



# First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation  
June 18, 2023 ♦ 3<sup>rd</sup> 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](mailto:office@uccanoka.org) and ask to be added.

## Prelude

Malcolm Anderson

## The Church Bell Rings

### \* Opening Hymn

“The Church’s One Foundation” #386

*In the spirit of “old timey” hymns that are popping up this summer, we’re singing the older lyrics from the Pilgrim Hymnal. Unexpectedly, the framers of the New Century Hymnal removed feminine language for the Church for theological reasons (singing “we” for church is a defensible alteration!), but today we’ll sing it.*

**The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
she is his new creation by water and the word;  
from heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride,  
with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.**

**Elect from every nation, yet one o’er all the earth,  
her charter of salvation, one Lord, one faith, one birth,  
one holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food,  
and to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.**

**‘Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,  
she waits the consummation of peace forevermore;  
till with the vision glorious, her longing eyes are blest,  
and the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest.**

**Yet she on earth hath union with God, the Three in One,  
and mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.  
O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we  
like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with thee. Amen.**

\* Call to Worship and Opening Prayer (adapting part of Psalm 78)

One: Give ear, my people, to my teaching; incline your ear to the utterances of my mouth.

**Many: We will open our senses to your instruction, Holy One!**

One: I will open my mouth in a proverb; I will utter riddles from of old.

**Many: Holy Spirit, help us to understand!**

One: We will not hide them from their children; we will recount to generations to come, the praiseworthy deeds of God.

**Many: Help us to tell the stories faithfully and truly, Jesus!**

One: Let us pray.

**Many: Gracious God, we are grateful for the holy words we have in the Scriptures, words that offer us guidance and mystery in the doings of our lives. Help us to not make idols of those words or of that book. Help us remember that these words were written by people who could be just as confused as we sometimes are! Instill within us a humility to use these words with care and grace, that we might not let a stubborn adherence to tradition overwhelm our love for our neighbors, especially those against whom these ancient words have been turned. In the name of Jesus we pray; amen.**

A Time for Children (10:30)

*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.

*Here in this place, the new light is streaming; now is the darkness vanished away.  
See in this space our fears and our dreamings brought here to you in the light of this day.  
Gather us in, the lost and forsaken, gather us in, by Spirit and flame;  
call to us now, and we shall awaken, we shall arise at the sound of our name.*

*We are the young, our lives are a mystery. We are the old who yearn for your face.  
We have been sung throughout all of history, called to be light to the whole human race.  
Gather us in, the rich and the haughty; gather us in, the proud and the strong;  
give us a heart, so meek and so lowly; give us the courage to enter the song.*

*Not in the dark of buildings confining, not in some heaven, light years away.  
Here in this place the new light is shining; now is the kingdom and now is the day.  
Gather us in and hold us forever; gather us in and make us your own;  
gather us in, all peoples together, fi-re of love in our flesh and our bone.*

*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 – Matthew 15:1-9

Lector, **Congregation**

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, <sup>2</sup> **"Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands before they eat."** <sup>3</sup> He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? <sup>4</sup> For God said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' <sup>5</sup> But you say that whoever tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is given to God,' then that person need not honor the father. <sup>6</sup> So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God. <sup>7</sup> You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: <sup>8</sup> 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; <sup>9</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'"

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

**Many: Thanks be to God.**

## Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

## Hymn

“Open My Eyes, that I May See” (back of bulletin)

*This 1895 hymn by Clara H. Scott appears in 224 hymnals—but neither the Pilgrim Hymnal nor the New Century Hymnal. It is, without a doubt, her most famous and beloved hymn.*

Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me;  
place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free.  
Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see;  
open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my ears, that I may hear voices of truth thou sendest clear;  
and while the wave-notes fall on my ear, everything false will disappear.  
Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see;  
open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my mouth, and let me bear gladly the warm truth everywhere;  
open my heart, and let me prepare love with thy children thus to share.  
Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see;  
open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!

