



# First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

*An Open and Affirming Congregation*

November 26, 2023 ♦ Reign of Christ Sunday



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

Centering Music

Koki Sato

The Church Bell Rings

\* Opening Hymn

“All Hail the Power of Jesus’s Name” #304 (alt)

*Note: Verse three has alternate lyrics.*

**All hail the power of Jesus’ name! Let angels prostrate fall;  
bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Christ servant of all.  
Attend the Savior’s sovereign claim, and crown Christ servant of all.**

**Adorn, O martyred saints of old, the coronation hall;  
extol the Wounded One foretold, and crown Christ bearer of all.  
Extol the Wounded One foretold, and crown Christ bearer of all.**

**All heirs of God’s steadfast regard, forgiven, loved, and called,  
proclaim the wonders of God’s grace, and crown Christ healer of all.  
Proclaim the wonders of God’s grace, and crown Christ healer of all.**

**Before the cross, with heaven’s throng, we on our knees shall fall;  
we’ll join the everlasting song, and crown Christ savior of all.  
We’ll join the everlasting song, and crown Christ savior of all.**

\* Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: Eternal Christ, you rule!

**Many: Praises be to Christ the King!**

One: Teach us your way, O Jesus, that we may honor you truly.

**Many: Teach how to best honor your majesty, Exalted One!**

One: "Feed my lambs."

**Many: Are we talking with food or with the Word?**

One: "Wash their feet."

**Many: Um, say again?**

One: "Welcome all outcasts."

**Many: You're asking a lot, Jesus.**

One: "When you do as I do, you will understand my crown."

**Many: Help us understand, O Heaven's Sun!**

One: Let us pray.

**Many: Jesus, we thought you would be the conquering hero, the king foretold. But then you died, and promised us a Spirit for a teacher. So teach us, Holy Spirit! Teach us to truly absorb the arresting truth of Jesus's reign, that the soldiers could not humiliate the one who was already humbled. Help us to live by his example as servants of all! Amen.**

A Time for Children (10:30)

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

"More Heart, Less Attack"

Need to Breathe

Anoka UCC String Band

*Be the light in the crack / Be the one that's been there on a camel's back  
Slow to anger, quick to laugh / Be more heart and less attack*

*Be the wheels not the track / Be the wanderer that's coming back  
Leave the past right where it's at / Be more heart and less attack*

*The more you take the less you have / 'Cause it's you in the mirror staring back  
Quick to let go slow to react / Be more heart and less attack*

*Ever growing steadfast / And if need be the one that's in the gap  
Be the never turning back / Twice the heart any man could have*

*Be the wheels not the track / Be the wanderer that's coming back  
Leave the past right where it's at / Be more heart and less attack  
Be more heart and less attack / Be more heart and less attack*

*I stuck my hat out, I caught the rain drops / I drank the water, I felt my veins block  
I'm nearly sanctified, I'm nearly broken / I'm down the river, I'm near the open*

*I'm down the river to where I'm going*

Scripture Reading – Matthew 27:11-14, 27-37

Lector, **Congregation**

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "**You say so.**" <sup>12</sup> But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. <sup>13</sup> Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" <sup>14</sup> But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

<sup>27</sup> Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. <sup>28</sup> They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, <sup>29</sup> and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" <sup>30</sup> They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. <sup>31</sup> After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. <sup>32</sup> As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. <sup>33</sup> And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), <sup>34</sup> they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. <sup>35</sup> And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; <sup>36</sup> then they sat down there and kept watch over him. <sup>37</sup> Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

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

**Many: Thanks be to God.**

## Hymn

## “Our Lord, You Stood in Pilate’s Hall”

*This hymn by Rev. Carolyn Winfrey Gillette is set to AZMON (“O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing #42)*

**Our Lord, you stood in Pilate’s hall, his judgment to endure.  
Yet all he ruled would one day fall; you reign forevermore!**

**You are our King and yet you said it’s not by sword or might;  
where truth is lived and love is spread, your reign comes into sight.**

**Where people live in deep despair, forgotten, hurt, alone,  
we hear their urgent, whispered prayer: “When will your reign be known?”**

**And where your church on earth today is mighty, rich, and strong,  
Lord, may we not forget your Way, nor lose your kingdom’s song.**

**“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done” not just in heaven above;  
O God, may we obey your Son, who reigns o’er all in love.**

## 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](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.*

## Interlude

Koki Sato

## Prayers of the People

*A 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.**

\* Doxology

NUN DANKET

*“Now Thank We All Our God” #419 v. 3*

**All praise and thanks to God our Maker now be given,  
to Christ, and Spirit, too, our help in highest heaven.  
The one, eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore,  
for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore!**

\* 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

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.*

**COFFEE HOUR IS SERVED BETWEEN SERVICES.**

Acknowledgements

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Sermon Text

*“When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.” (John 6:15)*

Jesus had just fed the multitudes, and the crowds were gobsmacked at the miracle they had witnessed. They saw in Jesus a response to the Roman occupation, a prophet like Elijah, filled with power. They saw someone like Hezekiah, Josiah, like Solomon who could wrest control of their land back from

foreign conquerors and restore the Davidic covenant. They saw a king, and as sometimes happens when people insist on putting someone in power, they wanted to do that to him.

But he ran. He ran to his place of solace, of quiet, of safety from the desires of crowds who didn't realize how wrongheaded their impulse was, if understandable. He ran away from the same impulse that had led the Israelites in the time of the Judges to beg Samuel for a king—a request that so infuriated Samuel that he would have refused, but for God telling him to go ahead and do it.

