



Trinity United Church of Christ

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Trinity United Church of Christ

April 28, 2024

8AM and 10:30AM Worship

5th Sunday of Easter

Awakening joyful service guided by our still speaking God!

If this is your first time with us, or if you have come to this sacred space your entire life, we are glad to be on this journey of faith with you. To enhance your worship experience, we have large print bulletins and hearing support devices available.

Please ask an usher or greeter for assistance.

Enter to worship today but stick around to see what God is doing in this place!

*Congregational responses in **bold print**. * Denotes standing as you are able.*

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WELCOME/TIME OF SHARING

No matter who you are or where you are in life's journey,
You are welcome here!

PRELUDE – “Praise His Greatness” – *M. Hayes*

***CALL TO WORSHIP**

Jesus is the true vine and God is the vine grower.

We are the branches.

It is God's Word that makes the branches strong;
and the Word bears fruit.

The Word give rise to action;
and action proves our discipleship.

God celebrates when we act faithfully;
and we give back praise and glory, to God.

***HYMN #517 “I Need You Every Hour”**

***PRAYER OF INVOCATION**

**Cultivating God, we come as your children to
grow and learn, because you are our divine vine grower.**

**God, we desire for you to abide within us,
and for your grace to be revealed anew daily.
As your branches, we ask you to nourish us for continued growth.
May you transform our hearts and minds as we hear your Word,
sing your praises, and engage in holy dialogue through prayer.
May you help us to bear good fruit through the vine of Jesus. Amen.**

***SUNG RESPONSE #163 “Many Are the Light-beams” (Vs 2 and 5)
*Many are the branches of the one tree. Our one tree is Jesus.
Many are the branches of the one tree; we are one in Christ.
Many are the members, the body is one; members all of Jesus.
Many are the members, the body is one; we are one in Christ.***

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**O God, giver of life, we confess the times
when we fail to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.
God, forgive us when we ignore or we fail to see our neighbors in need.
Abiding God, also forgive us when we reject love from others,
and shut down completely. As we confess the times when we did not
tend to our own needs and denied ourselves forgiveness and grace.
In our failures, we have refused your invitation to grow closer to you.
Bring us back to you, O God, and connect us again with each other. Amen.**

MOMENT FOR SILENT PRAYER

ASSURANCE OF GRACE

SPECIAL MUSIC

John Lucas

A TIME FOR THE YOUNG AT HEART

SCRIPTURES

1 John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent

his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. ¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. ¹⁵God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. ²¹The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

John 15:1-8

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

SERMON

"Tree of Life!"

PRAYER/LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, 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 sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power and the Glory, forever. Amen.**

**HYMN #163 “Many Are the Lightbeams”
(Remain Seated)**

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH #887 A New Creed**

We are not alone, we live in God’s world.

We believe in God:

**who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by the Spirit.**

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:

**to celebrate God’s presence,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus,
crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.**

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.

We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

***CELEBRATION OF OUR GIFTS**

May our connectedness spark us to acknowledge the need in our midst.

May our hearts respond generously.

***OFFERTORY RESPONSE #236 “Halleluja” (2X’s)**

Halle, halle, halleluja. Halle, halle, halleluja.

Halle, halle, halleluja. Halleluja, halleluja.

***PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

**As the Good News of Jesus Christ is heard and celebrated,
may the gifts of this faith community make an impact
locally and globally as we reach out to touch the wider world. Amen.**

***HYMN #28 “For the Beauty of The Earth”**

***FINAL BLESSING**

***POSTLUDE**

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Today's Worship Elements have been adapted from the following resource:

Abiding in Love: Service Prayers for the Fifth Sunday of Easter Year B, was written by the Rev Dr. Sheila Harvey Guillaume, pastor of Union Congregational United Church of Christ in West Palm Beach.

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Today's Worship Participants

Rev. Dr. Frederick A. Young		Pastor
Kara Young	10:30am	
Jen Mickelson	8:00am	Lay Liturgists
Catherine Hammons	10:30am	
Sara Shank		Organist
John McKay		Senior Choir Director
Mark Luckenbaugh	8:00am	Percussion
Jane Malone	8:00am	Ushers
Jane Malone, Roberta Weiant	10:30am	
Janet & Steve Sheely	10:30am	Greeters
Janet Sheely	10:30am	Acolyte
Georgia Hollabaugh, Kara Young, Luke Milhimes, Russell Bailey,		Tech Team
Carl Barrick, Suhua Dong, Stacey Rushwald, George Steckert, Garrison Redding, Terry Krietz		

I Need You Every Hour

Annie S. Hawks, 1872; alt.

