



First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation

August 13, 2023 ♦ 11th 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

If you would like to join our mailing list, email office@uccanoka.org and ask to be added.

Prelude

Don Shier

The Church Bell Rings

* Opening Hymn

“When Morning Gilds the Skies” #86

**When morning gilds the skies, my heart awakening cries,
may Jesus Christ be praised!**

Alike at work and prayer, one purpose I declare, may Jesus Christ be praised!

**New strength comes night or day when from the heart we say,
may Jesus Christ be praised!**

Let sin and evil fear, when this sweet chant they hear, may Jesus Christ be praised!

**Discordant humankind, in this your concord find,
may Jesus Christ be praised!**

Let all the earth around ring joyous with the sound: may Jesus Christ be praised!

**Be this, while life is mine, my canticle divine,
may Jesus Christ be praised!**

Be this th’ eternal song, through all the ages long: may Jesus Christ be praised!

* Call to Worship and Opening Prayer (drawn in part from Psalm 108)

One: My heart is fixed, Holy One; let me, even with my glory, sing praise and hymn.

Many: Wake the harp and lyre, the piano and voice and organ! Let us wake the dawn!

One: I will give thanks to you, Ancient One, and sing praises to you among the peoples.

Many: Higher than the heavens is your steadfast love; your trustworthiness extends beyond the clouds.

One: Be exalted above the heavens, O God, and let your glory be over the earth.

Many: Deliver those you love; save them and answer them in their peril!

One: Let us pray.

Many: Save those who you love, Glorious One, and remind us again and again that you love everyone. Teach us every day that every person we meet is our neighbor—even those we think of as enemies. Instill within us a heart of grace for all we meet, so that even when we passionately disagree and fall to dismay, we might still speak and act out of abundant love. In the name of Jesus we pray; amen.

A Time for Children

Prayer of Preparation

“Pour Out Your Spirit”

C. Grundy

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.

The musical score is written on four staves in 4/4 time. The melody is simple and suitable for children. The lyrics are placed below the notes, with some words underlined to indicate syllable placement. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Special Music

Medley

arr. Garrett Breeze

Nancy and Mike Benz

The medley is of “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” and “O Spirit All-Embracing” by Wyeth and Holst, respectively.

Scripture Reading – Matthew 5:43-47

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'
⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, who makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

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

Many: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Hymn

“Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life” #543 (vv. 1-3, 5)

**Where cross the crowded ways of life, where sound the cries of clan and race,
above the noise of selfish strife, O Christ, we hear your voice of grace.**

**In haunts of wretchedness and need, on shadowed thresholds framed with fears,
from paths where hide the lures of greed, we catch the vision of your tears.**

**From tender childhood’s helplessness, from human griefs and burdened toil,
from famished souls, from sorrows’ stress, we know your heart does not recoil.**

**O Savior, from the mountainside, make haste to heal these hearts of pain;
among these restless throngs abide, O tread the city’s streets again.**

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

“Pour Out Your Spirit”

C. Grundy

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

Don Shier

*** 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**

**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

Don Shier

*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.*

COFFEE HOUR IS SERVED AFTER WORSHIP!

Acknowledgements

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Sermon Text

I’ve always been amazed by those artists who sit at easels at zoos, amusement parks, county fairs, and the like who will draw your portrait for a few bucks—or should I say *caricature*? You know the artform, especially as it shows up in political comics—the judicious exaggeration of already-prominent facial features such as Bill Clinton’s nose, Ross Perot’s ears, Joe Biden’s smile, and Donald Trump’s hair. It’s good for a laugh, and if you know an artist, it’s fun to listen to them observe, “Oooh that face would be easy to do a caricature!”

What’s less fun is how often we all prove ourselves masters of the caricature, and we don’t even have to be artists to do it.

I often wonder to what degree caricature is present in Scripture, because certainly folks got exaggerated for some reason or another. I mean, was King Ahab really that bad? Was King Hezekiah really that good? We get lots of stories about David, but the biggest caricature I think is every time a king of Israel or Judah is “rated” based on how closely they “walked in the way of David.” Of good king Josiah it says at the start of 2 Kings 22, “He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.” Except, of course, that David DID turn aside from the ways of God on several occasions that became fodder for Biblical storytellers. The measuring stick leaves that part out, making it kind of a caricature; a deliberate misrepresentation of the subject.

