



# First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation

May 14, 2023 ♦ 6<sup>th</sup> 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, 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

Koki Sato

The Church Bell Rings

\* Opening Hymn

“Bring Many Names” #11

**Bring many names, beautiful and good, celebrate, in parable and story,  
holiness in glory, living, loving God, Hail and Hosanna! Bring many names!**

**Strong mother God, working night and day, planning all the wonders of creation,  
setting each equation, genius at play: Hail and Hosanna, strong mother God!**

**Warm father God, hugging every child, feeling all the strains of human living,  
caring and forgiving till we're reconciled: Hail and Hosanna, warm father God!**

**Old, aching God, grey with endless care, calmly piercing evil's new disguises,  
glad of good surprises, wiser than despair: Hail and Hosanna, old, aching God!**

**Young, growing God, eager, on the move, saying no to falsehood and unkindness,  
crying out for justice, giving all you have: Hail and Hosanna, young, growing God!**

**Great, living God, never fully known, joyful darkness far beyond our seeing,  
closer yet than breathing, everlasting home: Hail and Hosanna, great, living God!**

\* Call to Worship and Opening Prayer (drawing in part from Psalm 19)

One: The teaching of the Holy One of Old is perfect, restoring the soul;

**Many: the decrees of the Fount of Wisdom are trustworthy, making us wise.**

One: The precepts of the All-Loving God are right, rejoicing the heart;

**Many: the commands of the Fire of Sinai are clear, enlightening us.**

One: The reverence of the Most High is pure, standing forever;

**Many: the judgments of the Just One are true and righteous.**

One: They are more desired than gold, than much fine gold;

**Many: they are sweeter than honey, than the drippings of the honeycomb.**

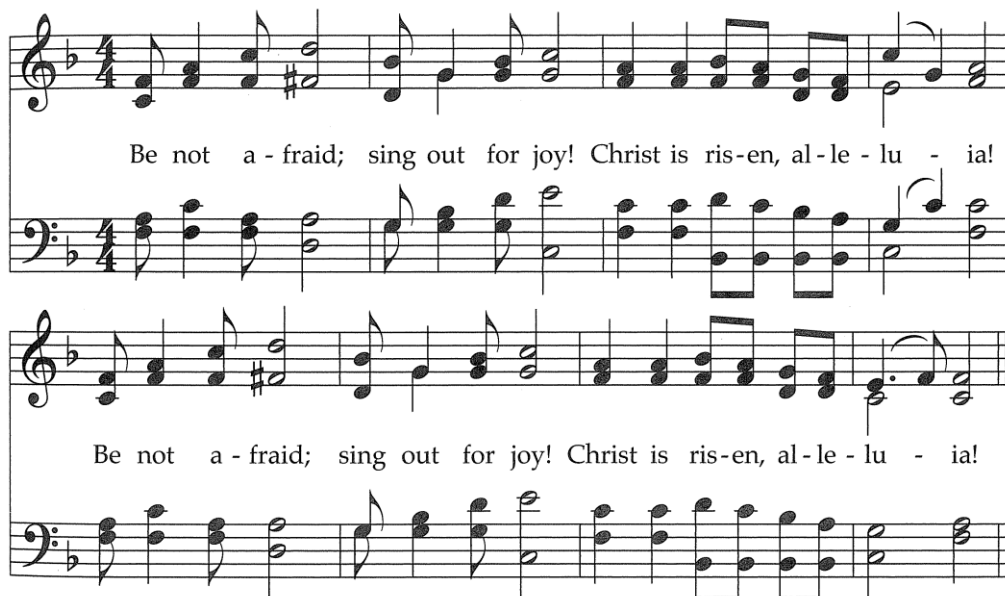
One: Let us pray.

**Many: Gracious God, we agree with the Psalmist that your teachings are amazing—but we aren't so sure about "perfect." We know that our holy writings are old. REALLY old. We know that they've been revised, lost, found, erased, rewritten, dripped-on, sneezed-on, and crumpled. Help us to always remember that and to read them with humility. Help us to not turn the book itself into an idol. Help us to remain open to new revelations and discoveries that can deepen our appreciation for our spiritual heritage, that they might make us even more enthusiastic witnesses to your Good News in this world. 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!

