



First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation

October 1, 2023 ♦ 18th 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

Prelude

Koki Sato

The Church Bell Rings

A Time for Children (10:30)

We Come to the Table (*adapted from a liturgy written by Rev. Maren Tiribassi*)

Call to Worship (Canada)

One: The whole world is in God's hands.

Many: Everything that lives and breathes. Everything that simply is. Everything.

One: From the farthest spaces, to the inmost places!

Many: God is with us and we are with God. Alleluia!

One: As people of Christ, gathered at table, with our siblings around the world, to remember whose we are, we praise —

Many: Alleluia! Thanks be to God!

One: Let us pray. With all that we have, with all that we are, we worship you, God-of-all-Being. Bless this day. Bless this time. Bless this gathering. Bless this world with your overflowing love. Alleluia!

Many: Alleluia! Amen!

Praise (Argentina) (singing)

Santo, santo, santo, mi corazon te adora!

Mi Corazon te sabe decir: santo eres Dios.

“Santo, Santo, Santo” #793

Holy, Holy, Holy. My heart, my heart adores you!

My heart is glad to say the words: you are holy, God.

Invocation (Aotearoa / New Zealand)

God of brilliant sunsets and shining rainbows,
God of golden daffodils and glowing autumn leaves,
God of all the blues of sunlit seas,
God of all the shades of green in bush and field,
in rivers and oceans and lakes,
in rough stones on a beach and polished jewels in a showcase,
God of people, brown and amber, pink and ebony,
artistic and athletic, practical and visionary,
compassionate and laughter-bringing,
God who colours us a world of variety,
We thank you that you have made each of us unique,
that you call us to contribute our special colours to the life around us.
We come to you in thanksgiving and worship. **Amen.**

Invitation (Germany)

One: We rejoice in the God of life, who gives us bread: the fruit of the earth worked with human hands, who makes it into the bread of life.

Many: We rejoice in the God of life who gives us wine: the fruit of the vine tended with daily care, and puts the flavor of the new world into it.

One: As the grain and grapes are joined on this table in bread and wine, a visual symbol for us,

Many: May our church join together into a visual symbol for the entire world.

Reconciliation (Chile) (the word "py'aguapy" is Guarani, a national language of Paraguay)

One: Paz, peace, py'aguapy. (roughly, "pee-awa-pee")

Me Comprometo, Señor a buscar:

La sanidad de mi relación contigo.

La sanidad de mi relación conmigo misma.

La sanidad de mi relación con otros.

La sanidad de mi relación con toda tu creación.

¡SHALOM!

Many: Paz, peace, py'aguapy.

I commit, God, to searching for:

The healing of my relationship with you.

The healing of my relationship with myself.

The healing of my relationship with others.

The healing of my relationship with all your creation.

¡SHALOM!

Assurance of Grace (China)

One: Forgiveness is forgetting bad things, remembering good things. Forgiveness is accepting God's love.

Naming of Countries

One: In this World Communion, we pray for these particular countries:

Many: [Call out for all to hear the name of a country for which we pray today.]

Words of Remembering (Korea)

Remember the Lord, the friend of sinners, who were the oppressed, the estranged, the weak, the sick, widow, orphans. Remember the Lord, the one disliking of the common structure and power. Remember the Lord, the one sharing of daily food in life. Remember the Lord, the one liberating from a dictator.

We remember thy suffering, O Lord, at thy Last Supper.

Prayer of Consecration (Guatemala)

One: You emptied yourself completely, keeping nothing for yourself. Now, naked, utterly stripped, you give yourself to us as bread that sustains us and as juice that consoles us. You are Light and Truth. You are the Way and the Hope. You are Love. Grow in us.

Sharing of the Elements (South Africa)

One: The ears of wheat are broken and scattered on the hillside to grow. Gathered, they are broken again and scattered throughout the city to make bread. The bread is scattered to each home and broken to make nourishment. Broken and scattered, broken and scattered, and some becomes Christ's body broken for us, as we are the people of God scattered through the city and, perhaps, broken to give nourishment to others.

Many: We receive this bread, broken, scattered and made whole. We drink this cup, thirty, longing, willing to be poured.

The elements will be distributed in the pews. Partake as you are served.

Gluten-free crackers are in the center container in each bread plate.

Peel-and-eat safety elements are included in the juice trays.

Music (Japan)

Koki Sato

Prayer of Thanksgiving (Mexico) (unison)

We give you thanks O Lord, for all food that has arrived at our table from your generosity. Bless the people who have made it possible, from the cultivation of the

earth until it arrived to us. Give bread to those who are hungry, and to those who have bread give us hunger for you. Amen.

