



Maundy Thursday

First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Anoka, Minnesota
April 76, 2023 ♦ 6:30p.m.



We are an Open and Affirming Church.
No matter who you are or
where you are in your life's journey,
you are welcome here.



We do not anticipate that livestreaming will be available for this service.
However, if that changes, you can watch it live or later at:
<https://www.youtube.com/@AnokaUCC>

Prelude

Welcome

Singing

“O Love That will Not Let Me Go” #485

**O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in you;
I give you back the life I owe,
that in your ocean depths its flow may swell with ardor true.**

**O Light that follows all my way,
to you I yield my flickering flame;
renew my spirit's feeble ray,
that from your brilliant sun-lit day it may new brightness claim.**

**O Joy that seeks me through my pain,
to you I cannot close my heart;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and know the promise is not vain that you will ne'er depart.**

**O Cross that raises up my head,
from you I dare not seek to flee;
life's glories wither and are dead,
but from the ground there blossoms red, life that shall endless be.**

Scripture Reading – John 8:2-11

Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵ Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what

do you say?" ⁶ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

Special Music

"By My Side" from Godspell
Kari Johnson and Laurie Elvig, Duet

Peggy Gordon

*Where are you going? Can you take me with you?
For my hand is cold and needs warmth. Where are you going?
Far beyond where the horizon lies,
and the land sings into mellow blueness
Oh please, take me with you.
Let me skip the road with you; I can dare myself.
I'll put a pebble in my shoe, and watch me walk.
I can walk and walk!
I shall call the pebble Dare. We will talk together about walking.
Dare shall be carried, and when we both have had enough,
I will take him from my shoe, singing:
"Meet your new road!"
Then I'll take your hand, finally glad that you are here by my side.*

Sermon

Singing

"It Was a Sad and Solemn Night" #225

**It was a sad and solemn night,
when powers of earth and hell arose
against the Child of God's delight,
whom friends betrayed to wicked foes.**

**Before the mournful scene began,
our Jesus blessed and broke the bread;
what love through all these actions ran,
what wondrous words of love were said.**

**"This is my body, broke for sin,
receive and eat the living food";
then took the cup and blessed the wine,**

“This the new covenant in my blood.”

**“Share this, my feast, till time shall end,
in memory of your dying friend:
meet at my table and recall the love
which God has shown to all.”**

**O Christ your feast we celebrate;
we show your death, we sing your name,
till you return, and we shall eat
the marriage supper of the Lamb.**

Communion

One: On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, Jesus’s disciples said to him,

Many: “Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

One: So he sent two of them, saying, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The teacher asks, where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover meal with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.” So they set out and went to the city and found everything as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

One: As Jesus gathered with his friends in that upper room, he knew that his time with them would soon end. Because he loved them, and so that they would understand this in a new way, he got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash his friends’ feet.

Many: What are you doing?

One: Jesus said, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

One: While they were eating, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you eating here tonight is going to betray me.” The disciples were greatly disturbed.

Many: Who is it?

One: Jesus said, “It is one of you who is dipping your hand into the bowl with me.” But they were all sharing in the meal.

One: Later, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, he broke it up into smaller pieces and shared it with them, saying, "Take and eat, and remember me when you do, because I am going away."

Many: Where are you going?

One: Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he shared it with them until all had drunk from it. Then he said, "Whenever you drink of the cup like this again, remember the new covenant I am making with you before my blood is poured out for you."

Many: Can you take me with you?

One: Jesus replied, "I am going far beyond where the horizon lies, where the land sinks into mellow blueness. You cannot follow, but you will follow afterward."

Many: Oh, where are you going?

You are invited to come forward to sit at the Table and receive the elements as if you were gathering with friends for a meal. Just let it happen.

Special Music

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Kari Johnson and Laurie Elvig, Duet*

Peggy Gordon

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Scripture – Luke 22:39-46

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." ⁴¹ Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, ⁴² "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." ⁴³ Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. ⁴⁴ In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. ⁴⁵ When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, ⁴⁶ and he said to

them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial."