Be not a - fraid; sing out for joy! Christ is ris-en, al - le - lu - ia!

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 is for the vocal soloist, and the second system is for the choir or congregation.

Special Music

“Magdalene”

Libbie Schrader

Today’s special music is a recording by the original artist and is used with her permission.  
The song does include the word “whore” as a nod to traditional teachings about Mary  
that are wholly in error.

You can watch her official video here (it lacks one verse): <https://vimeo.com/69995141>

She recorded the full version here:

<https://www.reverbnation.com/libbieschrader/song/4897994-magdalene>

*I went to the garden of the holy Virgin / Mary most pure, conceived without sin  
I was down on my knees with the dirt on my skin / And I asked for the blessing of the Magdalene.*

*There she came to me in a state of grace / Bearing things to reveal in this earthly place  
Secret songs of the flesh like a holy hymn / Oh I asked for the wisdom of the Magdalene*

*She's a bleeding heart full of blinding light / Which she carefully conceals 'til the time is right  
Oh a woman heavy with the dark of night / She will do, Allelu, what she came here to do  
She is ready now to do what she came to do*

*There's a picture hanging by my bathroom door / It's a vision of Our Lady, maybe virgin, maybe whore  
Either way, there are roses flowing from her hands / The soft, sure blessing of the Magdalene*

*Well there once was a time by the ocean shore / I was praying in the sand I was praying to my Lord  
Saying "what would you have of me? anything at all" / He said "be as much yourself as is possible  
Girl, be as much yourself as possible"*

*So I went to the garden of the holy Virgin / Ready now to see what I've been burying within  
It was never sin at all, it's a deep Amen / The long hidden knowledge of the Magdalene*

*She's the one to reveal what the world couldn't know  
She was close to Jesus' side / She was holy, she was whole  
Covered up by the laws of the learned men / Oh, they all fear the power of the Magdalene*

*Ad Jesum per Mariam Ad Jesum per Mariam / I asked for the blessing of the Magdalene  
Ad Jesum per Mariam Ad Jesum per Mariam / We're looking for the blessing of the Magdalene  
We're all aching for the blessing of the Magdalene*

*(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 - John 11: 1-3, 17-27

Lector, **Congregation**

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet

with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

<sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.

<sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

<sup>22</sup> But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup> She said to him, **"Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."**

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

**Many: Thanks be to God.**

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

*You can read Diana Butler Bass's sermon/lecture at the following link.*

[https://open.substack.com/pub/dianabutlerbass/p/mary-the-tower?utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/dianabutlerbass/p/mary-the-tower?utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web)

Hymn

"I Come to the Garden Alone" #237

*C. Austin Miles wrote this hymn and its music to tell the story of  
Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Jesus.*

**I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses;  
and the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses.**

**[refrain] And he walks with me, and he talks with me,  
and he tells me I am his own,  
and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.**

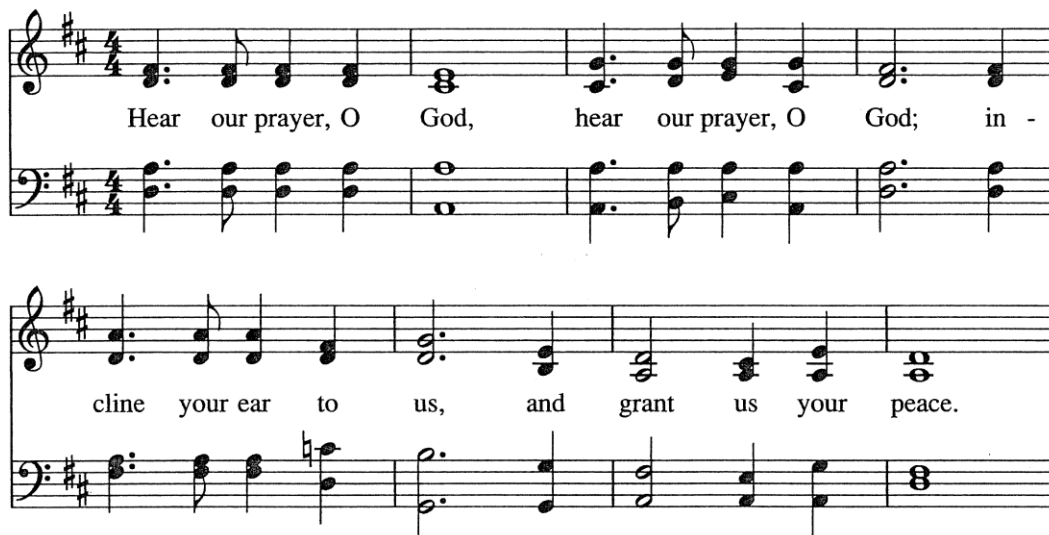
**He speaks, and the sound of his voice is so sweet the birds hush their singing;  
and the melody that he gave to me within my heart is ringing. [refrain]**