Refrain added by Robert Lowry, 1872; alt.

1. I need you ev-ery hour, O God of grace;
the peace your voice af-fords, I now em-brace.
I need you, how I need you! Ev-ery hour I need you;
O bless me now, my Sav-ior; I come to you.

2. I need you ev-ery hour, in faith or fear;
temp-ta-tions lose their power when you are near.
I need you, how I need you! Ev-ery hour I need you;
O bless me now, my Sav-ior; I come to you.

3. I need you ev-ery hour, in joy or pain;
come quick-ly and a-bide or life is vain.
I need you, how I need you! Ev-ery hour I need you;
O bless me now, my Sav-ior; I come to you.

4. I need you ev-ery hour; teach me your will,
and your rich prom-is-es in me ful-fill.
I need you, how I need you! Ev-ery hour I need you;
O bless me now, my Sav-ior; I come to you.

Many Are the Lightbeams

Cyprian of Carthage, "De unitate ecclesiae," 252 C.E.

Swedish paraphr. by Anders Frostenson (b. 1906)

Transl. David Lewis, 1983

1. Man-y are the light-beams from the one light.
 Our one light is Je-sus.
 Man-y are the light-beams from the one light;
 we are one in Christ.

2. Man-y are the branch-es of the one tree.
 Our one tree is Je-sus.
 Man-y are the branch-es of the one tree;
 we are one in Christ.

3. Man-y are the gifts given, love is all one.
 Love's the gift of Je-sus.
 Man-y are the gifts given, love is all one;
 we are one in Christ.

4. Man-y ways to serve God, the Spir-it is one;
 ser-vant spir-it of Je-sus.
 Man-y ways to serve God, the Spir-it is one;
 we are one in Christ.

5. Man-y are the mem-bers, the bod-y is one;
 mem-bers all of Je-sus.
 Man-y are the mem-bers, the bod-y is one;
 we are one in Christ.

John 8:12; 9:5; 15:1-5; 1 Cor. 12:4-27; Gal. 3:28

For the Beauty of the Earth

St. 1–3, Follitt S. Pierpoint, 1864; alt.

St. 4, Miriam Therese Winter, 1993

1. For the beau-ty of the earth,
for the splen-dor of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
o-ver and a-round us lies,
God of all, to you we raise
this our hymn of grate-ful praise.
2. For the won-der of each hour
of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon, and stars of light,
God of all, to you we raise
this our hymn of grate-ful praise.
3. For the joy of hu-man love,
broth-er, sis-ter, par-ent, child,
Friends on earth, and friends a-bove,
for all gen-tle thoughts and mild,
God of all, to you we raise
this our hymn of grate-ful praise.
4. For the good that love in-spires,
for a world where none ex-clude,
For a faith that nev-er tires,
and for ev-ery heart re-newed,
God of all, to you we raise
this our hymn of grate-ful praise.

Trinity United Church of Christ
Gettysburg, PA

5th Sunday of Easter
April 26, 2024



Sermon

“Tree of Life”

John 15:1-8

Rev. Frederick A. Young

Kara Young

A seminary friend of Kara's and mine posted a conversation he had with his young son on social media the other day. Wisdom comes from within, no matter our age. Pastor Jeff relayed:

I went to seminary to learn how to do theology, but sometimes I'm floored at how innate the desire is to think in those ways. I had a great reminder of that this morning getting Ivyn dressed for school. For context, I need to tell you there was some good old fashioned New England fog was settling in around our wet land home...

Ivyn said, "Hey dad, look at that fog. I think it's God breathing."

I answered, "Yeah buddy? What makes you think that?"

Ivyn explained, "Because it's like when we breathe, and you can see your breath. She breathes and it looks just like our breath."

"That's a great observation buddy!" I exclaimed, "So, you think God breathes like us? I do too, I think that's where we learned to breathe."

Ivyn got more descriptive, "Yeah, maybe She doesn't breathe EXACTLY like us - because She's God - but maybe She breathes from Her ear, or her eye, or... something."

I replied, "I like that buddy. I don't know exactly how God breathes either, but it's nice to think about isn't it?"

Ivyn said, "Yeah, that fog is pretty cool."

Friends, pay attention to everything because theology doesn't

always have to be fancy and well worded to be profound and beautiful and meaningful.

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I love this early morning conversation between our friend, Jeff and his four-year-old son. Ivyn is quite a theologian. Whether breathing, healing, miracles or gardening, our faith is as complicated as it is comprehensive. Today's passage from John is Jesus' final "*I am*" statement from his farewell discourse. The vines and branches were described to give his followers strength for the days following his death. Like any good metaphor, it is not just to define something, but to point to something else. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus has identified himself with everyday images to catch his follower's attention: bread, light, door, shepherd, life, way, truth and now a vine.

