

**FIRST SUNDAY  
AFTER PENTECOST  
JUNE 4, 2023**



**Genesis 1:1-2:4a**

**ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

10207 Lincoln Trail  
Fairview Heights, IL

Telephone 618-397-6323

e-mail– [stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com](mailto:stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com)

Website: [www.stjohnfairview.org](http://www.stjohnfairview.org)

Rev. Rosemary Captain

*Organist – Sharon Banjavcic*

*Liturgy – Rev Lavon Bayler*

*Communion liturgy – Rev. Thom Shuman*

**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: How majestic is God's name in all the earth!  
We see God's glory in the expanse of the heavens.

**MANY: All plants and animals are God's creation.**

**All that God has made reflects God's goodness.**

ONE: We are created in God's image, to relate to God.  
We receive great abundance and care from our Creator.

**MANY: God blesses us day by day with good things.**

**We are given dominion over the works of God.**

ONE: Gather to praise God and greet one another.

Celebrate all the ways God is revealed to us.

**MANY: We worship the Creator and Sustainer of all things, we rejoice in Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit.**

**\*PRAYER OF INVOCATION:** Triune God, known to us in more ways than we can count, we marvel at the mystery of life, and wonder at your attention to our lives. As we ponder the vast expanse of space, we are fascinated by distances too extensive to understand. The times we have measured are a tiny ripple in your eternity. Yet you have honored this planet by revealing yourself in the life and ministry of Jesus and the empowerment of your Holy Spirit. Let us experience your presence in the time of worship. Amen.

**\*CALL TO CONFESSION:** All that God has created is labeled "very good." Life in all its forms is complex and interrelated. Human life is precious and marvelously linked. Let us confess our neglect and irresponsibility in relation to all creation and to one another.

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

**Amazing God, the more we learn of your creation, the more we are filled with awe and wonder. Yet, our vision narrows to our limited concerns, and we forget the**

**immense reaches of the stewardship to which you appoint us. We have not taken good care of this tiny spaceship, Earth, which is our home. We have not cared well for one another as sisters and brothers. Our doubts outweigh our obedience. O God, help us fulfill our baptism and claim our discipleship, as forgiven and forgiving sinners. Amen. Amen**

**\*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:** We are created in the image of God and are blessed with the capacity to reflect God's will in our daily lives. God cares for us and invests us with responsibility. Thus God honors us with high expectations and confidence in our willingness to seek out life's best for all people. We are loved. We are forgiven. Our baptism is renewed.

**\*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.**

**FIRST TESTAMENT READING: Genesis 1:1-2:4a**

**World's creation in seven days**

1 When God began to create the heavens and the earth—<sup>2</sup> the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God's wind swept over the waters—<sup>3</sup> God said, "Let there be light." And so light appeared.<sup>4</sup> God saw how good the light was. God separated the light from the darkness.<sup>5</sup> God named the

light Day and the darkness Night. There was evening and there was morning: the first day.

<sup>6</sup> God said, "Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters to separate the waters from each other." <sup>7</sup> God made the dome and separated the waters under the dome from the waters above the dome. And it happened in that way. <sup>8</sup> God named the dome Sky. There was evening and there was morning: the second day.

<sup>9</sup> God said, "Let the waters under the sky come together into one place so that the dry land can appear." And that's what happened. <sup>10</sup> God named the dry land Earth, and he named the gathered waters Seas. God saw how good it was. <sup>11</sup> God said, "Let the earth grow plant life: plants yielding seeds and fruit trees bearing fruit with seeds inside it, each according to its kind throughout the earth." And that's what happened. <sup>12</sup> The earth produced plant life: plants yielding seeds, each according to its kind, and trees bearing fruit with seeds inside it, each according to its kind. God saw how good it was. <sup>13</sup> There was evening and there was morning: the third day.

<sup>14</sup> God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night. They will mark events, sacred seasons, days, and years. <sup>15</sup> They will be lights in the dome of the sky to shine on the earth." And that's what happened. <sup>16</sup> God made the stars and two great lights: the larger light to rule over the day and the smaller light to rule over the night. <sup>17</sup> God put them in the dome of the sky to shine on the earth, <sup>18</sup> to rule over the day and

over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw how good it was. <sup>19</sup> There was evening and there was morning: the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup> God said, “Let the waters swarm with living things, and let birds fly above the earth up in the dome of the sky.” <sup>21</sup> God created the great sea animals and all the tiny living things that swarm in the waters, each according to its kind, and all the winged birds, each according to its kind. God saw how good it was. <sup>22</sup> Then God blessed them: “Be fertile and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.” <sup>23</sup> There was evening and there was morning: the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup> God said, “Let the earth produce every kind of living thing: livestock, crawling things, and wildlife.” And that’s what happened. <sup>25</sup> God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was. <sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth.”

