



First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation

August 20, 2023 ♦ 12th 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

Gideon Scheeler

The Church Bell Rings

* Opening Hymn

“There Is a Balm in Gilead” #553

(refrain) There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole,
there is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain,
but then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again. *(refrain)*

Don't ever feel discouraged, for Jesus is your friend,
who, if you ask for knowledge, will never fail to lend. *(refrain)*

If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul,
you can tell the love of Jesus, who died to save us all. *(refrain)*

Call to Worship

The Call comes from Christine Robinson's 2006 interpretation of Psalm 1, titled "Happiness."

One: Happy are they who know good and do good.

Many: Their love for the good feeds them continually.

One: They are like trees planted near the river, whose roots go deep and wide.

Many: They thrive, bear fruit in season, and weather drought without wilting.

One: Those who are not so grounded will glow around like dry leaves in the wind.

Many: Let us root ourselves in Good, and live.

Singing

“Come and Fill”

Jacques Berthier



Come and fill our hearts with your peace. You a - lone, O Lord, are ho - ly.
Con - fi - te - mi - ni Do - mi - no quo - ni - am bo - nus.



Come and fill our hearts with your peace, al - le - lu - ia!
Con - fi - te - mi - ni Do - mi - no, al - le - lu - ia!

A Time for Children

*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.*

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.

Special Music

“O Perfect Love”

Barnby, arr. Gumma

Kari Johnson and Erin Heers-McArdle, Handbell Duet

*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.*

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. ² Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. ³ Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. ⁴ Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. ⁵ David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him; as a result, Saul set him over the army. And all the people, even the servants of Saul, approved. ⁶ As they were coming home, when David returned from killing the Philistine, the women came out of all the towns of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. ⁷ And the women sang to one another as they made merry, **"Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands."** ⁸ Saul was very angry, for this saying displeased him. He said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands; what more can he have but the kingdom?" ⁹ So Saul eyed David from that day on.

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

Many: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Hymn

"Dear God, Embracing Humankind" #502

**Dear God, embracing humankind, forgive our foolish ways;
re clothe us in our rightful mind, in purer lives your service find,
in deeper reference, praise.**

**In simple trust like theirs who heard, beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of your word, let us, like them, by spirit stirred,
rise up and followers be.**

**O Sabbath rest by Galilee! O calm of hills above!
There Jesus met you prayerfully: the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love.**

**Drop your still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of your peace.**

**Breathe through the pulses of desire your coolness and your balm;
let sense be numb, let flesh retire; speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm.**

Acts of Prayer

*If you wish to share a prayer with the congregation (joy, concern, hope, worry, or anything at all),
you may write it upon the supplied index card and give it to a Deacon during the Interlude.*

Write "SILENT" on the card if you want the Pastor to see it but not say it aloud.

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.*

Interlude

Gideon Scheeler

Prayers of the People

*The Pastor will read aloud the prayers of the congregation, occasionally including the call/response:
God in your love // **Hear our prayer.** Prayers marked "SILENT" will not be read aloud.*

Singing

"Come and Fill"

Jacques Berthier



Come and fill our hearts with your peace. You a-lone, O Lord, are ho-ly.
Con - fi - te - mi - ni Do - mi - no quo - ni - am bo - nus.



Come and fill our hearts with your peace, al - le - lu - ia!
Con - fi - te - mi - ni Do - mi - no, al - le - lu - ia!

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

Congregational Blessing “God Be With You” (#809) Dorsey/Hutchins

**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

Gideon Scheeler

*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

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

Friends, my anxiety has been elevated lately, and though the reasons aren’t really germane to this sermon, the response is. I went to therapy to talk it through! And while there this last Monday, my therapist taught me something new: depression relates to things in the past, while anxiety relates to things in the future, typically negative futures that we focus on overmuch, much to the detriment of our mental health!

This was King Saul’s big problem. He was so afraid that David would take his throne that it overwhelmed everything else. But did Saul have to go so angrily into that night? Or could he have tried to accept those things that were evidently going to happen and in so doing achieve an inner peace?

It was kind of his fault to begin with. There he sat in his command tent on the field of battle, facing off against the Philistines. Twice a day, the giant Goliath would come out and demand Saul send forth a champion to settle the war in personal combat. But there was no one to be found. How to you contest with a nine-foot-tall giant whose armor weighs 125 pounds? You can’t.

So imagine his incredulity when this winsome young lad from the sheepfolds of Jesse the Bethlehemite shows up and offers to be that champion. Preposterous! But the boy claims to have personally dispatched both lions and bears that had predated his flock. More, the boy’s faith in Israel’s God is so profoundly clear that maybe, just maybe, this is a hero like of old, sent and blessed by God to defeat the giant. And it’s not like there’s anyone else waiting in line! So Saul commissions the boy to do the deed, outfitting him in armor and arming him with Saul’s own sword.

Imagine Saul's surprise when the kid takes all of that off and takes out the giant with a single shot from his sling. The seeds of resentment are surely planted in that moment, when the kid rejects all of the trappings of war and proves greater than any other in Israel's ranks. But it's when the people respond to that victory that Saul's anxiety really gets triggered. The women come out with their musical instruments to sing and dance in celebration of David's victory, doing so in a way that invites an unwelcome comparison. "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands!"

