



# First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

*An Open and Affirming Congregation*

May 7, 2023 ♦ Fifth Sunday of Easter



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 would like to join our mailing list, email [office@uccanoka.org](mailto:office@uccanoka.org) and ask to be added.*

## Prelude

Koki Sato

## The Church Bell Rings

## \* Opening Hymn

“Crashing Waters at Creation” #326

**Crashing waters at creation ordered by the Spirit’s breath,  
first to witness day’s beginning, from the brightness of night’s death.**

**Parting water stood and trembled as the captives passed on through,  
washing off the chains of bondage—channel to a life made new.**

**Cleansing water once at Jordan closed around the One foretold,  
opened to reveal the glory ever new and ever old.**

**Living water, never-ending, quench the thirst and flood the soul.  
Wellspring, Source of life eternal, drench our dryness, make us whole.**

## 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.*

## The Baptism of Alexander James Schumann

*Parents: Carrie and Thomas (TJ) Schumann*

*Great-Grandmother: Nancy Ahlberg*

*Sponsors: Caitlyn Shoultz (aunt) and Tyler Schumann (uncle)*

## Introduction

One: In the sacrament of baptism, we are following an ancient custom. Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to be blessed and named as God's own. In the early Christian church, entire households, including children, were initiated into the faith through baptism. When John baptized Jesus, this is what Jesus came to know in that moment: after he was baptized and while he was praying, he knew God loved him deeply.

At First Congregational Church, we believe God made human life to be good and that children share in the original blessing of all living things. In this moment of dedication and grace we praise the goodness of God and commit ourselves to teaching the one baptized how to live a life that embraces kindness, justice, and humility, no matter where their path leads.

## Questions and Promises of Parents

One: As parents, do you commit yourselves emulating the goodness of Jesus and teaching your child that Love is the only force that binds all living things together in mutual concern and care? If so, please say, "We do."

Parents: We do.

One: Will you raise Alexander in a home where trust is cultivated, kindness is your guiding principle, and a spirit of grace prevails? If so, please say, "We will."

Parents: We will.

One: Will you participate in communities and provide opportunities for Alexander to encounter that which is sacred and worthy in life? If so, please say, "We will."

Parents: We will.

One: Will you teach Alexander to live as Jesus did, particularly in resisting evil, standing up against injustice, and serving others? If so, please say, "We will."

Parents: We will.

One: Will you teach Alexander to love others with all their strength, soul, heart, and mind? If so, please say, "We will."

Parents: We will.

## Questions of Sponsors

One: As Alexander's sponsors, do you promise, with God's help, to guide and encourage the spirit of this child and to help their parents keep the promises they have made? If so, please say, "We do."

Sponsors: We do

### Congregational Promise

One: Let us, the community of First Congregational Church, pledge our love and support to this family.

**Many: We covenant with you on behalf of your child. We rejoice in the hope and love which they represent. We unite with you to labor and pray for their spiritual growth, that they may know and trust the goodness of God. On behalf of the whole church of Jesus Christ, we welcome them.**

### Baptismal Prayer

One: Let us pray. Creator God, loving parents have come into your presence this morning. Fill them with your wisdom so they may teach Alexander to know and love God and embrace all that is sacred. May they and their child be ever conscious of the beauty of the world and the goodness that surrounds them. May they have the courage to face evil and the faith to transcend it. Grant them strength of body and clarity of spirit, that that they may live long and prosper.

*As the Baptismal waters are blessed:*

Recalling now your endless and boundless love, we ask that you bless this water, that it might be for us both symbol and substance of your love, reminding us to love others as you have loved us. Amen.

### Baptism

One: What name have you given your child?

Parents: Alexander James Schumann.

One: Alexander James Schumann, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Mother of us all.