<sup>27</sup> God created humanity in God’s own image,  
in the divine image God created them,  
male and female God created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground.” <sup>29</sup> Then God said, “I now give to

you all the plants on the earth that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food. <sup>30</sup> To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food.” And that’s what happened. <sup>31</sup> God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good. There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.

**2** The heavens and the earth and all who live in them were completed. <sup>2</sup> On the sixth day God completed all the work that he had done, and on the seventh day God rested from all the work that he had done. <sup>3</sup> God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all the work of creation. <sup>4</sup> This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

### **EPISTLE REDING: 2 Corinthians 13:11-13**

#### **Final greeting**

<sup>11</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, good-bye. Put things in order, respond to my encouragement, be in harmony with each other, and live in peace—and the God of love and peace will be with you.

<sup>12</sup> Say hello to each other with a holy kiss. All of God’s people say hello to you. <sup>13</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

### **\*GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 28:16-20**

#### **Commissioning of the disciples**

<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**MESSAGE:**

May, June – tis the season of graduations and commencement ceremonies. Many times there is a commencement keynote speaker who has some degree of authority to speak. Perhaps that speaker is a well-known academic, author, scientist, celebrity – someone who has accomplished something in their lives that makes them an expert in something and thus an authority figure. I’m certainly not in that category so I’m glad I have never been asked to give a commencement speech. What can you say that hasn’t already been said? And who really remembers anything that was said at their graduation ceremony? I only remember that my name was called.

However, there is one commencement message that we can read over and over and remember the meaning and

perhaps repeat some of – Jesus’ commencement message to the eleven disciples.

This passage from the Gospel of Matthew, is the last thing they hear from Jesus. I know we had Jesus speak to the disciples in the Gospel of Luke and precede to ascend to his Father. Each of the Gospels ends Jesus’ time on earth in a distinctive way. In the Gospel of Mark, the end focuses on the empty tomb and the fear of the first witnesses. In the Gospel of John ends on a series of appearances of the resurrected Christ, especially to Peter. And, as we heard, the author of the Gospel of Matthew depicts the resurrected Jesus’ commissioning the disciples for mission. Which ending is the best? All of them. Which ending is what truly happened? All of them.

This passage that we heard draws together many of the most important themes and motifs of the Gospel of Matthew, thereby suggesting that this particular ending is designed for this very story. As so often before in Matthew, the setting is an unnamed mountain, which Matthew associates especially with the revelation of divine presence and authority. Matthew also refers prominently here to “heaven and earth”, terminology that recalls the story of creation in Genesis 1, thereby linking this episode to a long tradition of stories about the fracturing of earth from heaven and the hope of their repair.

Jesus also provides his justification for the disciples’ commission by affirming that he has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth.” Authority – its nature,

source, and effects – is yet another persistent Matthean interest. Matthew also returns in this scene to the identification of Jesus as Christ – as God with us. Thereby framing the entire Gospel with this claim.

Even as this ending emphasizes key themes and claims of the whole Gospel, it also marks a fresh beginning point; after all, that's what commencement means. This starting point begins in Galilee, where Jesus' own ministry began, while they are called to be people on the move in mission, the disciples must also be rooted in the story and the land where their own journeys began. They will conduct their mission between two worlds; with Jesus on the mountain – itself apparently a thin place between the human and divine realms – they stand at the edge of a new world and a new time. *(I'm sure those words have been used in commencements speeches.)*

The time of empire, of debt and slavery, of the reign of death, is passing away. **It will continue to exercise sway only where the death and resurrection of God's son is not proclaimed.** But the truth about Rome's empire has been unveiled for all the world to see. It has wielded its most powerful tool – death on a cross – against God's son as he proclaimed and inaugurated God's empire, but now even Rome's control of the mechanism of death – the cross - has been shown to be hollow. The empire of the heavens has not just begun, it has already won the crucial victory.

The disciples are not receiving diplomas. They are receiving the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to be with them every day until the end of the present age. Amen.

#### **PASTORAL PRAYER:**

We rejoice in the knowledge of you, O God, for you love righteousness and justice and your love unfailing fills the earth. We stand in awe of the power of creation you have exercised in the scattering of the stars and the gathering of the seas. We are humbly grateful that you receive us as your people for the sake of your son, Jesus.

Saving God, as you called your church to testify for you around the world, give us the strength and confidence to do so. May the whole body of the church, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promote the body's growth in building itself up in love. May the whole world know that we are Christians by our love for one another. May the unbelieving and doubting be received as they seek faith by the hearing of your word, preached and demonstrated in holy and loving living.

Bless our families, young and old, gathered in households and scattered by duties and travel and vocation. Keep our children from harm and danger. May our nurture of them in home and church and school develop in them a love of beauty and truth in art and in life. May they behold the beauty of the Lord in the house of the Lord.