Singing "My Life Flows on in Endless Song" #476 (vv 2, 4)

**What though my joys and comforts die?
My Savior still is living.
What though the shadows gather round?
A new song Christ is giving.
No storm can shake my inmost calm,
while to that Rock I'm clinging;
since Love commands both heaven and earth,
how can I keep from singing?**

**I lift my eyes; the cloud grows thin;
I see the blue above it;
and day by day this pathway smooths,
since first I learned to love it.
The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,
a fountain ever springing;
all things are new since I am Christ's—
how can I keep from singing?**

Postlude

Acknowledgements

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Sermon Text

The only song in *Godspell* that isn't written by Stephen Schwartz is "By My Side;" it was written by Peggy Gordon, one of the original cast members whose involvement with the show predated Schwartz's. Gordon and friends had developed the show on their own, and some of their music—like "By My Side"—even came from other shows that had never been produced. When they brought Schwartz in to improve their work, he threw out every one of the songs that had already been written except for this one, saying there was no way he could improve upon it.

The song remained Gordon's in the revamped show with her as the featured soloist. But though the musical is ostensibly drawn from the Gospel according to Matthew, "By My Side" happens after a scene drawn from John 8 where a woman is accused of adultery (despite the fact that the man is also supposed to be held accountable for adultery). Peggy Gordon took that to heart, reflecting that the woman felt so moved by the mercy shown to her that she couldn't help but follow Jesus. But where was he going?

He seems to give her something of an answer: “far beyond where the horizon lies and the land sinks into mellow blueness.” She wants to follow him there. Of course she does! How much better must that be than a world where an ancient law that applies to both women and men is only enforced upon the women? Even if the road to that place is hard, she wants him to know that she’s willing to follow. She’ll prove it by putting a pebble in her shoe—not to cause her pain, but to exercise willpower in order to endure that discomfort. She’ll apply that willpower to keep her on the road with Jesus. She dares herself to follow through. She dares him to take her along.

We know that’s not how it’s going to play out.

Later in John, Peter asks Jesus, “Where are you going?” In various ways, the Gospel authors all have Jesus telegraphing his imminent arrest and execution. The disciples often don’t get it, grasping only that Jesus is going away. Even though he isn’t sure what Jesus means, Peter wants to follow. Wherever Jesus is has to be better, right? But Jesus says, “You cannot follow me now.” Peter wants to know why; he claims he’ll even lay down his life for Jesus. And that’s when Jesus forewarns Peter that his faithfulness will fail and he will betray his lord three times before the night is even over. The pebble in Peter’s shoe is evidently too painful.

Peter, of course, isn’t the only betrayer, and in *Godspell*, the betrayal by Judas is worked into “By My Side” in an interlude right before the end: “Then the man they called Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and said: ‘What will you give me to betray him to you?’ They paid him thirty pieces of silver.” Does Judas already know that none of them can follow Jesus where he is going, that it isn’t to some place beyond the horizon where the land sinks into mellow blueness? There were those in the years that followed these events who thought he did, either because he was part of the plot to kill Jesus, or, amazingly enough, because he was the only one of Jesus’s friends who was willing to help Jesus stage the most remarkable protest ever, one that would end in Jesus’s own martyrdom.

That’s perhaps the saddest thing about Maundy Thursday. It’s not just the establishment of a memorial meal. If it were, that would be bittersweet for being the final dinner together, but it wouldn’t be so sorrowful. But the fact is that Maundy Thursday leads us directly to Good Friday. The events of the next day can’t happen without the movements the night before. And through it all, we ought to remember that to Jesus’s friends at the time, Easter was scarcely even a pipe dream. Oh, according to some Gospel authors he was telling them he must rise again on the third day, but let’s be real here. They weren’t really expecting that. No one was lurking around the Temple or the Palace and thinking, “Eh, whatever happens it’s all going to work out. He told us so.” No one is really thinking that Jesus is going far beyond where the horizon lies to where the land sinks into mellow blueness. This isn’t *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* where King Caspian and his friends are able to sail a ship to the very edge of that horizon and wade their way to where Aslan awaits them. This night can only end in sadness.