Was Goliath a caricature, too? His story was one of my other lectionary options today. The descriptions of him certainly sound exaggerated: “his height was six cubits and a span,” which was more than nine feet tall. “The weight of [his] bronze armor was five thousand shekels” (125 lbs). “The iron tip of his spear weighed six hundred shekels” (fifteen pounds). No doubt Goliath was to be understood as a throwback to the Nephilim, the giants of old (and Genesis 6:4) who were the children of angels and mortals, mighty and powerful folks who so disturbed God that God forbade such unions and limited the

lifespan of mortals to 120 years. Should we understand Goliath as an accurate portrayal of something or someone from that time? Surely not. People don't get that tall. The tallest professional wrestler working in the WWE today is a guy named Omos the Nigerian Giant who is reportedly 7 feet 3 inches tall. Goliath is a fantasy, or perhaps as I suggested, a caricature.

The Philistines on the whole were the real problem. They were the regional power at that time, dominating their neighbors from their five-city bulwark of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Gath (the latter being the town associated with Goliath). The end of 1 Samuel 13 establishes that part of this domination was technological, implying that the Philistines controlled the iron trade and all weapons made from iron. We read at that time that the armies of Israel were using repurposed farming tools, not swords and spears. That particular supremacy alone was so significant that it could easily lead to the nature of Goliath, not as an actual person, but as a symbolic story that represents just how big and scary Philistia was to the threatened Israelites. By that reasoning, David's victory over Goliath then becomes a symbolic story of his general victory over the Philistines. The character of Goliath is a caricature, drawn specifically to exaggerate the truth and represent something that is easier to rhetorically attack.

That's what we're still good at. Exaggerating our enemies and opponents in order to make them easier to attack. In order to make folks so afraid that they'll support us as we deal with those enemies. We see this in so many contexts. The Red Scare of McCarthyism relied entirely on caricature, casting Communism as something that posed a clear and present, *immediate* danger to the United States. Mickey Rooney's caricature of an Asian character in the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's* leaned into and exaggerated Asian stereotypes in a way that fed the Caucasian Westerner's negative feelings toward folks of Asian ancestry. And of course, present-day politics leans heavily into caricature in order to get headlines, clicks, and vote. The white, overweight, red-hat wearing MAGA extremist who has strapped on his AR-15 isn't any more representative of the people in this country who voted for President Trump than any attempt to cast Biden supporters as University-indoctrinated coastal elitists who want to throw open our national borders and give all of the brown people the right to vote.

In any election season—and we're in one right now, pretty much exclusively around here for school board spots—it's altogether easy for us to create caricatures of those with whom we disagree. It makes it easier for us to not have to wrestle with the inherent humanity of our opponents if we caricature them as “ignorant book burners” or “sex-trafficking child groomers”. It makes it easier to be nasty without internal repercussion when we've reduced our neighbors to those things that we hate. I am convinced that's why Jesus got so bloody direct.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

We all know that's a hard lesson. Perhaps the hardest. That's why we all turn into acrobats and contortionists about it, caricaturing ourselves until we resemble someone who is simply trying to love our neighbors out of their wrongness. But that's not even the hardest part of the lesson!

For if you love [only] those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Oh, Jesus. Why you gotta be so pushy? Are you saying we're no better than those we've painted in ugly colors? No better than *tax collectors*? No better than *Gentiles*?

Yes. That's what he's suggesting. Because those things were caricatures, too. Yes, tax collectors were fellow Jews who sometimes enriched themselves off of the backs of their peers. But they were also

people who were just as desperate, just as hungry, just as longing for salvation from Rome. Some were folks who calculated a terrible equation: is it worth being called a collaborator if it means my kids will have enough to eat?

Listen. I'm preaching to myself as much as to any of you. It's so blasted easy to create a caricature that makes me feel like I'm in the right, I'm on the side of the angels. I'm the one who can see the right and decent way forward. *They don't get it. They believe wrongly. They are reading their Bibles wrong. They want to just be in control and uphold the patriarchy. They hate diversity and equity and inclusion for whatever reasons.*

But *they* love their children, too.

Loving our neighbors has to begin with remembering that. Whoever we cast as "they" are folks who love their children, too. Who want to keep them safe. For sure, we don't all agree on the best ways to do that. For sure, some ways are provably worse than others based on real data (assuming we're even looking at the same data). For sure, there's rampant misinformation out there that persuades people to turn to different alternatives, and sometimes that misinformation is deliberate and toxic.

But they love their children, too.

The Russians love their children, too.

The Philistines loved their children, too.

And Jesus loves all the little children. We daren't forget that. Or that every person we oppose or with whom we argue was once a child. They still are, really. Children of God. Beloved children of God.

The earth's temperature is already too hot. But maybe if we remember all this stuff, at least one kind of temperature can be brought down. It might even make it easier to bring down the others, too. What a reward that might be!

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.