**I'd stay in the garden with him, though the night around me be falling;  
but he bids me go; through the voice of woe his voice to me is calling. [refrain]**

## 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](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 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

Reprinted music is covered under OneLicense.net #A-715296.

The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright ©1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

### Sermon Text

I want to you to look at the top of your bulletin, friends, at the top-right corner of the front page, because it might just be that I haven't adequately explained that symbol. It's a new UCC symbol developed in the last decade, an outgrowth of our denomination's use of a single comma in an earlier campaign. This one is magnified in ways that invite interpretation, not remotely limited to a moving wave that suggests the activity of the Holy Spirit that assures us that GOD IS STILL SPEAKING.

The Rev. Ron Buford once spearheaded the UCC's "God Is Still Speaking" campaign by linking it to an old quote from Gracie Allen: "Never put a period where God has put a comma." It's one of the closest things we have to a denominational confession of faith in short form, a claim that God didn't stop revealing Godself when the Bible was canonized. It's a traditional view that all the revelation God ever performed is contained within the Bible. There are even those within our denomination who believe that everything about God and our faith is contained in that book. A period, not a comma.

But indeed, God is still speaking, and just as God spoke in ancient times, sometimes God speaks through women—and we should be listening!

What I am about to tell you is Biblically super-geeky and it fills me with excitement that can't be contained by a period. It needs a comma because the joy just keeps flowing! And now I'm going to pull extensively from "All the Marys," a sermon given by Church scholar Diana Butler Bass in 2022.

The song I played for you today was written some years back by Elizabeth—Lizzie-Schrader, at that time an Episcopalian folk singer. One day, Schrader went into a garden in New York City. Based on the song, it might have been a garden dedicated to Mary, mother of Jesus, but in that garden, she heard an answering voice.

The voice said, "Follow Mary Magdalene."

Bass notes that Schrader wasn't accustomed to hearing voices when she prayed, so she took it seriously. That's when she wrote that lovely song we heard today. But then she thought she needed to learn more, so she called up the Episcopal seminary in New York and said, "I want to learn more about Mary Magdalene." They invited her to enroll, so she did. And then she got an advisor, and she said, "I want to learn more about Mary Magdalene." And the advisor said, "Go for it." And then, when it came time to write her Master's thesis, she said, "I want to write about John 11 and Mary Magdalene." And her professor said, "Do it, but go to the oldest texts we have and see if you can find something new to say."

Now, perhaps you're confused. Doesn't the story say, "Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha?" Maybe you remember a story from Luke in which two sisters—Mary and Martha—have an encounter with Jesus, and Martha gets all put out because Mary won't help with the housework. Yes? And that Mary we equate with Mary of Bethany, a Mary that we have not generally associated with Mary Magdalene because Magdala isn't anywhere near Bethany. This isn't a Mary Magdalene story! We only get one reference to her as someone who bankrolled Jesus and had some demons driven out of her, and then she shows up at the crucifixion and the Resurrection.

And you'd be right. But here's the thing. God is still speaking, through both Mary and through Elizabeth Schrader!

Because of advancements in the field, Schrader didn't have to go across the world to examine Papyrus 66, the oldest and most complete version of John we have. It was available to her as a high resolution scan. And as this one-time folk singer who now knew enough Greek to be dangerous started looking really closely at the scan, she made a shattering discovery.

