



# First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation  
May 21, 2023 ♦ Seventh 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

Welcome! If you would like to join our mailing list, email [office@uccanoka.org](mailto:office@uccanoka.org) and ask to be added.

## Prelude

“Canon of Grace”  
Anoka UCC Bell Choir

arr. Linda R. Lamb

## The Church Bell Rings

## \* Opening Hymn

“Jesus Loves Me” #327

**Jesus loves me! This I know, for the Bible tells me so.**

**Little ones to him belong; they are weak, but he is strong.**

**Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.**

**Jesus loves me! This I know, as he loved so long ago,**

**taking children on his knee, saying, “Let them come to me.”**

**Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.**

**Jesus loves me! Still today, walking with me on my way.**

**Wanting as a friend to give light and love to all who live.**

**Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.**

## Children’s Time and Bestowing of Bibles

One: [Name], we give you this Bible, that through it you may learn and be shaped by the stories of our faith, that they may teach you to always do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Do you accept this beloved book with joy? If so, please say, “I do!”

Recipient: I do!

## The Baptism of Josephine Izel Hess-Vasquez

Grandparents: Ronda Hess, Greg Hess, Alberto Vasquez-Parada, Inez Rios-Contreras

Godparents: Bailey Hess, Frank Allen, Violent Allen

## Introduction

One: In the sacrament of baptism, we are following an ancient custom. Joseph and Mary brought the infant Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to be blessed and named as God's own. In the early Christian church, entire households, including children were initiated into the faith through baptism. John baptized Jesus. And this is what Jesus came to know in that moment: after he was baptized and while he was praying, he knew God loved him deeply.

**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 Alexander's 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 Jojo to know and love God. May they and Jojo 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.

*As the Baptismal waters are blessed:*

Recalling now your endless and boundless love, we ask that you bless this water, that it might be for us both symbol and substance of your love, reminding us to love others as you have loved us. Amen.

Baptism

One: What name have you given your child?

Parents: Josephine Izel Hess-Vasquez.

One: Josephine Izel Hess-Vasquez, 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: May your names be honored and respected for wisdom and good deeds. May God's blessing be upon you, now and always. May you be a joy to your families and may you bring blessing to humanity and glory to the name of God. We welcome you into our midst on behalf of the whole church of Jesus Christ.**

Bestowing of the Congregational Gifts

Choir Anthem Medley

Anoka UCC Chancel Choir; Don Shier, Director

*Every year at this time, the choir offers a look back at many of their anthems from the year.*

*They conclude with a full anthem of blessing that will carry us in love through the summer.*

“An Instrument of Thy Peace”

J. Jerome Williams

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.*

- “Oh Lord, You Know My Heart” Sandra Ford  
*O Lord, you know my heart. You have heard my ev’ry doubt, my ev’ry fear.  
O Lord, you trace the pathways of my life; I feel your hand and know that you are near.*
- “Pie Jesu” Arlen Clarke  
*Pie Jesu Domine, Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem, Pie Jesu domine.*
- “Magnificat” J. Leavitt  
*Magnificat, anima mea Dominum;  
et exsultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutary meo.*
- “Sleep Little Lamb” J. M. Martin  
*Quietly we praise you. Gently we adore you.  
Tenderly we lift our songs to the newborn king.  
One day loud hosannas will praise the great I Am;  
but tonight hearts whisper, “Sleep, little Lamb.”*
- “Run, Ye Shepherds” Passereau; arr. Schweitzer  
*Run ye shepherd, run to find the Savior,  
run ye shepherds, run to find the babe, the holy one.*
- “Amazing Grace” arr. Bob Krogstad  
*When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,  
we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we’d first begun.*
- “Lift Every Voice and Sing” arr. Gilpin  
*Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has brought us.  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.  
Facing the rise sun of our new day begun, let us march on till victory is won.*
- “Make Them Hear You” from Ragtime Ahrens/Flaherty  
*Go out and tell the story to your daughters and your sons. Make them hear you.  
And tell them, in our struggle, we were not the only ones. Make them hear you.  
Your sword can be a sermon or the power of the pen.  
Teach every child to raise their voice and then, my brothers then  
will justice be demanded by ten million righteous men. Make them hear you.*
- “Hosanna” from Jesus Christ Superstar Rice/Webber  
*Hosanna Heysanna Sanna Sanna Ho Sanna Hey Sanna Ho Sanna.  
Hey JC, JC won’t you smile at me? Sanna Ho Sanna Hey Superstar.*
- “Everybody Rejoice” from The Wiz Luther Vandross  
*Can you feel a brand new day?*

