulletin.

Introduction

One: In the sacrament of baptism, we are following an ancient custom by which believers were welcomed into the Body of Christ and declared to be children of God. In the earliest days of the Jesus Movement, those first followers may have pledged themselves to Jesus and his Way with a particular baptismal creed that may have begun, "For you are all children of God in the Spirit."

Many: "There is no Jew or Greek, there is no slave or free, there is no male and female;"

One: "For you are all one in the Spirit." These words signal for us that in baptism, we are surrendering the human tendency to divide ourselves and limit the Spirit's blessing. Today, as we baptize this child, we affirm that God's vision for creation is for the Spirit to bless everyone, everywhere.

Congregation: We believe God made human life to be good and that children share in the original blessing of all living things. In this moment of dedication and grace we praise the goodness of God.

Questions and Promises of Parents

One: As parents, do you desire to have your child baptized into the faith and family of Jesus Christ? If so, please say, "We do."

Parents: We do.

One: Will you raise your child in a home where trust is cultivated, love is your guiding principle, and a spirit of grace prevails?

Parents: We will. If so, please say, "We will."

One: Will you participate in communities and provide opportunities for your child to encounter that which is sacred and worthy in life and where your child may learn and appreciate the Christian heritage?

Parents: We will. If so, please say, "We will."

One: Will you teach your child to follow in Christ's way; to resist evil, to stand up against injustice and to serve others? If so, please say, "We will."

Parents: We will.

One: Remembering God's great love for us, will you teach your child to love others with the same strength as you love? If so, please say, "We will."

Parents: We will.

Questions of Sponsors

One: As [REDACTED] sponsors, do you promise, with God's help, to guide and encourage the spirit of this child and to help their parents keep the promises they have made? If so, please say, "We do."

Sponsors: We do.

Congregational Promise

One: Let us, the community of First Congregational Church, pledge our love and support to this family.

Many: We covenant with you on behalf of your child. We rejoice in the hope and love which they represent. We unite with you to labor and pray for their spiritual growth, that they may know and trust the goodness of God. On behalf of the whole church of Jesus Christ, we welcome them.

Baptismal Prayer

One: Let us pray. Creator God, faithful parents have come into your presence this morning. Fill them with your wisdom so they may teach [REDACTED] to know and love God. May they and [REDACTED] be ever conscious of the beauty of the world and the goodness that surrounds them. May they have the courage to face evil and the faith to transcend it. Grant them strength of body and clarity of spirit, that they may enjoy fullness of years and live to do your will in faithfulness.

Congregational Blessing of the Water (sing through once as the waters are poured)

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.

Baptism

One: What name have you given your child?

Parents: [REDACTED].

One: [REDACTED], I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Mother of us all.

Congregational Blessing

One: Let us now, as the people of God and the Body of Christ, bless this child together:

Many: [REDACTED], you are a child of God in the Spirit. May you always open your heart to both tears and laughter, giving yourself to Love. May you grow to know the blessing of that Spirit, that you may use your gifts to help create a Beloved Community on earth where all division gives way to invitation. We welcome you into our midst on behalf of the whole church of Jesus Christ.

Bestowing of the Congregational Gifts

Special Music

“Give Yourself to Love”

Kate Wolf

Alice and Randy Getchell, Kari Johnson, and Mike Benz

Adapted lyrics in verse 2 by Alice Getchell

Kind friends all gathered round, there's something I would say:

*That what brings us together here has blessed us all today.
Love has made a circle that holds us all inside,
Where strangers are as family, and loneliness can't hide.*

*(Chorus) You must give yourself to love, if love is what you're after,
Open up your hearts to the tears and laughter
And give yourself to love, give yourself to love.*

*I've walked the North Shore in the rain, I've learned to love the wind;
I've been up before the sunrise to watch the day begin.
I searched for a community of friends who're of like mind,
(And) Here we are a testimonial to "Seek and you will Find."*

*Love is born in fire, it's planted like a seed.
Love can't give you everything, but it gives you what you need.
(And) Love comes when you are ready, love comes when you're afraid;
It'll be your greatest teacher, the best friend you have made.*

*(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 – Galatians 3:26-28

Lector; **Congregation**

... for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷ As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ **There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female;** for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.
Many: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Dr. Stephen Patterson surmises that this early creed from Galatians might have originally spread in this way, shared here for added clarity and remembrance:

For you are all children of God in the Spirit.
There is no Jew or Greek,
there is no slave or free,
there is no male and female;
for you are all one in the Spirit.

Hymn

“They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love”

**We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord (2x)
and we pray that all unity may one day be restored:
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.**

**We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand (2x)
and together we'll spread the news that God is in our land.
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.**

**We will work with each other; we will work side by side (2x)
and we'll guard human dignity and save human pride:
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.**

**In the Son, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free.
There is no longer male and female, just you and me.
In the Spirit, we love each other in unity.
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.**

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

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!**

* Congregational Benediction (*spoken in unison*)

**For we are all children of God in the Spirit.
There is no Jew or Greek,
there is no slave or free,
there is no male and female;
for we are all one in the Spirit.**

* 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 told you that I was taking a one-week break from the church's mission statement, but that's not actually true. I shouldn't be surprised; as I said last week, my favorite part of our mission is our commitment to being a church that is always struggling to become more caring, open, inclusive, and accepting—which is precisely something for which the Jesus Movement was all-in in its earliest days. So, I suppose this is more like Part II from last week! But first, a reminder about Baptism, partly because we celebrated one today.

Baptism has long had a variety of interpretations in the Church. In almost every context, it is a ritual entry into the Body of Christ. In churches like ours, it's usually also a covenant commitment made between God, a child's caretakers, and the Church to raise that child in the Church and teach them to live as a caring, open, inclusive, and accepting disciple of Jesus. But perhaps most infamously, Baptism in many church contexts has involved a literal washing-away of sin (though it persists nonetheless) and/or an unlocking of the pearly gates so that the newly baptized will get to go to heaven.

