

## SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

MAY 14, 2023

### MOTHER'S DAY TO ALL THOSE WHO HAVE MOTHERED US!



### ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Rev. Rosemary Captain

*Organist – Sharon Banjavcic*

*Liturgy – Rev Lavon Bayler*

#### \*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:

ONE: The God of heaven and earth calls us together.

We come to explore matters of the Spirit.

MANY: There is so much we do not know or understand.

So much of God is unknown to us.

ONE: Let us look carefully at the objects of our worship.  
Our attention is easily diverted from God.

MANY: We want to worship the One who gives us breath.  
We reach for the reality beyond our knowing.

ONE: In God we live and move and have our being.  
All that we have and are comes from God.

MANY: God is not limited to shrines made by us.  
God is everywhere present in the whole universe.

#### \*PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

Let the sound of praising you be heard among us today, and in all the places of your dominion, O God. We believe you are present with us even when we cannot feel or see or hear you as we would like. We thank you for the times when you have caught our attention. We ask for one of those times today. Shake us out of our complacency and our cherished iniquities. Hold us in your steadfast love and call forth within us an awareness of all your blessings. Stimulate among us an eagerness to live as you intend. Amen.

#### \*CALL TO CONFESSION:

We have been baptized and claimed in the name of Jesus Christ for a lifetime of service. Yet we are often intimidated by our fears and seduced by our fantasies. We worship autonomy and deny community. We ignore the commandments God has given us. We need to face our guilt. God demands our repentance.

**\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

**O God, we confess that we have loved our own way more than we love you. The Spirit of truth does not abide in us, for our actions contradict the words of praise we utter in worship. We neglect the spiritual disciplines that would draw us close to you and the caring outreach that would link us with sisters and brothers who need to know of your love. We have not witnessed to our faith in ways powerful enough to evoke opposition or cause us to suffer. O God, it is hard to follow Jesus! Forgive us, teach us, help us! Amen.**

**\*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:**

You are not left to struggle alone. You have an Advocate who is always with you. You are not rejected. God hears your prayers and offers you steadfast love in all circumstances. Do not be afraid to hope, and to share that hope with others around you. Claim God's gifts of reverence and gentleness as you testify to the resurrection. Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

**SECOND TESTAMENT READING: Acts 17:22-31**

<sup>22</sup> Paul stood up in the middle of the council on Mars Hill and said, "People of Athens, I see that you are very religious in every way. <sup>23</sup> As I was walking through town and carefully observing your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: 'To an unknown God.' What you worship as unknown, I now proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup> God, who made the world and everything in it, is Lord of heaven and earth. He doesn't live in temples made with human

hands. <sup>25</sup> Nor is God served by human hands, as though he needed something, since he is the one who gives life, breath, and everything else. <sup>26</sup> From one person God created every human nation to live on the whole earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God made the nations so they would seek him, perhaps even reach out to him and find him. In fact, God isn't far away from any of us. <sup>28</sup> In God we live, move, and exist. As some of your own poets said, 'We are his offspring.'

<sup>29</sup> "Therefore, as God's offspring, we have no need to imagine that the divine being is like a gold, silver, or stone image made by human skill and thought. <sup>30</sup> God overlooks ignorance of these things in times past, but now directs everyone everywhere to change their hearts and lives. <sup>31</sup> This is because God has set a day when he intends to judge the world justly by a man he has appointed. God has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

**EPISTLE READING: 1 Peter 3:13-22**

<sup>13</sup> Who will harm you if you are zealous for good? <sup>14</sup> But happy are you, even if you suffer because of righteousness! Don't be terrified or upset by them. <sup>15</sup> Instead, regard Christ the Lord as holy in your hearts. Whenever anyone asks you to speak of your hope, be ready to defend it. <sup>16</sup> Yet do this with respectful humility, maintaining a good conscience. Act in this way so that those who malign your good lifestyle in Christ may be ashamed when they slander you. <sup>17</sup> It is better

to suffer for doing good (if this could possibly be God's will) than for doing evil.

<sup>18</sup> Christ himself suffered on account of sins, once for all, the righteous one on behalf of the unrighteous. He did this in order to bring you into the presence of God. Christ was put to death as a human, but made alive by the Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And it was by the Spirit that he went to preach to the spirits in prison. <sup>20</sup> In the past, these spirits were disobedient—when God patiently waited during the time of Noah. Noah built an ark in which a few (that is, eight) lives were rescued through water. <sup>21</sup> Baptism is like that. It saves you now—not because it removes dirt from your body but because it is the mark of a good conscience toward God. Your salvation comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who is at God's right side. Now that he has gone into heaven, he rules over all angels, authorities, and powers.

**\*GOSPEL LESSON: John 14:15-21**

<sup>15</sup> "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup> I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. <sup>17</sup> This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can't receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you.

<sup>18</sup> "I won't leave you as orphans. I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you. <sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commandments and keeps them

loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

**Thanks be to God, Amen.**

**MESSAGE: "How Can We Do Greater Things Than Jesus?"**  
"If only we could have been there when Jesus was around!" people often say. "It would have been so much easier. He would have explained everything to us and told us what to do. And he would have been such an encouragement. Whatever we were doing, he would have been positive about it, and we'd want to go on and do even better." It's a common perception, but it's wrong on two accounts. First of all, evidence of the four gospels suggests that the people who were around in Jesus' day didn't see it like that themselves. Some of his closest friends betrayed and denied him. Even the beloved disciple ran away in the garden. Most people couldn't really make him out. He was compelling but puzzling. Many thought he was mad.

Secondly, in this passage and several others in the next two chapters, we find that Jesus has promised to be 'around' with his people every day and forever. In fact, he promised that it will be easier, not harder, in this new approach he is asking them to accept. Jesus promised his people that they will be able to do things they couldn't do when he was physically present.

But how will he be 'around' now? He has promised to send us his spirit, his own breath, his own inner life. Here, and for the next two chapters, he uses a special word to

describe the spirit. In verse 16 he says that the father will give us “another helper”. This “helper” is the spirit.

However, the word translated “helper” by some is rich and many-sided. It doesn’t simply mean someone who comes to lend assistance in our various tasks. It certainly does mean that as well; the spirit, as we’ll be seeing, comes to give God’s people the strength and energy to do what they have to do, to live for God and witness to his love in the world. But that word means two other things as well.

One word sometimes used is “comforter.” Comfort is a strange and wonderful thing. Have you noticed how, when someone is deeply distressed, after a bereavement or a tragedy, that the fact of having other people with them, hugging them and being alongside them, gives them strength for the next moment, then the one after that, then the one after that? Outwardly nothing has changed. The tragedy is still a tragedy. The deceased person won’t be coming back. But other human support changes our ability to cope with disaster. It gives us strength. When the spirit is spoken of as the “comforter”, this kind of extra strength to meet a special need is in mind.

But there is something quite different as well. An equally good translation for the word is “advocate.” An advocate stands up in a court of law and explains to the judge or jury how things are from his or her client’s point of view. The advocate pleads the case. Jesus assumes that his followers will often find themselves, as he found himself, on the wrong side of official persecution. He saw the situation, as centuries of Jewish tradition had done before him, in terms

of the heavenly lawcourt with God as the judge. In that court, his people can rest assured that their case will be heard, that God will constantly be reminded of their plight, because the spirit will plead on their behalf. *(Paul says much the same in Romans 8:26-27.)*

As a result of this promised spirit, the spirit of Jesus himself, Christians now, remarkable though it may seem, are in a better situation even than the followers of Jesus during his lifetime. They were sometimes able to do remarkable things even then; Jesus gave them the power, in the other gospel accounts, to perform healings like his own *(Luke 9:1-6; 10:17)* But most of the time they were following Jesus in some bewilderment, and when he wasn’t there they couldn’t do very much. They were frozen by mistrust and unbelief. *(Mark 8:18, 28-29).*

However, now when people accept the spirit from Jesus, they will be able to do all kinds of things. When Jesus “goes to the father” – in other words, when he defeats the power of death through his own death and resurrection – then all sorts of new possibilities will be opened in front of them. The “works” he has been doing, as he says again and again, are evidence that the father is at work in him. Now he says that the disciples will do even greater works than these!

I don’t know about you, but all that sounds a little terrifying to me. I can’t imagine doing greater works than Jesus. I’m just going to have to pray more deeply to believe and trust the words of our Savior Jesus Christ who freely gives us his life and the Holy Spirit, the comforter, the

advocate, the helper, the Spirit of truth, to make all things possible. Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:**

God everywhere, God with us, God in us, we may find you and know you anywhere. We are grateful that you give us life and breath, together with all human beings. We acknowledge your greatness in designing the world and creating boundaries of time and place. You display great patience with us in our times of ignorance and delay the day of judgement that we may rediscover you and our solidarity with all humanity. Most of all you have given us Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to guide us to do great works. Thank you.

We love you, heavenly Mother, Father, parent, because you bend down to listen to us when we call. We come to you not only with our own entreaties but for our brothers and sisters as well. We pray for you church universal. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purge it. Where it is in error, direct. Where it is superstitious, rectify it. Where it is right, strengthen and confirm it. Where it is in want, furnish it. Where it is divided and asunder, build it up in unity, God of love and mercy. We realize all efforts for good are up to us to complete and we are thankful that you have sent us the Holy Spirit to help us.

Compassionate God, hear our prayers for all who have been affected by the many shootings in our country. We search for those who know the answer to this problem and

can change our policies and laws to stop those who wish to harm others.

Healing God, hear our prayers for all who are troubled in mind and circumstance. Restore to health those who are sick and those recovering from surgery. May they, with new health and strength, give thanks to you and for those who have cared for them. We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, 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:** Our spiritual ancestors brought sacrifices as offerings to God. We are invited to join them in bringing our best to proclaim God's rule over all things. God claims our labors and the fruit of our labors. In response, we offer them gladly.

**\*UNISON OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

**May all that we give today be used to express your love among us and beyond us, God of all people. We are thankful for your gift to us in Christ Jesus, who was so committed to sharing your love that he risked rejection and death. We are grateful that even though his suffering resulted in death in the flesh you made him alive in the spirit. May Christ live today in us, in our caring, in our**

**giving, in our speaking, in our doing. We rededicate ourselves to your service. Amen.**

**\*RESPONSIVE COMMISSION AND BENEDICTION:**

ONE: God has listened to our prayers and abides with us.  
God's blessing rests on us as we scatter to serve.

**MANY: The Spirit lives within us and among us.  
We seek to live as resurrection people.**

ONE: Daily God will add to your understanding if you ask.  
Do not fear to seek after the truth God will reveal.

**MANY: Every day can be an adventure in faith.  
All our encounters can link us more closely with God.**

ONE: Our Creator draws us into community.  
Our spiritual journey is linked to others' stories.

**MANY: Together we will seek to know God more fully.  
We will remember one another in prayer.  
Amen. Amen.**

**PRAYER LIST:** Urban Baum, David Seneczyn, Theo Mally, Becky Ballard, Rosemary Williams, Ronald Bopp, Syd Safriet, Mary Holcomb, Beth Sheldon, Marilyn Paul, Gloria Coble.  
All those affected by the recent shootings, the victims, the injured, their families, the shooters, and their families.