### 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

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](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](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 9WKLGX8TRZCN.*

Offertory

Malcolm Anderson

\* 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

\* 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

Malcolm Anderson

*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

According to the Gospels, Jesus spent a lot of time calling people hypocrites for theological inconsistency—in other words, “do as I say, not as I do.” In today’s reading, the Pharisees—ever the antagonists to the Jesus of Matthew’s storytelling—are upset that those who follow Jesus aren’t washing their hands before they eat. They refer to this necessity as being of “the tradition of the elders.” Jesus,

rather than responding to the charge, engages in a bit of “whataboutism” with a two-point rebuttal. He points out that this “tradition” belongs to the Pharisees alone—he says “your tradition”—for this is not a commandment that appears in the Torah. He also points out that the Pharisees are already in noncompliance with the Torah—and with the original Ten Commandments, to boot—by implying that something they’re doing is violating the commandment to honor one’s parents.

I don’t want to get into the weeds on that story, but it does give us an occasion to talk about what I like to think of as an idolatry of the text. By that I mean the tendency to say that the rules and commandments of Scripture are supremely important while simultaneously NOT following them all and then remaining silent about those omissions. A couple of current events from the last week will serve as a better illustration than today’s reading. Now be clear about this: a lot of this comes from a fundamentalist, evangelical, and/or conservative conviction that God is the true author of Scripture, and the Bible is doctrinally claimed to be the inerrant word of God in its English translation. By extension, this means that ALL content in Scripture is considered authoritative, despite actual practice.

The first event is this: a pastor in Indiana is promoting “a pledge that pastors can take to promise to share only scripturally sound messages from the pulpit” (that’s a quote from Fox News). Specifically, Pastor Lucas Miles is railing against the alleged destructiveness of “wokeness” in the church. The implication is that “wokeness” is unbiblical. We know, of course, that this is nonsense. “Wokeness” is about meeting people where they are. It’s about confessing the painful reality that racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism are endemic in the Church despite the fact that in the ministry of Jesus, we see him actively working against all of those poisonous dynamics.

The truth is that the overwhelming tradition of the church for most of the last 2000 years has been to elevate wealth and masculinity above all other things. It even got written into the Bible in the later parts of the New Testament, especially in those places where women are explicitly banned from becoming pastors. This, despite Mary Magdalene being Apostle to the Apostles. This, despite the presence of women in the text who were clearly leaders of early churches. To put it as Jesus did, churches in the tradition of Pastor Miles have broken with precedents set by Jesus for the sake of their ongoing tradition.

That leads me to the more well-known current event: the vote in the Southern Baptist Convention to affirm the expulsion of Saddleback Church in California and Fern Creek Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. The reason? Saddleback placed its senior pastor’s wife on the pastoral staff, and Fern Creek is led by the Rev. Linda Barnes Popham. For each vote, the result was around 90% for expulsion.

In defense of the expulsion, the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary said that the existence of women pastors, “is an issue of fundamental biblical authority that does violate both the doctrine and order of the Southern Baptist Convention.”

Pay close attention, friends: while he claims that there is Biblical authority involved, his main point is that having women in the pulpit *violates doctrine*.

Doctrine.

The United Church of Christ isn’t a doctrinal church. We affirm the historic creeds of the church as many statements of faith among many. We say that we lift up “testimonies of faith, not tests of faith.” We further understand in the UCC that doctrine can really screw up our attempts to love our neighbors. I mean, actual wars were fought over doctrine! There was a major council of the church in Ephesus in 431 just to settle rabid fights over whether you could call Mary *Theotokos* (mother of God) or just *Christotokos* (mother of Christ). One of the major conflicts over heresy in the church concerned a widespread view that Jesus was the first of God’s creations rather than being co-eternal with God.

Doctrine. UGH.

In today's reading, the Pharisees are upset because the disciples aren't adhering to the doctrine held by the Pharisees, and it's an old problem that's always new again. The Bible says both that women are pastors and that they shouldn't be. It's doctrine that insists that the latter position is the true one. The Bible says nothing about birth control—but doctrine insists that the Sin of Onan was that he “spilled his seed on the ground” instead of, evidently, using it for procreation (his true “sin” was that he didn't fulfill his dead oldest brother's property rights). All manner of pastors—yours truly included—offer preaching that is deeply rooted in Scripture. Doctrine says that those of us who don't uphold patriarchy are doing it wrong.