John's community was in a precarious situation. Their choice to follow a troublesome new kind of religious ideology made them suspect in the eyes of the established authority and subject to excommunication. To be cast out of the faith of their family; homeless, landless, and alone was a terrible fate. Community was everything. I think about the

conversation between Jeff and his son, and wonder if Ivyn had not been raised in a church community, would it have occurred to him to compare God's breathing with his own?

Community continues to be at the heart of our churches today. The United Church of Christ is an excellent example for the vine and branches metaphor as five Christian denominations came together to form a united body. Jesus is the strong vine, rooted firmly in the tilled soil. We are the many branches extending from the vine to hold unfurled leaves to the sun for energy and support the abundant, sweet fruit as it grows to bless the people with sustenance. Our still speaking God is the vine grower who tends the vine, pruning and trimming branches so that they bear the most fruit. Our church is but one branch of an encircling and intertwining vine whose fruitfulness depends on abiding with Jesus. The Messiah makes it clear that he is intimately connected to God. Without the Creator, Jesus has no life, no ministry, and no mission. The true vine is possible because of the vinegrower who gives life and sustains it.

One distinctive characteristic of the early Christian Church that set it apart from the already established hierarchical temple system remains at the heart of our beloved UCC; all branches are equal before God. There is no pride of place. All branches are rooted together in one vine, and only because of their common roots can they produce a harvest. Today, our promise to remain in covenant keeps us connected to God and to each other. For John's community faithfulness was determined not by outward or elaborate rituals but by one's relationship with God through Jesus.

Within this text we are reminded that there is not a single follower of Christ who is Christian on their own. We cannot grow, flower, and generate fruit without living in love with each other. The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes the community that Jesus calls forth when he shares the African philosophy of '*Ubuntu*', "*I am, because we are!*" Those who recognize the Christ are moved to respond to this gift through their own acts of love. A sign of discipleship is doing good works for the right reasons, sharing the

abundance of the harvest we are nurturing. Jesus uses the common image of a grape vine and transforms it into a symbol of community, mission, and love.

In her recent letter in the Penn Central Conference *eNews*, Conference Minister, Carrie Call, reflects on the vine metaphor:

Jesus knows what lies ahead for the disciples. We know too, since we have the benefit of hindsight. They will suffer. Their lives will be pruned significantly. Yet we also know that the church flourished when it was persecuted in those early centuries. Talk about counterintuitive. This is a deep mystery and cannot be reduced to a simplistic (and manifestly unhelpful) “God’s going to make you suffer so you bear more fruit.” Instead, Jesus knows that as the disciples (and all the disciples to come) share the gospel message, they will hit up against resistance of all kinds – even from within their own church.

Often when in a social setting, I am asked what I do for a living. Just as many times, when I declare I am a pastor, I hear, “*Oh, well I am more spiritual than religious!*” First, I didn’t pry about their religious

status. Second, is this response a defense mechanism for those who do not attend church? I typically say, “*That’s okay!*”. Then they look at me as if I absolved all their sins. Have you ever wondered about the difference between the two? Religious versus spiritual? The Christian religion is highly structured and based upon beliefs and practices, rituals, and dogma, in an attempt to live life close to God by remembering and celebrating the life of Christ. When someone identifies as more spiritual, they may feel they nurture a link between themselves and the Divine apart from the confines of that foundation. Their connection to God may occur strongest when out in creation, or creating art or music, or maybe meditating. There are many types of spiritual practices. These two labels seem opposed, but they aren’t necessarily separate. You can attend church weekly, love liturgy and community, while still needing soul level communion under the trees. What spirituality alone can’t bring is the sense of fellowship that supports and sustains and feeds us in our faith when we worship together. When someone claims a religion they are a part of something bigger, a family of faith.

Remember, the vine feeds the branches. The branches produce fruit that feeds the world and gladdens the heart. We are the branches. The vine cannot sustain without us, and our bounty comes from abiding in the true Vine, rooted to the soil. How are we connected or disconnected from the true Vine? Are we fruitful in our ministry and mission? How are we abiding in Christ? What needs to happen for us to produce a bountiful harvest? Perhaps we need the awe and wonder of a child like Ivyn, who through his unique sense of God, shares the Gospel with others!

Ivyn:

Yeah, maybe She doesn't breathe EXACTLY like us - because She's God - but maybe She breathes from Her ear, or her eye, or... something.

Amen.