Choir Anthem

“Peace I Leave with You”

Walter L. Pelz

*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you:  
not as the world giveth give I unto you.*

*(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 – Luke 14:7-11

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable.  
<sup>8</sup> "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; <sup>9</sup> and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. <sup>11</sup> For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

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

**Many: Thanks be to God.**

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Hymn

“When in Our Music God Is Glorified” #561

**When in our music God is glorified, and adoration leaves no room for pride,  
it is as though the whole creation cried: Alleluia!**

**How often, making music, we have found a new dimension in the world of sound,  
as worship moved us to a more profound Alleluia!**

**So has the church in liturgy and song, in faith and love through centuries of wrong,  
borne witness to the truth in every tongue: Alleluia!**

**Let every instrument be tuned for praise! Let all rejoice who have a voice to raise!  
And may God give us faith to sing always: Alleluia!**

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!**

\* 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.**

\* 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

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Sermon Text

Back in the 1990s, one of the best airlines in the United States was Midwest Express. It started out as a regional business-class airline, founded by the company Kimberly-Clark (the makers of Kleenex), and it quickly added other points of call until it wasn't regional anymore. A big part of the reason it became so

successful—or at least I choose to believe this—was because it was the most comfortable airline for anyone who couldn't afford to fly first class.

That's because the *whole plane* was first class.

They didn't call it that, but that was the idea. Instead of two columns of seats that had three seats each, Midwest Express jets had two columns of two seats each, all upholstered in leather. Passengers had more room side-to-side, and even front-to back. The airline also served fresh-cooked meals on actual china, and then there was the best part of all: toward the end of every flight, the flight attendants baked chocolate-chip cookies for the entire plane. The smell of those cookies was like a foretaste of heaven, and that first bite into the still-warm cookie was heaven realized.

Maybe it's a quirky way to think about the Kingdom of God (the Beloved Community), and perhaps it's not a perfect example because Midwest Express still cost a little bit more than more conventional airlines, but that airline, in their unusual way, was a flying commentary on unjust social systems—and it's those systems that Jesus was so often at pains to deconstruct.

You may recall that the Roman Empire was rooted in a social system of patronage, not at all unlike a giant pyramid scheme. Caesar sat at the top. Beneath him were his court officials and the members of the Roman Senate. Below that were high-ranking military officers and maybe rich merchants. By the time we get to the bottom, the whole system has widened out to encompass countless poor and marginalized people.

The whole point of this system was to ensure that wealth and power flowed up into the hands of a few, and ultimately into the hands of the Emperor. It incentivized the people at the top to keep it that way so that they could be further enriched. The whole system was designed to keep the masses powerless and weak, valued only for how much they could contribute in taxes that ended up lining the pockets of the ultra-wealthy. If you ever needed to see another reason why Jesus was deemed a threat to Rome, there it is. The way he talked about God and the world sought to flatten that system. He wanted to put leather seats in every row and serve everyone on china. He wanted to serve warm chocolate chip cookies to everyone, not just the powerful.

That vision didn't work for the Romans, so they killed him. It didn't end up working well for Midwest Express either, though that had a lot to do with 9/11.

This parable that Jesus tells and I read today is just one of many instances where he illustrates this new world order that he calls the Kingdom of God. For make no mistake—the prayer he gave his followers included this critical line: **“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** The Beloved Community isn't about what comes *later*. It's about what God is hoping to create on earth now. And the way to do that is to not grasp at power. To not create a pecking order. He tells the people to not sit at the head table at the wedding banquet, because sooner or later the newly-married couple is going to show up and you'll have to move (or something along those lines!). Rather, he says to sit at the lowest place. The place of the least influence and honor.