Jesus, Lord of life, who came among us that we may have life and have it abundantly, through the Spirit continue your ministry of doing good and healing the sick. Hear us as we name in our hearts those of our family and friends who most need your healing touch. Deliver those who are captive to addictions of mind and body. Save those who are trapped in destructive and abusive relationships. Send your people as ministers of presence to those who are lonely and afraid.

Keep us in the way everlasting by your guiding and sustaining Spirit. We praise your name, Fatherly, Motherly God, our salvation and destination, as we pray together . .

**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.**

**OFFERTORY INVITATION:** What will we return to God for all the bounty of the universe we have been given to enjoy? We cannot count the blessings of life which God supplies to us. The mandate of Christ is clear: "Go and make disciples of all nations." That means we must, first of all, accept our own discipleship in wholehearted obedience and self-giving services. God expects no less than all we have and all we are.

**\*UNISON OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

**Amid our doubts and the temptation to grab life's blessings for our own personal use, we come to dedicate our time, talent, and treasure to realize your reign on earth, majestic God. As we enjoy your bounty, we give that all our sisters and brothers might also come to appreciate the amazing gifts you entrust to us. Thank you for life and all its wonders. Amen.**

**HOLY COMMUNION:**

I pray God in Community be with you!

**And also with you!**

May the Holy Three who are One be in your hearts.

**May we be filled with imagination,  
with words, with life itself.**

Let us sing our praises to God  
who makes us one with all people.

**We join all creation in singing glad songs to our God.**

You poured your imagination into chaos, stirring all your dreams and hopes and, placing them on that palette called your heart, began to paint on the blank canvas of creation, azure for clear morning skies, bright yellows for marigolds, deep green for grass in the meadows, red and orange tickling lazy sunsets.

Simply, faithfully, graciously, all was offered to those created in your image, but we preferred the absence of color in sin, and would paint our lives in death's greyness. You sent prophets and artists, singers and poets, to point us back to your beauty and art, but we preferred the bleak

mirages offered by temptation and foolishness.  
Finally, you appealed to your Word to bring us the good news of your salvific heart.

With those who see and worship, as well as those who doubt and despair, we offer our praise to you:

**Holy, holy, holy are you, Majestic Name.**

**All creation joins in praising your goodness and wonder.**

**Hosanna in the highest!**

**Blessed is the One who is with us to the end.**

**Hosanna in the highest!**

Word of justice and love, you pointed to the Holy One in every word and deed, even as God blessed your every step and breath. A baby, you showed us God's vulnerability; a young child, you taught us to draw closer to God; a storyteller, you reminded us of the One who would run to scoop us up in arms of love and welcome; a lover, you enter into sin's embrace, taking the kiss death intends for us, so that, as resurrection's hope, you offer us life with you forever.

As we struggle to understand such a gift, as we seek to live such faithfulness, we live in that mystery called faith:

**Christ died, your Word silenced by the world;**

**Christ was raised, your Word singing of resurrection joy;**

**Christ will come, the Word which will call us home to you.**

Like a storm, you blew over creation's oceans;  
with a gust, you blow open our shuttered souls;

with a light breath, you give us life, so now,  
Breath of God, Spirit of all that exists, touch the simple gifts of the bread and the cup with the sacredness of your peace, and stir us all from our fear and apathy.

The bread which is broken is filled with your strength, so that we can go and offer freedom to the prisoner, so that we can breathe hope into our dying neighborhoods, so that we can be peace for an angry world.

The cup is never drained of your grace, so that we may silence all hatred, so that we might put evil in the past, so that we might renew your fragile creation.

And when we are gathered in that place to which you will direct us at the end of time, we will join with our siblings in forever praising your glory, your love, Amen.

### **SHARING THE ELEMENTS**

#### **\*UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

**Eternal God, we thank you for your presence in the simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. By the power of your Holy Spirit, unite us with all whom Christ welcomes, that we may be the servant church of the servant Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.**

#### **\*COMMISSION AND BLESSING:**

Go out to tell the world that God cares.  
Celebrate the gift of life and all its possibilities.

**We are awed by God's vast creation.**

**We are amazed at how God honors us.**

God has given us stewardship over creation.

We are given the care of every living thing.

**Land, sea, and air are ours to enjoy.**

**All are entrusted to our careful watch.**

Generations before us have passed on God's gifts.

Generations to follow depend on our faithfulness.

**We pray for insight and generosity to save this legacy.**

**We seek to live in peace and love with everyone.**

Amen. **Amen.**

**CONDOLENCES to the family and friends of Darlene Bax who went to life eternal Tuesday May 30, and whose private services were Friday June 2.**

**PRAYER LIST:** Mari Ella Gianino, Carson Edwards, Bill Donovan, Yvonne Weber, Jackie Canterbury, Marilyn Paul, Beth Sheldon, Mary Holcomb, Syd Safriet, Ronald Bopp, Rosemary Williams, Becky Ballard, Theo Mally, David Seneczyn, Urban Baum.