What did Jesus want? I believe he wanted us to unclench our fists from doctrine, especially when it overwhelms the need for a pastoral response—and that doesn't mean “a response by a pastor.” It means leaning into [kindness over tradition] and [grace over dogma]. It means stopping to consider whether our convictions are serving only to convict others of made-up crimes.

The UCC isn't a stranger to this. Only next month will we finally elect our first woman as General Minister and President. I've participated in many clergy arguments in closed social media groups where some pastors insist that licensed ministers aren't allowed to wear stoles. Where pastors shouldn't ever preside over a private baptism. In 2005, when the General Synod passed its famous resolution in support of same-sex marriage (or infamous, depending on your point of view), the far more controversial resolution was one that affirmed “multiple paths to ministry.” In essence, it was a declaration that God calls people to ordained ministry in ways that don't always match the 4-3 plan—that is, four years as an undergrad and three years in seminary. And where did the opposition to that resolution mostly arise? From the ranks of ordained clergy.

Doctrine. It's a pain.

I'm speaking for no one other than myself when I say that any stubborn clinging to doctrine in the face of someone else's real-world pain or need is as much a “sin” as anything else given that name. It's like a faucet that spills forth hard water. When the hardware is installed, the water flows clean, pure, and without impediment. But over time, hard water deposits build up. Everything gets crusty. The flow of living water becomes interrupted. Sooner or later, you have to soak that spigot in vinegar and break away the crust and get back to the love that started it all.

I learned an important lesson about this in my last internship in seminary. I was posted to Epiphany United Church of Christ in St. Louis, a tiny but vibrant congregation with the most emphatic Open and Affirming ministry I've ever seen. Eden put me there because they knew I needed that perspective. They knew I needed some experience in an environment that wasn't just a bunch of straight, cisgender folks.

One day, I was sitting down for my weekly supervisory talk with the pastor. She shared with me that a member wanted to be rebaptized, and she wanted to know what I thought about that.

Well, friends, doctrine says that's not necessary. Traditional doctrine says—and there were church fights just to settle this argument—that the Holy Spirit is the one who baptizes, and that a baptism is a one-and-done thing. So why on earth would one re-do a baptism? Why not just do a reaffirmation of baptism? That would be doctrinally appropriate. But see, then she gave me more info. The man in question had undergone a legal name change, and he wanted to be rebaptized into his new name. But he was still the same guy, wasn't he? Why would that matter? Then she gave me more: as a youth, he had been brought up in a fundamentalist church. When it became clear that he was gay, the men of the church

sexually abused him in order to dispel his desire for other men. His wanted to break from that past and live into the future as a beloved child of God, free from that former suffering.

Doctrine would have sent him away in pain.

The pastor baptized him again.

One of the most beloved verses in progressive Christianity is Micah 6:8: “What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” You’ve heard me cite it many times, and I have to bring it up again because doctrine, when upheld for the sake of itself, can become neither just, nor kind, nor humble. It can make for an idol of tradition instead of a ministry of love.

Unclench those fists. Testify without testing. Witness without withholding. Honor God and each other with lips *and* hearts.

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.*

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

- **June 25 – PRIDE SUNDAY**
- **July 9 – Installation of Pastor Kelsey Renk (during service)**
- **July 30 – New Member Sunday (new member conversations on 7/16 and 7/23 during coffee hour)**
- **VBS – DATE TO BE DETERMINED (it is happening!)**



1. O - pen my eyes, that I may see Glimps-es of truth Thou hast for me;  
 2. O - pen my ears, that I may hear Voic - es of truth Thou send - est clear;  
 3. O - pen my mouth, and let me bear Glad - ly the warm truth ev - ery-where;

Place in my hands the won - der - ful key That shall un-clasp and set me free.  
 And while the wave-notes fall on my ear, Ev - ery-thing false will dis - ap-pear.  
 O - pen my heart, and let me pre-pare Love with Thy chil-dren thus to share.

*Refrain*

Si - lent - ly now I wait for Thee, Read - y, my God, Thy will to see;

O - pen my eyes, il - lu - mine me, Spir - it di - vine!  
 O - pen my ears, il - lu - mine me, Spir - it di - vine!  
 O - pen my heart, il - lu - mine me, Spir - it di - vine! A-men.