Special Music

“Wherever You Are”
Anoka UCC String Band

The Franz Family

*Are you standing at a crossroad wondering which road you should take?
And you're dreading the decision and a possible mistake.
But the will of God won't lead you where the grace of God can't keep you.
You will never be out of His care. Remember that the lord's already there.*

*(chorus) Wherever you are, wherever you're going
God is right there beside you seeing and knowing.
Wherever you go, He already knows what lies ahead and what's behind.
You'll always find He's never too far from wherever you are.*

*You are waiting to hear thunder and see lightening in the sky
Oh, but God can work His wonders through a still small voice inside.
So keep listening and learning and continue on your journey
Following the one who is the way; Oh, He's the only road you need to take. (chorus)*

You'll always find that He's never too far from wherever you are.

Scripture Reading – Matthew 15:10-11, 15-20

Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: ¹¹ it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." ¹⁵ But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." ¹⁶ Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷ Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? ¹⁸ But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

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

Many: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Hymn (*Dakota*)

“Great Spirit God” #341 (vv. 1-2, 4)

Great Spirit God, the things which are yours are numerous and great.

The heavens above you set in their place, and earth received its form by your hands.
The ocean depths respond to your will, for you can do all things.

Your will, mysterious and so strong, brings growth to all the earth.
Food for our souls and clothing to wear, are like your cup that blesses and fills.
Provide for us each day of our lives sufficient for our needs.

That day you came to dwell on th earth, bringing us all great joy!
The nations scattered over the world, to them you gave the light of all life.
O Jesus, O Compassionate One, we offer praise to you!

Offering

Text-to-Give: [844-334-1477](tel: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 (Argentina) (*singing once through each language*) “Santo, Santo, Santo” #793
Santo, santo, santo, mi corazon te adora!
Mi Corazon te sabe decir: santo eres Dios.

Holy, Holy, Holy. My heart, my heart adores you!
My heart is glad to say the words: you are holy, God.

* 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 (*Argentina*)

Que el Dios de la Vida,
sea tu guía en el camino de cada día,
sea tu refugio en momentos de inseguridad
y sea tu descanso en tiempos de fatiga.

Que el Dios de la Vida,
te fortalezca cuando te sientas débil,
te consuele cuando estés triste
y te abraze cuando te sientas sola.

Que el Dios de la Vida,
que te quiere y te conoce,
te cubra con su ternura de Madre.

Por siempre.

Amén.

May the God of Life,
be your guide on the road every day,
be your refuge in times of uncertainty
and be your rest in times of fatigue.
May the God of Life,
strengthen you when you feel weak,
comfort you when you feel sad
and hug you when you feel alone.
May the God of Life,
who loves you and knows you,
cover you with the tenderness of a Mother.
Forever.
Amen.

Congregational Blessing (*America*)

“God Be With You” (#809)

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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<https://giftsinopenhands.wordpress.com/2020/09/25/holy-communion-liturgy-for-world-communion-sunday-october-5-2020/>

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Sermon Text

I have a non-UCC, Christian friend who, upon first learning that I was a pastor, ended up sharing with me her spiritual pain that in her church tradition, she couldn't partake of Communion. It's because she has celiac disease, and in her church's tradition, the bread of Communion MUST have gluten. Somewhere along the line, that portion of the Church decided that the bread had to be of a very specific type or it didn't work. It didn't count. Was that an evil intention? I don't think so—but it harms nonetheless.

That's what Jesus is talking about in today's Scripture passage. Though many interpreters have latched onto a seemingly anti-semitic reading of the text and then perpetuated that antisemitism in the world today, Jesus's beef isn't really with the Jewish religious leaders and their purity laws, laws that those leaders were concerned were being violated by Jesus and his disciples. No, what Jesus is talking about is

the altogether *human* foible of purity-enforcement, so often in a way that ignores the real harms that are being caused.

Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg notes in her book *On Repentance and Repair* that when we see words like “purity” and “impurity” we tend to read them as a moral concept, all tied up with our essential worth, with shame, with existential dirt. But she notes that the ritual sacrifices performed by the High Priest in the Temple era weren’t about that. The Temple was a special place. A holy place. Jewish tradition deemed it necessary to approach the holy site with a reverence that fit the occasion. Sacrifices of atonement and cleansing weren’t about the individual’s morality or sins; it was about honoring that which was holy. In our modern context, though, we can see in so many places where we’ve lost that context. In our hyper-attention to the letter of the law, we often manage to take our attention away from how we might be harming people.

When Jesus rattles off the list of things that defile, we ought to resist the urge to internalize it. It’s not the moment to ask, “Is it I, Lord?” Don’t get bogged down in those weeds. What Jesus is really pointing out is that we shouldn’t get so caught up in tradition and purity if, at the same time, our actions are harming others or ourselves. The fun part is that he uses poop as his metaphor of the day!