Dr. Stephen Patterson of Willamette University—and formerly of Eden Theological Seminary—suggests in his recent book *The Forgotten Creed: Christianity's Original Struggle against Bigotry, Slavery, & Sexism* (Oxford, 2018) that it didn't take the Church very long to incorporate some of those more orthodox understandings of Baptism. It was ultimately all part of the Church's rapid transition from something truly groundbreaking and radical into an institution ruled just as much by the patriarchy as was the Roman Empire.

Patterson's central claim is that in the earliest days of the Jesus Movement, Christians developed and used a creedal statement—a claim of what was their official teaching—and they used it during baptism. It was a “baptismal creed.” We find that creed snuck briefly into Paul's letter to the Galatians, a letter that is otherwise concerned with telling male, Gentile Christians that they didn't have to get circumcised in order to become Christian.

This was something of a conflict. Paul had made this clear to the Galatians, only to have other evangelists—possibly ones with a more Jewish sensibility—come around and tell the Galatian men that no, in fact they *did* have to get circumcised (a message I'm sure was received with universal joy). Paul's letter is his response to that, a forceful declaration that they needed to get their stuff in a pile and remember what he told them in the first place. Then, in the midst of all of that anatomical rhetoric, he offered this snippet:

“For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one.”

It's an extensive, but surprisingly entertaining read as Patterson traces social and cultural pressures that led to this statement, one he argues early Christians took seriously. His claim is that the earliest Church followed Jesus in rejecting bigotry, slavery (well...), and sexism. That was their world, after all. The world was deeply invested in drawing a line between insiders and outsiders. The whole world, more

or less, enslaved people; in fact, it was so normal, that in the letter of Philemon, we see Paul potentially sending a slave back to his master because it was just so normal. And finally, we see Paul taking on sexism.

Patterson teaches that this statement is quite possibly a direct response to a common adage in the ancient world, one with both Jewish and Gentile sources that went something like this: “I thank God every day that I was not born a foreigner, a slave, or a woman.” Do you hear how Paul flips that? “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female. You are all one.” That early Christians may have recited this creed at baptism suggests that in the beginning, baptism wasn’t about sin or heaven or anything like that; it was a commitment to building the Beloved Community. Importantly, Dr. Patterson takes this one step further, arguing that this creed doesn’t *erase* differences, but in fact *celebrates* them. It’s not about conformity, but about *solidarity*.

It hardly took a generation before someone came along and undid all of Paul’s hard work, and they did it while pretending to be Paul. In the letters of Colossians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus, someone pretending to be Paul reversed it all. They advocated for slaves to be obedient and submissive to their earthly masters (see Col 3:22, Eph 6:5, Titus 2:9). Perhaps most egregiously, these forgers of Paul’s name went right back to being glad they weren’t born women. All we have to do is remember what the author of 1 Timothy says (2:11-15):

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. ¹² I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

Do you want to know why this is utter hogwash and proof that this Paul is a fake? We need only look to the final chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a ‘deacon’ of the church at Cenchreae... help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.” Two things are notable here: first, the word translated “deacon” is usually in the church translated “deaconess,” because women weren’t allowed to be deacons. But the word doesn’t mean “deacon” like we use it. It means *minister*. Phoebe was *the pastor of the church* in that town. AND, she was Paul’s benefactor—with the word there really meaning “patron,” as in the Roman context of patronage where your patron was kind-of-sort-of your *boss*. Paul was working for a woman! And then he goes on to name all kinds of other folks in the rest of that chapter, and about half of them are women too, folks who are also pastors, ministers, and even apostles.

Here’s a common pastoral peeve: when we’re in search and looking at profiles of churches, we commonly see churches call themselves “Bible-believing.” They look for preachers who will preach the Bible. If you zoom out to the 30,000-foot view, it’s not hard to see that progressive churches that practice openness, inclusion, acceptance, and care for all their neighbors are often caricatured as communities where folks have substituted an earthly, politicized point of view for the Gospel. Except...

... there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one.

It’s not substituting the wisdom of the world for the instruction of God to acknowledge that real Paul and real Jesus were trying to create a community where bigotry, classism, and sexism were set aside in favor of an egalitarian, all-embracing way of life that, while hardly being utopian, treated each person as an equal. It’s simply embracing the clear, Biblical evidence that at one point, if only for a little while, the Church lived out an ethic of care, inclusion, acceptance, and openness. For a season, the earliest Christians

strove to create a community where all were one in Christ Jesus. That the Church and Empire came together to erase that hardly makes us unbiblical.

Today, we [will] have baptized a child into the faith and family of Jesus Christ, into a community that seeks always to be in solidarity with all peoples of the world who face exclusion. We embrace, as Paul once did, as a baptismal creed that in the Spirit, we are all children of God, whether we are Jew or Greek, male and female, and all of the other binary classifications we use to divide and conquer. We embrace what might be one of the very first creeds of the church and struggle to make it our own.

There's an old saying in the United Church of Christ: that we will "marry anyone and bury anyone." That's because the UCC, though not a "creedal" church, historically has struggled to embrace Paul's teaching that we are all one in the Spirit. We are all one in Christ. I am rarely more delighted to be a pastor than when a non-hetero couple comes to me, longing to make a covenant commitment to each other in a church where they will actually be affirmed. When someone with no current church affiliation comes to me asking to baptize their child. When someone asks if will perform the rites of farewell for their loved one, regardless of their background, belonging, or theology. How can I not? How can we not? *For you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

May the Holy Spirit continue to spread that welcome far and wide.
Amen.

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

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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.