Perhaps we’ve taken that entirely too much to heart. The Church has been so shaped by the trauma of Good Friday that they read it backwards into the Last Supper and our reenactments of it ever since. Or at least, that’s the contention my teacher Christopher Grundy has made in his book, *Recovering Communion in a Violent World*. His contention is that in the actual, physical reenactment of Communion, we don’t just remember him. We remember him *dying*, and we ritually reenact it. In this sense, it’s an outgrowth of literalism taken too far. Jesus says, “this bread is my body.” And then we break it—not because we’re breaking bread in order to share it more easily, but because we’re liturgically re-breaking his body just as the Roman soldiers did on that accursed hill.

Have we, in an effort to fervently show Jesus that we’re willing to walk his path with him, created an unnecessary discomfort for ourselves? Have we placed a sharp pebble in our shoe so that we might show him just how much we dare to follow him? All so that he might let us join him in that land of mellow blueness?

In the earliest days of the Protestant Reformation, the original Reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, and the original Lutheran, Martin Luther, had a chance to skip the road together, but they couldn't agree on what happens in the sacrament of Communion. Both walked away from the Catholic contention that the bread and wine become the literal body and blood of Jesus, but Luther didn't walk as far. He believed that the elements were simultaneously body and bread, wine and blood. He said that the most important thing Jesus said was, "This is my body, broken for you" (and so with the wine). Zwingli disagreed. He believed that the most important thing Jesus said was, "Do this in remembrance of me." He didn't think there was any mystical mojo happening at the meal; it was just a bunch of people getting together around a table to remember Jesus. Notably, John Calvin—Zwingli's successor—pulled the Reform tradition away from Zwingli's belief when he taught that Jesus was "spiritually present" at the table. And they still broke the bread.

All these hundreds of years later, I still think that Zwingli was on to something, because I think the church created a problem rather than solving one. We put a pebble in our shoe and wedded Thursday to Friday in a way that keeps Jesus's agonizing death in the forefront of our spirituality. And while the Catholics have sometimes been criticized for putting Jesus up on that cross all the time, lending visual weight to the preeminence of Friday, the Protestants didn't move that far away. It's still a cross. Body or no, it reminds us of the pain and suffering. It impresses into us the doctrinal belief that the point of everything was the cross, the sin, the redemption, the purchase.

In our desire to show Jesus just how committed we were to following him, did we take too literally his invitation to take up our crosses and follow?

I realize that it's not going to look as good hanging on a necklace, but what if the visual proof of our focus were the Table? Not the cross on which he died, and not an altar that insists his death was a sacrifice, but a Table around which he wants us to gather with our neighbors to eat and remember and create community?

Where are you going?

I'm going to go get a bite to eat.

Can you take me with you?

Of course; I was going to ask!

If we're cold and in need of warmth, where better to find it than around a table in the presence of our friends—or if you lean Psalmic about it, even in the presence of our enemies?

What if heaven isn't beyond some far horizon? What if the land of mellow blueness is just every table around which people gather in community and love?

What if we resolved our conflicts not by attacking each other with bombs and guns, but by sitting together and eating each other's food?

Could we dare that?

Can we dare ourselves?

When the prophets told us to beat our swords into plowshares, they wanted us to carry that to its sensible conclusion. The plowshares break the soil, not the body. Then we plant seeds, that they might grow into the food we harvest, that we might take that harvest and prepare it as a meal. By each other's side. We battle hunger, not each other. Around a table. Not upon a cross.

Far beyond where the horizon lies, where the horizon lies.

And the land sinks into mellow blueness,

oh please take me with you.

Take us there, O Christ. Take us with you.

Amen.

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.

Holy Week @Anoka UCC

"How Can I Keep from Singing?"

4/2 - Palm Sunday, 8:30am + 10:30am

- Featuring "Hosanna" from *Jesus Christ Superstar*
- Annual Eggstravaganza (egg hunt + activities) after the 10:30 service

4/6 - Maundy Thursday, 6:30pm

- Featuring "By My Side" from *Godspell*
- Communion

4/7 - Good Friday, 7:30pm

- Featuring "On the Willows" from *Godspell*

4/9 - Easter, 8:30am + 10:30am

- Featuring "Everybody Rejoice (Brand New Day)" from *The Wiz*



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OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST. GOD LOVES YOU, AND SO DO WE!