### Congregational Blessing

One: Let us now, as the people of God and the Body of Christ, bless this child together:

**Many: May your names be honored and respected for wisdom and good deeds. May God's blessing be upon you, now and always. May you be a joy to your families and may you bring blessing to humanity and glory to the name of God. We welcome you into our midst on behalf of the whole church of Jesus Christ.**

*Though it is traditional for the Pastor to carry the child through the congregation and “introduce” them to the people, today that special blessing comes in an anthem from our church choir—of which the Pastor is a member!*

Choir Anthem

“How Great Thou Art”

arr. Bock

*Anoka UCC Chancel Choir; Don Shier, Director*

*O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds thy hands have made,  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed!  
Then sings my soul, my savior God to thee; how great thou art, how great thou art. (x2)*

*When through the woods and forest glades I wander and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;  
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur, and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze:  
how great thou art! How great thou art!*

*And when I think, that God, his son not sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in.  
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin.  
Then sings my soul, my savior God to thee; how great thou art, how great thou art. (x2)*

*When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart.  
Then I shall bow in humble adoration and there proclaim, my God, how great thou art.  
Then sings my soul, my savior God to thee; how great thou art, how great thou art. (x2)*

<p><i>(10:30) 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.</i></p>
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Scripture Reading – Psalm 63:1-8

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as  
in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

<sup>2</sup> So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.

<sup>3</sup> Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

<sup>4</sup> So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

<sup>5</sup> My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips

<sup>6</sup> when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;

<sup>7</sup> for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

<sup>8</sup> My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

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

**Many: Thanks be to God.**

Hymn

“As We Gather at Your Table” #332

**As we gather at your table, as we listen to your word,  
help us know, O God, your presence; let our hearts and minds be stirred.  
Nourish us with sacred story till we claim it as our own;  
teach us through this holy banquet how to make Love’s victory known.**

**Turn our worship into witness in the sacrament of life;  
send us forth to love and serve you, bringing peace where there is strife.  
Give us, Christ, your great compassion to forgive as you forgave;  
may we still behold your image in the world you died to save.**

**Gracious Spirit, help us summon other guests to share that feast  
where triumphant Love will welcome those who had been last and least.  
There no more will envy bind us nor will pride our peace destroy,  
as we join with saints and angels to repeat the sounding joy.**

We Come to the Table

Invitation

One: When Jesus sat at table and enjoyed communion with tax collectors and sinners he proclaimed that God’s care knows no bounds. At this table we live into that call by spreading the invitation as widely as we possibly can; no matter who you are or where you are on your life’s journey you are welcome here. For neither age, nor race, nor gender, nor orientation, nor ideology, nor anything else can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Savior.

Thanksgiving Prayer

One: God be with you:

**Many: and also with you.**

One: Lift up your hearts:

**Many: we lift them up to God.**

One: Let us thank God:

**Many: it is good to thank God.**

One: We thank you, God, that you have provided for all the worlds that ever were or will be by giving yourself to them in love. If we go to the heights of the

mountains, or if we make the grave our bed, you are with us. If we go to the depths of the sea, your right hand holds us fast. We thank you for Jesus, your Word, who lived among us, uncovering your presence. We thank you that you stamped his death with victory and that Life, not Death, was the final word. We ask now that you bless us, as we share this bread and cup, that we might be nourished by that same unbounded love and so be encouraged to be your servants to the world. And now, as your beloved whom you have reconciled to yourself, we pray:

### 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.**

### Communion

One: As this grain once was scattered in the field and has come together in one bread, so we, with different needs and hopes, come together as one, for we share one bread. Take. The Bread of Life.

The cup which we share is the cup of the New Covenant written in our hearts and witnessed by Jesus. Take. Drink. The Cup of the New Covenant. God is with you.

*As the Deacons will distribute Communion, you may partake of the elements as you are served. At the same time, we will sing:*

Eat this bread, drink this cup, come to me and nev - er be hun - gry.

Eat this bread, drink this cup, trust in me and you will not thirst.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

One: Let us pray in gratitude.

**Many: Thank you God, for renewing us at your table by the presence of Christ.**

**Thank you for your eternal love, the Bread of Life, that sustains all creation.**

**May you continue to love us in our faithful acts and by that love discourage us from our unfaithful acts, that we might rejoice as your servants to the world.**

**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](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

Koki Sato

\* 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

\* Easter Blessing

“The Day of Resurrection” #245 (v .3)

**Now let the heavens be joyful, let earth its song begin,**

**the whole world keep high triumph, and all that is there in.**

**Let all things seen and unseen their notes of gladness blend,**

**for Christ again has risen, our joy that has no end!**

Postlude

Koki Sato

*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

We have a bird's nest in the front of our house right now. Recently, Erin put up a silken floral wreath on the section of wall between our garage doors, and almost immediately, a house finch moved in. Then, a few days ago, Erin went out and took a picture of the nest's interior, and to our surprise she discovered that a cowbird had laid an egg alongside the finch eggs. Cowbirds have a bad rap for doing this, but the Audubon Society reminds us that this is just nature doing its thing and we shouldn't interfere. More graciously, I suppose that cowbirds mamas have a very different context of maternity, and thus they rely on the wings of other birds to shelter their offspring.