Now, this seems a bit counterintuitive. Who wants to sit in the cheap seats? And Jesus himself makes it easy to read this parable in what I think is the wrong way, because it's not about hoping the host will come along and invite you to sit in a higher place. It's really about not having a hierarchy at all. It's about getting rid of first-class entirely so that everyone on the plane can have cookies. Because everyone on the plane *deserves* cookies. Everyone on the plane deserves love. For in the eyes of God, there is no distinction between rich and poor when it comes to how much God loves them. No distinction between the powerful and the powerless. God loves everyone the exact same amount—though we should note

that God does demonstrate a *preferential option for the poor*, in no small part because no one prefers them on earth.

It's getting hard for me to read the news again. Too many stories abound about state legislatures enshrining into law the abominable corruption we all recognize as Christian nationalism. I'm entirely anxious about the ultra-rich spending their ill-gotten gains on advertising in battleground states, all in the hopes they might sway some moderate House and Senate elects to *let the nation go into default*. And while some do this for purely economic reasons—it serves their intent to further enrich themselves at the expense of everyone else—others are prosecuting this goal through the overtly-religious lens of, as I said, Christian supremacy. They want the United States to be a jet where all of the china and cookies are restricted to first class. Where all of the legroom is to be found in the front of the plane. Where everyone else subsidizes the airline by packing themselves into the back of the plane like cordwood, where they can smell the cookies but never eat of them. And then they try to convince people that this is the right way to go about it, all because anyone who doesn't affirm whiteness, straightness, and Christianity won't even be allowed on the plane in the first place.

Beloved, that is most assuredly NOT the Kingdom of God.

This is most assuredly NOT what Jesus was talking about.

Christian supremacy is nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal when we remember Jesus telling us to not sit at the head table, but to democratize the whole room. When we remember him telling us that we can't serve both God and wealth. When we remember that in the most startling lesson of all, he tied a towel around his waist and bent down to wash the feet of his friends. And then he showed us in the most arresting way possible that a pecking order serves only to make us pull back our hands in pain.

Friends, I have no specific call to action today except to say this: we know what we need to do to preserve a nation and a world that brings about a Beloved Community, and if we needed any further reminder of why it's so important, we saw it today. The child we baptized and her loving parents deserve all the love in the world. They deserve all the warm, fresh-baked cookies. They deserve the premium seats with legroom. They, and each and every one of us deserves to live in a world where bread is freely given, debts are forgiven, and all are delivered from evil. Yes?

Let's get to baking. 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.*

Summer Worship Series: **CONGREGATIONAL CHOICE!**

You all get to pick the hymns and readings for almost the entire summer! Each Sunday, the bulletin will keep a running tally here of what's been chosen for each day, including the name(s) of the person(s) who made the selection. Contact Pastor Chris ([pastor@uccanoka.org](mailto:pastor@uccanoka.org)) to book your slots, and send a freewill donation to Sally West ([mwest3500@gmail.com](mailto:mwest3500@gmail.com)) and let her know you've done so!

May 28: Pentecost (no slots available)

June 4: Opening Hymn, Scripture Reading, Post-Sermon Hymn

June 11: Opening Hymn, Scripture Reading, Post-Sermon Hymn

June 18: Opening Hymn, Scripture Reading, Post-Sermon Hymn

June 25: Pride Sunday (no slots available)

July 2: Opening Hymn, Scripture Reading, Post-Sermon Hymn

July 9: Pastor Kelsey's Installation Service (no slots available)

July 16: Opening Hymn, Scripture Reading, Post-Sermon Hymn

July 23: Opening Hymn, Scripture Reading, Post-Sermon Hymn

July 30: Opening Hymn, Scripture Reading, Post-Sermon Hymn

August 6: Opening Hymn, Scripture Reading, Post-Sermon Hymn

August 13: Opening Hymn, Scripture Reading, Post-Sermon Hymn

August 20: Opening Hymn, Scripture Reading, Post-Sermon Hymn

August 27: Opening Hymn, Scripture Reading, Post-Sermon Hymn

September 3: Opening Hymn, Scripture Reading, Post-Sermon Hymn