



First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation
March 19, 2023 ♦ Fourth Sunday in Lent



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 are a guest with us today, welcome! If you are comfortable sharing your information with us, there are cards in the pew holders that you can use for that purpose (place them in the offering plate).

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

Prelude

Koki Sato

Congregational Introit

“My Life Flows on in Endless Song” #476 (v. 1)

**My life flows on in endless song; above earth’s lamentation,
I hear the sweet, though far-off hymn, that hails a new creation.
Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear the music ringing;
it finds an echo in my soul—how can I keep from singing?**

Opening Scripture – Luke 22:35-36 (alt.)

Jesus said to his disciples, "When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "No, not a thing." ³⁶ He said to them, "But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one."

* Opening Hymn

“Lead Us from Death to Life” #581

[refrain] **Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth,
from despair to hope, from fear to trust.
Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace;
let peace fill our hearts, let peace fill our world,
let peace fill our universe.**

**Still all the angry cries, still all the angry guns,
still now your people die, earth’s sons and daughters.
Let justice roll, let mercy pour down,
come and teach us your way of compassion. (refrain)**

So many lonely hearts, so many broken lives,
longing for love to break into their anguish.
Come, teach us love, come, teach us peace,
come and teach us your way of compassion. (*refrain*)

Let justice ever roll, let mercy fill the earth,
let us begin to grow into your people.
We can be love, we can bring peace,
we can still be your way of compassion. (*refrain*)

* Call to Worship and Opening Prayer (drawing from Isaiah 60)

One: Arise, shine, for your light has come;

Many: the glory of the Holy One has risen upon us!

One: For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples;

Many: But the Mother of All will arise upon us, and her glory shall appear over us.

One: People from all nations will stream to God's light,

Many: and rulers to the brightness of God's dawning.

One: In the words of Isaiah we pray.

**Many: Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction
within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.
The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon
give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and
your God will be your glory. Amen.**

A Time for Children (10:30)

Prayer of Preparation (*sung, unison*)

“Holy, Holy, Holy”

An Argentine folk song.



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly. My heart, my heart a - dores you! My
¡San - to, san - to, san - to, mi co - ra - zón te a - do - ra! Mi



heart knows how to say to you: You are ho - ly, Lord!
co - ra - zón te sa - be de - cir: ¡San - to e - res, Dios!

“Scripture”

“Make Them Hear You” from *Ragtime*
Anoka UCC Chancel Choir; Don Shier, Director

Ahrens/Flaherty

*Go out and tell our story. Let it echo far and wide.
Make them hear you. Make them hear you.
How justice was our battle and how justice was denied.
Make them hear you. Make them hear you.
And say to those who blame us for the way we chose to fight
that sometimes there are battles that are more than black and white.
And I could not put down my sword when justice was my right.
Make them hear you.
Go out and tell the story to your daughters and your sons.
Make them hear you. Make them hear you.
And tell them, in our struggle, we were not the only ones.
Make them hear you. Make them hear you.
Your sword can be a sermon or the power of the pen.
Teach every child to raise [their] voice and then, my brothers,
then will justice be demanded by ten million righteous men.
Make them hear you. Make them hear you.
When they hear you, I'll be near you again, again!*

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

Many: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Hymn

“O God of Love, O God of Peace” #571

**O God of love, O God of peace, make wars throughout the world to cease;
the wrath of human wrong restrain: give peace, O God, give peace again!**

**Remember, God, your works of old, the wonders that our people told;
heal every malice, harm, and pain: give peace, O God, give peace again!**

**Whom shall we trust, O God, but you? For you are constant, strong, and true.
None ever called on you in vain: give peace, O God, give peace again!**

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!

You may also set up online giving at uccanoka.org or text your gift to the church using the Text-to-Give number above; both services are provided by Vanco. Thank you!

Interlude

Koki Sato

Refrain

“My Life Flows on in Endless Song” #476 (v. 4)

**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 mine since I am Christ’s—how can I keep from singing?**

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.*

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.

Closing Scripture – Luke 22:47-51 (*alt.*)

While Jesus was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" ⁴⁹ When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?" ⁵⁰ Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched the slave's ear and healed it.

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.**

Acknowledgements

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Sermon Text

Make them hear you.

Make them *hear* you.

MAKE THEM HEAR YOU.

That's the refrain, the repeat, the reiteration, the echo that never gets quieter.

Make them hear you.

Not feel you. Not feel the edge of your hand, the edge of your sword, the tip of the bullet.

Make them HEAR you.

That's the lesson Coalhouse Walker Jr., a ragtime pianist in the musical *Ragtime*, ultimately learns after losing so much that he turns himself toward retribution, toward violence, toward revenge. He had a beloved automobile--a Model T Ford--that was destroyed by racist, white fire men after he refused to pay them a made-up toll. He's a black man in New Rochelle, New York who is tired of being second class to the people around him with paler skin and more access to power. And worse, he loses the love of his life when she tries to talk to a politician in the hope he might help, but in a horrible misunderstanding she is beaten to death by the Secret Service.