What if? There's that benighted refrain. What if the people turn that admiration into loyalty? What if they call for the boy to receive the throne? It's bad enough that Saul's son, Jonathan, has tacitly already surrendered his inheritance to the boy. What if the people back that move?

Understand, friends. Israel had grown weary of being led by judges and prophets. They had begged Samuel to appoint for them a king like the other nations had. Samuel wasn't down for this, but God ordered it. So Saul had a reasonable expectation that his line was now royal; he would pass the crown to Jonathan, who would in turn pass it to his firstborn son, and on down through the ages in an unbroken Saulide dynasty. David was a sudden threat to that future before it even began.

Saul could find no inner peace, and I can only imagine that he craved it desperately. I can hear my therapist now. "Saul, why are you focusing on things that MIGHT happen that are so bad? Might not GOOD things happen, too?" Perhaps Saul could have chosen to celebrate David's victories. The political move would have been easy; take the credit. He was the one who appointed David to be Israel's champion. He was the one who put David in charge of the armies who came home victorious. He was the one who married his own daughters to David. Maybe he could have even formally adopted David and declared him to be of Saul's own blood.

But no. He was too anxious about losing his power, his clout, his authority, his acclaim, his wealth, his notoriety, his *legacy*. He chose to pursue inner peace through violence, and I'm not sure that ever really works.

None of us are monarchs, but I bet we can all relate to Saul's plight in some way or another. I've already admitted how much I can, and I'm sure I'm not the only one who suffers anxiety as I focus overmuch on an uncertain future that I fear will be filled with suffering. The fires in Canada and Maui are just the latest in a long chain of proof that human-wrought climate change is widespread and growing. As we look ahead to another major election season in 2024, we see the forces of anti-democracy strengthening in our own country. We wonder if and when Ukraine will be able to drive out their invaders. The people of Taiwan grow increasingly worried about China's designs for their island. Handguns are being modified to function as fully automatic, leading to a surge in gun-related deaths. Folks across our country are mobilizing to reverse public school progress that has positively impacted the mental health of all students, particularly those who identify as queer.

Are you feeling the anxiety already? Sorry about that.

What's to be done?

One option is always to pray, and if that works for you, then that's splendid. Voicing our anxieties to God could very well be a balm in Gilead not out of some magical formula, but because the mere act of naming aloud our fears and worries is a step toward coping with them. Accepting their reality can lead us to concrete steps to deal with them. But I'm a big believer in there being far more available to us than going into a private space and lifting our concerns to God in secret, as Jesus once suggested—which, mind you, isn't a dig on prayer because Jesus was really talking there about not making a big production out of praying in public.

No, I think what really plagued Saul here was that his actions fostered an increasing sense of isolation from his neighbors. I'm sure it didn't help that he was the first king of Israel. There wasn't a blueprint for that. He had no one who could counsel him from their own experience about the self-care he'd need to practice in order to endure this weighty calling. But beyond that, by his thoughts and actions he leaned into solitude, which became isolation, which surely became loneliness. He had no one to lean upon. No community. No close group of loved ones who could help him carry his burdens.

Even the introverts among us need supportive relationships, people with whom we can gather and come away feeling reinforced and restored. Because that's what we do in community. The old song says it best: **“we share each other's woes, each other's burdens bear, and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.”** Saul needed that. I need that. Y'all need that. It's a human imperative! We are genetically wired for community, and what Saul forgot is that when things get hard, that's when we need community even more.

It's not uncommon for me to talk to a church person who's been absent from the community for an extended period, only to learn that the reason for that absence is due to self-isolation. The most common refrain is something like, “I've just been having a hard time and feeling depressed, and I didn't want to bring other people down.” To them and to you I say with the utmost love and care: that's exactly the most important time to come be in community. Because in such moments, sometimes we're NOT resilient enough on our own. Isolation just feeds the beast, as it were. We must gather.

About a year before my favorite uncle died, he was in a solo car accident that nearly ended his life. I was a seminarian at the time, and when the news came, I was alone. I suppose I could have stayed in my apartment and grieved in isolation, but something inside me longed for community. I left my room and wandered over to the administration building. It was the slow time of the day, and there weren't many people around, but I found my way to the office of one of the faculty members, the Rev. Martha Robertson. She took one look at me and said, “What's wrong?” Then she invited me into her office, where I sat and cried for a while. When it seemed appropriate, she asked me about my uncle, but mostly she just let me weep, her mere presence fortifying me. She lent me her strength and her love when I needed it most.

Would Saul's story have turned out differently had he sought out such aid? I don't know. But I do know that our stories turn out differently when we do. As far as I'm concerned, that's one of the most profound benefits of being part of a worshipping community. This community. And though I'm supposed to be resting my voice, I'll cheat a little by ending with this refrain from *The Muppet Christmas Carol*:

**The love we found, the love we found
The sweetest dream that we have ever known
The love we found, the love we found
We carry with us so we're never quite alone.**
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 Health Ministries – Jessie Waks, NP

Director of Music Ministries – Don Shier

Keyboardist – Koki Sato

Moderator – Terja Larsen

Website: <http://www.uccanoka.org> ◆ Email: 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.