Did Jesus know he would fight a losing battle? Because the people made him king anyway. They took this humble, backwater prophet and decided that he was a king after all, if not in the most earthly sense. The soldiers put a crown of thorns upon his head in mockery, and the Church replaced it with a victor's crown of gold. Jonathan, the son of Israel's first king, stripped himself of his royal robe, his armor of rank, his sword and his bow and his belt and gave them all to David; we gave them to Jesus.

It's not like there isn't Biblical justification for doing so. Once you get past the Gospels, Jesus's robes start turning royally purple. The Christology of the Testament climbs higher and higher, from calling him the High Priest of the Order of Melchizedek in the book of Hebrews, all the way to a sword-slinging warrior-king in Revelation. Oh—and Melchizedek? He was a king and high priest of Jerusalem, then called Salem, whom Abraham and Sarah met on their journey to the Promised Land. Notably, “Melchizedek” means “King of Righteousness,” a title that would become one of many for Jesus.

Nonetheless, on this last Sunday of the church year on which we celebrate Jesus as King, we are on the cusp of remembering in Advent just how humble and NOT kingly were Jesus's legendary origins. Those tales foreshadow the stories of Jesus's arrest and execution by the Roman Empire. They foreshadow those moments in his brief, shining career when he refused to be crowned. In Advent, we lift up those powerful prophetic passages about the crooked becoming straight and the rough places plain as God promises us a divine Kingdom, a Beloved Community where the stratification of society, inevitably crowned with a monarch, is flattened out into an existence of unfettered equity.

It's not like it doesn't make sense. We love monarchs. Fantasy tales abound with the stories of kings, sometimes so on-the-nose as to make those kings into Christ-figures, much like Aragorn in *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*—a film that made over \$1.1 billion. Especially in America, shows about the British royalty abound and generally do very well. In some ways, however historically ironic this is, the Crown is more popular in America than in Great Britain! And of course, in the Church, crowns are ubiquitous in our iconography, all the way to the one that sits atop the cross on the symbol of the United Church of Christ.

Given what I've already noted about Jesus's own thoughts about being a king, it's a strange disconnect to see even our own denominational symbol with a crown in the highest position. The tripartite orb at the bottom, by the way, for all that it looks like an orb of royal authority, actually represents the earth and Jesus's affirmation in Acts 1:8 that his disciples will be his “witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” If you squint while looking at the cross, it *could* be a royal scepter, but of course it's the means of his State-ordered execution.

It's probably not a bad idea that Christ the King Sunday gets the final word in the church year, even if I think that it should be one of the great laments of the Church that we made Mary's son into a monarch. On this day, it's traditional to sing things like—and these are the *Pilgrim Hymnal* lyrics, “**All hail the power of Jesus's name! Let angels prostrate fall; bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of all.**” Let us adorn him in gold and jewels; let us put the symbols of rank upon his head and shoulders. Let us bow before his ultimate authority!

But perhaps you noticed that the *New Century Hymnal* did change the words a bit: “**and crown Christ servant of all.**” *Servant*. That’s the reminder we need on Christ the King Sunday, though we can be forgiven for being confused. The Bible abounds with stories of kings who act in the most capricious of ways, just like Samuel warned. Even Psalm 72, attributed to Solomon, touches on some of those less-fortunate qualities—but we should note that the author there also lets us know exactly what a Hebrew King is supposed to be doing when they sing, “He has pity on the weak and needy, and saves the lives of the needy” (72:13). If we’re going to celebrate the kingship of Jesus, we would do well to remember that line precisely because it’s what Jesus spent so much time doing according to all of the Gospels.

For my pledge, the nature of Jesus’s reign is no better narrated than in the Gospel of John, when Jesus gathers with his friends for a final meal (John 13:3-5): *Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,* <sup>4</sup> *got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.* <sup>5</sup> *Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.*

I can’t overstate how consequential this scene is. Seven chapters earlier, the crowds have tried to make him king. Five chapters after, he tells Pilate, “My kingdom is not from this world” (18:36). And here, at table with his friends, he shows them what his kingship looks like. He shows us all. He shows us that authority comes through service, power through humility. He begs us to see that whereas Revelation puts him firmly on the throne with choirs of angels singing his name, his true throne is seen in the footwashing stool. The shoe-polishing bench. The basin of the pedicurist. The aching crouch of the toilet-plunger. The bent back of the floor-mopper. The stained and burned fingers of the cashew-sheller. The bleeding hands of the cotton-picker. The spattered apron of the burger-flipper. The weary yet expansive embrace of the childcare worker. The black lungs of the coal miner.

I can’t help but think of a conversation Erin and I overheard on the train from Fairfield, Connecticut to New York City last Monday. On the seat across the aisle sat a young man, an employee at Deloitte. As he narrated his life’s plans to his companion, he spoke of his struggle to either stay at his obviously high-paying job or go to law school with the promise of making even more money. He celebrated his purchase of his first Rolex at about \$14,000 and shared that he was on the list for his second. It was an investment, you see. He even disparaged his progressive parents for what he thought was an insincerity about their worldview.

I’m not sharing that tale to hack on the boy. He’s done nothing wrong; he’s simply fallen to the same siren song that plays out of every speaker, the one that promises us happiness if we can just do more, make more, produce more, empower ourselves more. The psalm that lures us to keep climbing the corporate ladder, the social ladder, the ladder that leads to the halls of power. The path of kingship. But Jesus is persistent, and his story keeps poking at us, reminding us that the path to leadership, the path to happiness, the path to liberation comes not through striving to rise, but in humbling ourselves to ensure that our neighbors have what they all need to live life abundantly. That we not get so caught up in a race to the crown that we forget: power is useless if it isn’t used to liberate all the widows and orphans.

On this Christ the King Sunday, let’s remember that when the crowds tried to make Jesus king, he ran. He ran so far away. In the end, he couldn’t get away—but it’s never too late for us to learn the lesson.

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](mailto: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.*