Coalhouse can't take it anymore, and he channels his despair into terrible rage. Along with some others whom he has turned to his cause, he takes over the JP Morgan library in the heart of New York City and threatens to burn it down, to blow it all up if the man responsible isn't turned over to him.

Jesus spends so much time telling his friends, the crowd, anyone who will listen that they must make them hear. Make them listen. He's a revolutionary, but his weapons are words. He goes around the Galilee, the Decapolis, through Gentile lands once held by Philistines, and finally to Jerusalem, trying to make everyone hear him. He goes to and fro in a far-flung district of the Roman Empire, telling them that the Emperor is no god. Caesar is no god. Caesar doesn't care about the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the sick, the bereaved, the prisoner. Caesar *creates* the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the sick, the bereaved, the prisoner. Into that world where all money, all power, and all reputation flow upward into the hands of a single man, he tells simple tales of a God--the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob; the God of Sarah, of Rebekah, of Rachel and Leah--a God who loves each and every person deeply, profoundly, graciously, personally, perfectly. A God who forgives so simply--with the turn of a phrase, one easier to say than "Get up and walk." One who says, "I created you and called you Good. Who is anyone else to say otherwise?" Jesus goes around telling the people that he desires mercy, not sacrifice. Clemency. Kindness. Steadfast love. He tells them that he came that they might have life, and have it abundantly. Not the wretched scraping and scrambling for the scraps that fall from the table, but a seat at the Table, a Table set for everyone, no matter who they are. No matter their nation of origin. No matter what they do, who they love, or what Caesar says is true about them. Because God's truth is stronger yet.

He trains those who follow him: Men like Peter, James, and John. More women than Scripture ever names, foremost among them a woman named Mary. He trains them and tells them, *Make them hear you*. It's a hard lesson. Against the legions, against the centurions, against the unbridled might of Rome, shouldn't they take up swords? Shouldn't they fight for what they believe? Shouldn't they resist with

tooth and nail, striking out the eyes of their enemies? When he gets arrested, that's what they do. They draw their swords and strike because they haven't yet truly heard him. So he tries one more time. One more time to make them hear. NO MORE OF THIS! he cries out. No more swords, no more guns. No more hate, no more war. No more anger and rage and trauma and violence. No more solving problems by using the tools and methods of the oppressor. And then, as if to prove his point but also because it's just who he is, he reaches out and heals the slave of the high priest, the one who someone struck with the sword.

In the musical, Coalhouse learns that lesson from Booker T Washington, who convinces him that the path of violence is no way to win the peace. And so he sings, **teach every child to raise their voice and then, my neighbors, then**, only then, can a truly just peace be achieved. He was far from the first. Dr. King learned that lesson too. He had believed that turning the other cheek only worked with individuals, that it wasn't meant for whole peoples. He wrote that it was from Gandhi that he learned otherwise, that a wise man from India had finally shown him how to "lift the love ethic of Jesus...to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale." For when you strike off the ear of your enemy, how will they hear you?

I don't know what that all means when dictators are launching missiles at their neighbors and sending innocent troops in to die. That's a different context, a different sermon, a different solution. But when people who don't understand--and some who do--are passing laws across the nation that vilify the trans person, the drag queen, the woman who is trying to quickly end an unwanted pregnancy, maybe that's who needs to hear. Maybe that's who needs to hear the sermon, to read the stroke of a pen instead of the stroke of a sword. That's what a state senator from Omaha is trying to do even now in Nebraska as she filibusters each and every bill that comes before the Unicameral in her effort to make them hear her, to make them understand just how harmful their anti-trans legislation truly is.

And yet, I confess feeling despair even there, too. I fear that bill will pass anyway. Some clearly will not shift unless personal experience reshapes them, and that's hard to manufacture. Impossible, perhaps. If they will not listen, if they will not hear, who is left?

When we hung the transgender banner on our church, someone--I don't remember who--asked me, "Who will even know what that means?" In other words, how will people hear us if they don't know what we're saying? My response was simple: those who need to hear us already know what that flag means. They'll hear us.

When we experience verbal assault by streetcorner preachers who call us apostate for loving our queer neighbors, that's when we need to remember that they aren't the ones who need to hear. They're not listening. But there are hundreds and thousands of people nearby who do. Perhaps some of them won't listen either, but their children will. Their children who are wondering who they are and what it means to be human. Their children who ought to be taught that there is more on earth than black and white, boys and girls, saved and damned. People who need to know that God's love surpasses all prejudice.

Make *them* hear you.

Might that be what Jesus meant when he said, "Go out and make disciples of all nations?" The church has so often interpreted that to mean that everyone, everywhere needed to be converted to Christianity. "Born again" in some traditions. But mightn't Jesus have meant that everyone, everywhere just needed a few neighbors who would teach them that the world could be so much better than it was if enough people heard the Good News? If enough children get taught that the Beloved Community can happen on earth and not just in some unknowable place or time after we die, wouldn't they spread that news even faster? Justice is, as ever, our battle, but it cannot be, must not be, will not be a futile effort so long as we fight it with our words.

It's a struggle, but we're not the only ones. Go out and tell that story. Make them hear you. And when they hear you? Heaven will draw near again and again.

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.