

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUNE 25, 2023



ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Rev. Rosemary Captain

Organist – Sharon Banjavcic

Liturgy – Rev Lavon Bayler

Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRELUDE: “You Are My All in All”

Jernigan/Tournquist

PENNIES FOR MISSION: Emmaus Homes

*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:

ONE: Come, nations of the earth, to bow before God.
Distant galaxies proclaim the Creator of all things.

MANY: We are humbled by the wonders of creation. We are amazed by God’s mighty works.

ONE: This infinite God cares for each one of us. God hears our cries and responds to our needs.

MANY: In our days of trouble, we call on our God. We are confident that God listens and answers.

ONE: Let us also call on God with our prayers of thanks. Let us celebrate the wondrous things God provides.

ALL: God cares for us, even when others reject us. We gather to glorify God’s name.

***PRAYER OF INVOCATION:** Holy God, come to us in our distress. We are weary of conflict and long for your healing waters of forgiveness and renewal. You have sent us a teacher to draw us into discipleship, and we have found fulfillment when we are faithful to Christ’s call. We long to find peace as we serve, but more often we encounter a sword. Our disagreements are many, and our capacity to forgive is strained. Send your light that we might not falter

in our caring and in the proclamation of your good news.
Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: NCH 475**

“God’s Eye is On the Sparrow”

***CALL TO CONFESSION:** God’s grace has been poured out among us that we might die to sin. Yet, we are persistent in our disobedience, as if we thereby give to God more opportunities to be gracious. Let us bring to God all the brokenness of our lives, our alienation from our Creator, from persons we are called to love, and even from our own best selves.

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

God, we are poor and needy in matters of the spirit. You have offered us newness of life, but we are fearful of its cost. Your gifts place us in debts so vast that we can never repay. We are not worthy of your love and cannot earn your forgiveness. How is it that when we accept your grace we sense a freedom we have never before enjoyed? O God, we want to be dead to sin and alive to you. Help us! Amen.

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:** As Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of God, we are lifted up to walk in newness of life, accepted and forgiven. You can never be your old self again, for Christ has set you free. Old divisions and misunderstandings are overcome in the steadfast love of God. All who give up their self-occupied ways for Christ’s sake find abundant life. This is God’s gift to you today.

***GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near.
As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God
always here. (repeat two more times.)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS: Genesis 21:8-21

Hagar and Ishmael evicted

⁸ Isaac grew and stopped nursing. On the day he stopped nursing, Abraham prepared a huge banquet. ⁹ Sarah saw Hagar’s son laughing, the one Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham. ¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, “Send this servant away with her son! This servant’s son won’t share the inheritance with my son Isaac.”

¹¹ This upset Abraham terribly because the boy was his son. ¹² God said to Abraham, “Don’t be upset about the boy and your servant. Do everything Sarah tells you to do because your descendants will be traced through Isaac. ¹³ But I will make of your servant’s son a great nation too, because he is also your descendant.” ¹⁴ Abraham got up early in the morning, took some bread and a flask of water, and gave it to Hagar. He put the boy in her shoulder sling and sent her away.

She left and wandered through the desert near Beer-sheba. ¹⁵ Finally the water in the flask ran out, and she put the boy down under one of the desert shrubs. ¹⁶ She walked away from him about as far as a bow shot and sat down, telling herself, I can’t bear to see the boy die. She sat at a distance, cried out in grief, and wept.

¹⁷ God heard the boy’s cries, and God’s messenger called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “Hagar! What’s

wrong? Don't be afraid. God has heard the boy's cries over there. ¹⁸Get up, pick up the boy, and take him by the hand because I will make of him a great nation." ¹⁹Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well. She went over, filled the water flask, and gave the boy a drink. ²⁰God remained with the boy; he grew up, lived in the desert, and became an expert archer. ²¹He lived in the Paran desert, and his mother found him an Egyptian wife.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 86:1-12 Page 677

EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 6:1b-11

Our new life in Christ

6 So what are we going to say? Should we continue sinning so grace will multiply? ² Absolutely not! All of us died to sin. How can we still live in it? ³ Or don't you know that all who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore, we were buried together with him through baptism into his death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too can walk in newness of life. ⁵ If we were united together in a death like his, we will also be united together in a resurrection like his. ⁶ This is what we know: the person that we used to be was crucified with him in order to get rid of the corpse that had been controlled by sin. That way we wouldn't be slaves to sin anymore, ⁷ because a person who has died has been freed from sin's power. ⁸ But if we died with Christ, we have faith that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ has been raised from the dead and he will never die again. Death no longer has power over

him. ¹⁰ He died to sin once and for all with his death, but he lives for God with his life. ¹¹ In the same way, you also should consider yourselves dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus.

MESSAGE: "Trust"

No matter how long and how devoted we are to God, we still struggle with trusting God. This saga of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar tells us that trust or the lack of it was a big part of their story.