“It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth that defiles... do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?” What he’s saying is, “It’s not crappy to break the rules if your adherence to those rules is blinding you to the harm you’re doing everywhere else.” He’s even saying, “Your rules about purity don’t matter much if you’re still treating yourselves and your neighbors like crap.” He is, in a rather pointed way, telling people they’re full of... *it*.

Consider that Communion example again. My friend was and is harmed because her church has focused so much on the ritual purity, the ritual rightness, the supposed ritual *accuracy* of the Sacrament that they’ve lost sight of how that hyper-focus has brought pain to others. And it’s not just churches with strict Communion rules where this happens! Oh, no. I’ve seen the ripples of it here, too!

It was a Youth Sunday, one with Communion. Notably, while the kids did offer the traditional bread and gluten-free crackers and juice, they also offered three other options: pancakes and syrup, grapes and Goldfish crackers, and Oreos with milk. From my privileged vantage point on the other side of the table, I watched as many of you approached the table and eyeballed those Oreos. I could practically read the questions in the air around your heads. *Can I really take those? Does it count if it isn’t bread and juice? But it’s not traditional!* To be sure, a sizable minority opted for tradition. Very few at all opted for the pancakes or the Goldfish. The rest—the majority—opted for Oreos. But often, that choice came with a facial expression of anxiety, doubt, or even discomfort, as if you had just been caught with your hand in the cookie jar.

In the Midweek Newsletter last week, I wrote about joy. Specifically, I wrote about how my home church’s pastoral search profile didn’t have any joy in it, even though I knew what their joys were and are. I invited you to think about what your joys are here. Today, I realize that the Youth Sunday Oreo Communion brought joy in this place. But perhaps it wasn’t so much just that it was Oreos and we all felt just a little bit naughty, so much as it was a moment in which we managed to capture the joy the multitudes might have felt that day on the seashore when Jesus turned five loaves and two fish into twelve basketsful. Or the joy a disabled man experienced when Jesus told him to take up his mat and walk. Or what anyone meeting Jesus might have felt when they were told, “Your sins are forgiven” just that easily. They felt joy! They felt wonder! They felt awe! Perhaps we can’t access the magic, but we can

certainly experience the miracle of joy. On that Youth Sunday, we let go of our inherited inhibitions, the peculiar demands of history and tradition, and we let ourselves feel JOY.

That sin list names things that erase joy. Things that disconnect us from the joy that we're supposed to feel in this life, the joy of feeling loved by another, by the self, by God. Things that transform joy into anguish. We aren't just supposed to love our neighbors; we're supposed to release the floodwaters of joy into the world. And perhaps, in the context of this parable, we're not supposed to fall into the trap of thinking that purity will get us there. We know what "purity" so often brings: segregation. Strife. Discrimination. Persecution. Casting others out and creating pariahs. Subtracting from our communities anything that deviates from "perfection" until there's no one left. To be really blunt, we learned during World War II what the quest for purity brings: concentration camps, both abroad and at home.

In the midst of our own messiness, in the UCC we say, "No matter who you are or where you are on your life's journey, you are welcome here." That's a particularly Table-centric affirmation, you know. Because the Table is the first place where we put that wisdom into practice. The Table is the place where all are welcome, be they Peter or John or Judas or Mary. Those who always have more room for wheat-based bread and those who are gluten-intolerant. The healthy and the ill. Those who dance and those who weep. The believer and the non-believer. The bread-eater and the Oreo-eater. The adult and the child. The one who thinks they aren't full of crap, and the one who knows they are. There is no purity at this table except in the purity of joy that we know when all our distinctions and separations and classifications turn to dust in the face of God's steadfast love. It might not be the most doctrinally-accurate thing, I am convinced that there is nothing blocking us from the Table.

The very next story in Matthew after this parable is the one where Jesus meets a Canaanite woman. I'm sure the author put it there to drive the point home, because it's in this scene where this Gentile woman approaches Jesus, begging him to heal her daughter. In response, he says, "It is not fair to take the children's food and feed it to the dogs." When she responds, "yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the masters' table," Jesus responds, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." But this is no test. It's not about the Canaanite woman. This is a moment when Jesus himself, immediately after preaching about what really defiles, fails to practice what he preached. When the woman calls him on it, he realizes just how crappy he was to his neighbor.

Can you imagine the joy that woman felt when her daughter was healed?

Can you imagine the joy Jesus might have felt when he realized that there were depths of grace he had not yet unearthed?

Do you feel joy in the possibility that Jesus wasn't any purer than the rest of us?

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.