Someone overwrote the text.

In that 1800-year-old version of John, the author wrote, "Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and **his** sister **Mary**." There's no Martha here. Someone went through and wrote a Greek "theta" – the letter that makes a TH sound – over the top of the Iota, the I of "Maria." Someone changed that second "Mary" to "Martha." Then they changed the possessive pronoun to further make it look like Mary and Martha, not Lazarus and Mary—because take note, this is almost certainly a clarifying repetition. Bethany is the town of Mary, of Mary the sister of Lazarus. AND, she's the one who evidently anointed Jesus's feet and wiped them with her hair. I'll come back to that.

Schrader further discovered that the early church father Tertullian wrote about John 11 around the year 200. He only mentions a Mary, not a Martha. Egeria, a fourth-century pilgrim whose diary we still have, writes about John 11, and she mentions a Mary, but no Martha. Oh, there's still a Martha in Luke, *but not in John*.

Anyway, Schrader's research was reviewed by Harvard, and they published it in their highfalutin' scholarly journal. Then the old German men of the Nestle-Aland organization who zealously guard the Greek New Testament and strive to ensure that all of our Bibles are as accurate as possible to the oldest manuscripts we have had Schrader come present her work to them, and their response was to say, "Well, we might have to change something here."

God is still speaking! Mary is still speaking!

But the story doesn't even end there. Because for centuries, people have said that Mary was from Magdala, as everyone knows. and Magdala is a little fishing village out on the Mediterranean coast. You can even go there and see a church dedicated to Mary. Except that the village in question wasn't called Magdala in the time of Jesus. So what's up with this Mary "Magdalene?"

In the New Testament we find two “Christological confessions,” moments where someone other than Jesus says, “Yep, you’re the son of God.” The first appears in Mark, Matthew, and Luke, and it’s always Peter. It’s the moment when Jesus says, “Who do you say that I am?” Simon says, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus says, “Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah... and I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” Peter, from the Greek “Petra” which means “rock.”

The second confession comes in John 11, when Martha who is really Mary says, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” And which Mary is that?

In all probability, it’s Mary Magdalene. Because here’s the thing about “magdala”: in Aramaic, which Jesus spoke, it means *the tower*. Peter the Rock, Mary the Tower. We already know that there were those in the centuries after Jesus died who thought Mary was a big deal. The Gnostics thought that Peter was rather put out about the whole thing, objecting to the way that Jesus kissed her and told her all of his biggest secrets. There are traditions that she was sent away by the Apostles, that she was put out to sea in a boat without a rudder, that she ended up in France and baptized a whole bunch of people.

Diana Butler Bass wept when Lizzie Schrader told her about her research and the very real possibility that Mary of Bethany IS Mary Magdalene—the one who confesses Jesus in John 11, and then is the first witness to his Resurrection in John 20. Mary, the one to whom the task was given to spread the Good News that Christ had risen. Mary, who in the Luke version *Peter doesn’t believe*, thinking her story is but an “idle tale.”

All of this in a church where Peter became the preeminent Apostle and Mary was covered up by the laws of the learned men.

Was it because they feared the power of the Magdalene?

I promised I’d come back to this. A few months back, I again talked about how a Pope conflated Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene and declared that she was a sex worker, all because of that whole “washing Jesus’s feet with her hair” bit that was considered to be sexually suggestive. Well, God is still speaking, and Lizzie Schrader is still teaching, and now it kind of looks like Mary of Bethany might actually BE Mary Magdalene. The prostitute part might not be right—though so what if it is—but the conflation might not have been a conflation. It might have been accurate all along. Mary Magdalene didn’t just witness the Resurrection, she confessed that Jesus is the Son of God, and in an early church where Peter rose to the top, her voice was silenced.

But Mary is still speaking.

God is still speaking.

We’re still learning that we’ve gotten things wrong. That the Bible is most assuredly NOT inerrant in its English translations. That things we’ve convinced ourselves are theologically critical might in fact be completely wrongheaded because someone came along later and changed the words. We can learn, and we can grow, and we can listen for the Stillspeaking God and the Stillspeaking Mary.

And that, dear ones, is very Good News.

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.*