When David makes reference to the shadow beneath God's wings, he's not telling us that God looks like a bewinged angel, though that image is compelling. There is something to be said for an embrace that doesn't just involve arms, but one that includes glorious wings wrapping around to shelter us in the healing protection of a loving shadow. Perhaps that's why our images of angels are so often not Biblically accurate. Instead of a writhing mass of many wings and many eyes, we instead get a body much like ours with wings growing from the back. It's more relatable, if nothing else. Perhaps it even softens the terror of the shepherds who receive good tidings from an angel.

But as I said, David's not talking about angels here, but chickens. Or so I like to think.

Four times in the Psalms, we get references to the shadow of God's wings, and all four Psalms are attributed to David, who appears to be writing in times of personal danger. Psalm 17:8 says, "Guard me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings." Psalm 36:7 says, "How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people make take refuge in the shadow of your wings." Psalm 57:1 says, "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, until the destroying storms pass me by." Finally, today's Psalm 63 approaches its end with this affirmation (verse 7): "for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy."

I know the Bible is the product of a patriarchal society that privileged masculine language for God, but sometimes I still chuckle in wonder at the ubiquity of Father language in the Church, mostly because this paragon of masculinity, David, the shepherd-boy turned king, the measuring-stick by which all subsequent kings are measured, employs female imagery to talk about God. That's what the "wings" language is about. It has both Scriptural and practical roots. Those practical ones are agrarian, as anyone with chickens can attest. The Scriptural ones go back to the very beginning: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from god swept over the face of the waters."

That word "swept" is funny in its translations. Most commonly, the verb is translated "swept," "moving," or "hovering," with that last one being closest to the mark. Because here's the real nature of that verb: it means *brooding*. The hovering of a hen over her eggs, and then her chicks. The parent bird gently perches above its offspring, covering them with its wings and protecting them from wind, rain, and sun. The shadow in this instance is no harbor for danger, but a shield against it. That's how David saw God: as a divine parent who cares for their children, protecting them and sheltering them from harm. A God whose love is so easily related to the love of a parent for a child, or for that matter, any adult who both gently and fiercely protects children.



Did you know that the sacrament of Baptism is not remotely monolithic in how it gets understood in the Church? Depending on your own perspective, it includes any combination of the following theologies. For some, particularly the Apostle Paul, Baptism is a participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus, with the descent into water symbolizing death and the rising from it as the resurrection. Others believe that in baptism their sins are almost literally washed away. Some believe it to be a moment when Spiritual gifts are bestowed. Others emphasize it as a ritual of entry into the Body of Christ. Some consider it a visible sign of the coming Kingdom. In a different category, there are those who believe Baptism should only be done when you've reached enough maturity to make the promises of baptism yourself, and then there are those who practice infant baptism—as we do—who make a commitment to raise the child to know and love Jesus.

In our denomination, it's probably more common that people think of baptism as an act by which a family and a congregation covenant together to raise a child to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with their neighbors. If the child is of the congregation, the congregation has a more active role. If the child is from far away, the congregation commits to supporting the family through prayer and whatever other ways make sense. It's like when a cowbird puts its egg in some other bird's nest; that new bird tacitly covenants to care for the chick.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the very breath of God, the Holy Spirit, blew over the primordial waters and blessed them with such fierce love that it gave birth to a new creation, order out of chaos. And then God settled upon that creation like a hen settles upon her nest and guarded it, fed it, loved it, and nurtured it. That is the same promise we make when we baptize a child. That's the same promise we seek to invoke whenever we invite people to the Table. It's part of the Good News that we proclaim as best we can amidst our human limitations, praying as we do that God will work through us to shelter the world beneath the shadow of its wings.

May we make it so with every breath we take, too. Amen.

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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.*