

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

April 28, 2024

WORDS OF WELCOME

INTROIT: HYMN #7 v.v. 1 & 3 *“All People that on Earth Do Dwell”* (Public Domain)

1 All people that on earth do dwell, sing out your faith with cheerful voice;
Delight in God whose praise you tell; whose presence calls you to rejoice.

3 Enter the sacred gates with praise, with joy approach the temple walls,
Extol and bless our God always as people whom the Spirit calls

CALL TO WORSHIP: (FROM PSALM 103 [NIV])

L: Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

C: Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—

L: who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,

C: who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,

L: who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

C: Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.

L: Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion.

C: Praise the Lord, my soul.

A: Let us praise God together from the very core of our being.

HYMN: #420 *“We Praise You, O God”* (Public Domain)

1 We praise you, O God, our Redeemer, Creator;
in grateful devotion our tribute we bring.
We lay it before you, we kneel and adore you;
we bless your holy name, glad praises we sing.

2 We worship you, God of our mothers and fathers;
through life's storm and tempest our guide you have been.
When perils o'er take us, you never will forsake us,
and with your help, O God, in life's struggles we win.

3 With voices united our praises we offer,
and gladly our song of thanksgiving we raise.
Our sins now confessing, we pray for your blessing;
to you, our great Redeemer, forever be praise!

*Moment of Silence, In Confession, Listening to God &
Reflection on God's Forgiveness, Love, Guidance, Redemption, and Restoration of our Lives*

WORDS OF GRACE:

L: God our Creator, Redeemer & Sustainer comes to us with grace, reminding us that God sent Jesus into the world, not for the purpose of condemning the world, but that the world might be saved through him, offering forgiveness and mercy, setting us free from past wrongs and with the help of the Holy Spirit empowers us to live life anew. Christ's birth, life, teachings death and resurrection give life meaning and direction and the opportunity to start over; to rise up with Christ into new resurrection life.

A: We believe in the grace and peace of Christ. We are forgiven.

With the help of God, we will rise up into resurrection life and share it with others. Alleluia!

HYMN OF RESPONSE: *“Give Thanks”*

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SCRIPTURE:

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1 John 4:7-21 - God Is Love

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In 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. ¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶ So 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. ¹⁷ Love 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. ¹⁸ There 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. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Those who say, "I love God," and hate a brother or sister are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

John 15:1-8 - Jesus the True Vine

¹⁵ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide 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. ⁵ I 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. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

A TIME OF REFLECTION: *“Fed By the Vine”*

Now that the weather is finally warming up, we are seeing the trees budding and leaves growing; we see blossoms bursting forth and soon fruit will begin to grow as long as the branches stay on the trees. When branches break off from the tree, they no longer receive the much-needed nourishment not only to survive, but to thrive and bear fruit; thus, they begin to wither and die.

Often times people use today's lessons to judge who is in and who is out rather than understanding that when we don't live in the vine and receive its nourishment we wither. Kristen

Lewis reminds us that *“These are the consequences of separation, not statements about a lack of righteousness. This describes the reality of disconnection, not the determination of who is in and who is out. This is a declaration of fact, not a pronouncement of retribution.”*

What our lessons from today do give us, is a picture of a very intimate God who desires to nourish and feed all to the point of bearing much fruit. The vine is healthy enough to feed all the branches that bear fruit but it can't provide that much needed nourishment when separated from the vine. Often times we see the pruning from the vine as God pruning people from the vine, but what if that pruning is about removing that from our lives and organizations which is not bearing fruit and sucking the life energy from that which does? Often, we talk about God being the shepherd, but the vine image is an even more intimate relationship than the shepherd who guides and protects and feeds as one watching over us. The vine is not disconnected but literally a part of us and we a part of the vine.