In Chapter 17 God told Abraham about having a son at the age of Abraham and Sarah. God's prediction caused Abraham to laugh and so did Sarah. Neither of them believed that God was powerful enough to make Sarah fertile. Abraham said to God, "if only you would accept Ishmael," his son by Sarah's servant Hagar. But God said "no, your wife Sarah will give birth to a son for you, and you will name him Isaac. I will set up my covenant with him and with his descendants after him as an enduring covenant."

Abraham wondered what would happen to Ishmael. God answered, "as for Ishmael, I've heard your request. I will bless him and make him fertile and give him many, many, descendants. He will be the ancestor of twelve tribal leaders, and I will make a great nation of him. But I will set up my covenant with Isaac."

The part of the story we read today comes from chapter 21. Isaac is born from Sarah as God predicted. However, Sarah becomes very jealous and threatened by Hagar and Ishmael who was older than Isaac.

As was the custom in those days, the oldest child of Abraham should receive the inheritance of Abraham and Sarah was afraid that would happen and Isaac would be left out. She told Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. Abraham loved this son too, and he really didn't want to send them out into the wilderness. However, once again, God came to counsel Abraham. God says "Don't be upset about the boy and your servant. Do everything Sarah tells you to do because your descendants will be traced through Isaac. But I will make of your servant's son a great nation too, because he is also your descendant."

As Hagar is suffering in the desert with her son, God comes to rescue them. ¹⁷ God heard the boy's cries, and God's messenger called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, 'Hagar! What's wrong? Don't be afraid. God has heard the boy's cries over there. ¹⁸ Get up, pick up the boy, and take him by the hand because I will make of him a great nation.' ¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well. She went over, filled the water flask, and gave the boy a drink. ²⁰ God remained with the boy; he grew up, lived in the desert, and became an expert archer. ²¹ He lived in the Paran desert, and his mother found him an Egyptian wife.

In this story of our origins, who do you think trusted God most? Abraham, Sarah, or Hagar? When Hagar first became pregnant she tried to runaway because Sarah despised her, even if it was Sarah's idea to send her into Abraham's tent. Yet God came to Hagar when she ran away and spoke to her. God told her to go back to Abraham. Hagar responded to God by saying, "You are the God who sees me. I have now seen the One who sees me."

To me that's extraordinary since she was an Egyptian pagan.

Twice God saved Hagar. If Sarah knew that, I wonder if Sarah was happy with that. Do we ever tell God who to bless and who not to bless because we don't like them or we have a disagreement with them, or we don't think they are worthy to be blessed by God?

What can we learn from these ancient people and their relationships with God? Did they have the same questions about God as we do? Is a sense of trust shaken for them just as our's is at times? Because we know the rest of their story, do we wish to know the end of our story before it happens? If we did, would it make a difference in our relationship with God now?

There's much to ponder in our journey to be closer to God and to each other. And one more question; have you ever laughed at God? Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC: "Every Step of the Way" video

Rev. Dr. Christopher Grundy

PASTORAL PRAYER:

God of all things, possible or seemingly impossible. God of all the wonders of the world which seem impossible, yet we know nothing is impossible for you. And we are grateful. We come to you with many questions, yet they seem insignificant compared to the problems going on in our world. We don't know how to make the world better. We don't know how to stop people from killing each other. We don't know what to do about poverty, hunger, abuse, addiction. Send us some of your wisdom, gracious God. Until then we'll continue to pray and talk to you. We'll

continue to send money and food to the food pantry. We'll continue to support our missions. If given a chance we will try to help those who have mental illnesses and just need someone to talk to and trust.

We trust you, dear God, to send your love, compassion, and comfort to all of us and especially to those who are grieving, lonely, in pain, and on our prayer list. May Jesus our savior, redeemer, and constant companion be with all of your children. . .

THE 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: NCH 769 "Hear Our Prayer"

**Hear our prayer, O God, hear our prayer, O God;
Incline your ear to us, and grant us your peace.**

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY: We have received God's help and comfort. Let us express our thanks. We have been called into the community of disciples. Let us offer the witness of our sharing. We have been assured of our own worth and value. Let us dedicate our offerings to building up others in God's love.

OFFERTORY: "Lead Me, Savior" Roger C. Wilson

***DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

***UNISON OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

For all the great and wondrous things you have done for us, O God, we are grateful. You give us strength to go on when we are troubled and discouraged. You grant newness of life as we share in Christ's resurrection. We want to pass on the good news through this offering and by the way we live each day. Lead us and guide us in your steadfast love, that we might channel your gift to all we meet. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: NCH 423**

"Great is Your Faithfulness"

***RESPONSIVE COMMISSION AND BLESSING:**

ONE: The Teacher has called you as disciples. Learn From Christ to serve without fear.

MANY: We expect to learn daily from our teacher. We commit ourselves anew to Christ's service.

ONE: You have been baptized into Christ's death. Live, with Christ, your resurrection faith.

MANY: We are not afraid of the cross. It calls us to fullness of life, spent for others.

ONE: Let God's love be your first awareness each day. Let that love flow through every activity.

ALL: We bow down to glorify God's name. We rejoice that God makes a place for our witness.

Amen. **Amen.**

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE:**

“Let There Be Peace on Earth”

POSTLUDE: “Alla Marcia” Stephen Otis