In this passage, Jesus was preparing his disciples for when he would no longer physically be with them. This was his way in John to let them know as he did in Matthew 28:20 *“I will be with you always to the end of the age.”* It is like the promise that we hear in Isaiah 41:10 *“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”* That vine is a source of nourishment from which we need to continually be nourished, but God will not force us to accept that nourishment, we must choose to accept it. Why would we not want to abide in the vine and allow the true vine to live in us, strengthening us, helping us and upholding us as we travel through this life? Abiding in the vine and the vine in us we find nourishment, hope and joy. We also find peace about all the things that we face, and all the things that we pray for, as our will and God's will become aligned. God, the Master Gardener will carefully and lovingly remove from the vine that which is sucking the energy from that which brings forth fruitful lives as we continue to be nourished by the vine. Though this pruning can be painful, its purpose is redemptive.

So, how do we know that we are being fed by the vine? Let us take a look at 1 John 4:11-12; *“11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”* Love is at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Love is the measure of faithfulness.

Being the church has never been about self-preservation but about allowing God to nourish us and to live within us and through us so that God's will may be done here on earth as it is in heaven.

When I was installed as your pastor over 10 years ago, these were the two focus scriptures I chose for that service. *“Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain.”* Psalm 127:1a and *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”* John 15:5

I chose these scriptures because I do not want us to labor in vain. I want us always to remember that being the church is not about numbers, but about abiding in the true vine and allowing that true vine to abide in us. In this we may continually be nourished and strengthened by the vine and others may come to know the true vine through our lives. I want us to trust in a very intimate God who will nourish us as long as we choose to feed on the vine that desires to nourish us, strengthen us, guide us and uphold us as we journey through this life. I also chose those verses because I believe they fit right in with what we claim to be in our vision statement and covenant as a church.

Vision Statement:

We the members of the Summit Congregational United Church of Christ seek, first and foremost, to live out the message of Jesus Christ in both our words and in our actions. Being led by the Holy Spirit, we invite others to join us as we endeavor to respond to God's vision of a world where all people experience love, justice, and peace.

Our Covenant:

As the membership of the Summit Congregational United Church of Christ, we do solemnly covenant and affirm that we are called to live in a loving, covenantal relationship with all humanity. We further assert that we embrace diversity in our congregation and community and affirm the dignity and worth of each person as a unique creation made in the image of God.

We honor as the most basic of our founding principles that discrimination, in any form, is incompatible with Christ's Gospel message of unconditional love. We recognize and accept the responsibility given to us by God, to care for one another, to hold in prayer this church and the church universal, and to seek equality and justice, love, and peace in all our relationships.

Jesus you are the true vine and we are the branches. Help us always to abide in you and allow you to abide in us so that others may come to know God, through our lives just as God has been revealed through you. God, we thank you that you love us not from afar, but so intimately that you have planted you Holy Spirit with in us as the vine to continually nourish us, strengthen us, uphold us, guide us and allow us to love as you love us. May all glory and honor be yours now and forever, Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

HYMN OF RESPONSE: v.v. 1, 2 & 4 "All Are Welcome"

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A TIME OF PRAYER -

Mystery of Mysteries, help us to seek Your wisdom by living into Your truth, and Your truth is found in the love we have for one another. May our love be fearless. May our love be without judgment. May our love call us into Your ways of justice, Your ways of practicing kindness, and Your ways of building peace. Mystery of Mysteries, we only know You in a glimpse; but we know You most fully in the abiding love we have for one another, a love that comes only from You, who gave Your life for us. We pray this not only for us, but for the world and for those who are yet to come into this world.

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LIFTING UP PRAYER REQUESTS - THE LORD'S PRAYER

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

L: Gracious God of love and majesty,

A: We recognize that the greatest gift is the gift of your unconditional love.

**May our offerings be acceptable to you and distribute this love to the world:
the small world we inhabit with the suffering people we know;
the larger world where the power of your love is sorely needed.**

SUMM-IT UP:

SENDING HYMN: v.v. 1 & 3 "Shine, Jesus Shine"

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CHARGE & BENEDICTION:

May the Lord bless and keep you.

May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

May the Lord look upon you kindly and grant you the peace God alone can give.

POSTLUDE: