



Unsplash Photo by Unseen Histories

“Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.”

– Martin Luther King Jr.

“Today I am so grateful that God knows my heart. Others may misunderstand my good intentions, judge my words or deeds, find fault, or blame what they truly did not understand. But God knows my heart. God knows I am learning, trying, endeavoring, to be all God created me to be.”

– Anonymous

HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

January 14, 2024, 10:55 am

** Your whole self is welcomed here. Please feel free to take care of your body during worship in ways that work for you.*

Prelude "Jesus Is Here Right Now" L. Roberts

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome and Announcements Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

One: May the peace of the Christ Child be with you.

Many: And also with you.

Introit "Holy Ground" Beatty/Davis

This is holy ground. We're standing on holy ground.

For our God is present and where God is, is holy. (2x)

We are standing on holy ground,

And I know that there are angels all around.

Let us praise Jesus now.

We are standing in God's presence on holy ground.

* Call to the Heart Jim Dwiggins

Please take a comfortable posture that supports your worshiping, reading, and singing...

One: We've come to worship God

Many: Who loved us before we were yet born.

One: We've come to worship God

Many: Who knows us even better than we know ourselves.

One: We've come to worship God

Many: Whose presence never leaves us.

One: We've come to worship God

Many: Whose love for us never ceases.

One: This is our God.

Many: Let us worship together!

Invocation

Jim Dwiggin

God of Righteousness, unite us in your life-giving presence. Guide us in our time of worship and mindful of you as we step out into the world, so that we may face injustice with courage and love. May we come to see that the end we seek is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience. The timing may feel off; the end of the road might be out of sight, yet we trust in your holy presence.

How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever.

How long? Not long, because you still reap what you sow.

How long? Not long. Because the arm of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

How long? Not long, because you are our God,

How long? Not long, because life and love will win. Amen.

* Hymn 366

“God of Our Life”

SANDON

God of our life, through all the circling years, we trust in you.

In all the past, through all our hopes and fears, your care shines through.

With each new day, when morning lifts the veil,

We own your mercies, God, which never fail.

God of the past, our times are in your hand; with us abide.

Lead us by faith to hope’s true promised land; be now our guide.

Bless us in times of darkness and of light,

Then faith’s fair vision changes into sight.

God of the coming years, through paths unknown we follow you;

When we are strong, O leave us not alone, our refuge true.

Be now for us in life our daily bread,

Our heart’s true home when all our years have sped.

Daily Affirmation

Ourselves: “I am wonderfully made, seen, and known by God.”

Neighbor: “You are wonderfully made, seen, and known by God.”

World: “We are wonderfully made, seen, and known by God.”

Prayer of Transformation for New Life (*unison*)

Jim Dwiggins

Please join me in this unison prayer of transformation for new life...

God of love and justice, we give praise for the wonder and beauty of our diverse human family. Yet we confess our fear of this gift. For our buried, subtle bias against people of color, our preference for what is white and familiar. We confess all our sin, including racism. We confess our silence in the face of injustice. Forgive our sin and transform it. Heal our fear and open our eyes. Give us humility to admit when we are biased, and honesty to be learners when we're not sure what to do or say. Help us be aware of our privilege and to steward it with humility and compassion. By the grace of your Holy Spirit give us the courage to take risks, to bear witness, to speak out against injustice. Amen.

Words of Grace

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

By God we've been wonderfully made. The tone of our skin has been set to God's diverse perfection, the shape of our bodies perfectly molded, and our eyes and hair signs that point to the wonder of God's multi-colored kin-dom. God sees us as we are, unbiased and without judgment, even if we so choose to transfigure into something new. We are seen, known, and loved, even as we stumble to remember this gift. May the grace of God's love move us to live in solidarity, to name hate, to incarnate equality, and to struggle in the movements for justice and dignity together. Amen.

Stories for All People

Laura Hankins

Prayers of the People

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Lord's Prayer

Our Creator, in whom we move and breathe and have our being,

The hallowing of your name shines forth in the diversity of your children.

May your peace and love, justice and equality, inclusion and belonging reign here on earth as in heaven.

Grant that our loved ones might have their daily needs met—that they might find gainful employment without discrimination; access to medical care without fear; their rights and lives protected and find a loving community to belong to and call their own.

Forgive us for the ways that we have fallen short and failed your children. Forgive us for the times we turned away or did not care; for the times we laughed or judged their unique expression made in your image; for the times we have misspoken, asked too much, or failed to hear. As we forgive those who might have failed us.

Lead us away from the temptation to be complacent in the face of injustice. But instead give us courage to stand up and stand with your beloved children. For your love and justice is to be made manifest now and forever.

Amen.

Modern Testimony

Terrence Hayes

The following is an excerpt from an address Martin Luther King Jr. gave to a packed audience of students at the University of California at Berkley on June 4, 1957...

I am quite aware of the fact that there are persons who believe firmly in nonviolence who do not believe in a personal God, but I think every person who believes in nonviolent resistance believes somehow that the universe in some form is on the side of justice. That there is something unfolding in the universe whether one speaks of it as an unconscious process, or whether one speaks of it as some unmoved mover, or whether someone speaks of it as a personal God. There is something in the universe that unfolds for justice and so in Montgomery we felt somehow that as we struggled, we had cosmic companionship. And this was one of the things that kept the people together, the belief that the universe is on the side of justice.

One: May we hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church;

Many: Open our ears, our hearts, our minds.

Hymn 472

“Precious Lord, Take My Hand”

PRECIOUS LORD

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand,

I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;

Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light:

Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

When my way grows drear, precious Lord, linger near,

When my life is almost gone,

Hear me cry, hear my call, hold my hand, lest I fall:

Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

* Hebrew Scripture Psalm 139 (CEB) Deborah Winston
Our Hebrew scripture for today comes from Psalm 139, where the psalmist writes of God's knowing everything about them...

Lord, you have examined me.

You know me.

You know when I sit down and when I stand up.

Even from far away, you comprehend my plans.

You study my traveling and resting.

You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways.

There isn't a word on my tongue, Lord,
that you don't already know completely.

You surround me—front and back.

You put your hand on me.

That kind of knowledge is too much for me;
it's so high above me that I can't reach it.

Where could I go to get away from your spirit?

Where could I go to escape your presence?

If I went up to heaven, you would be there.

If I went down to the grave, you would be there too!

If I could fly on the wings of dawn,
stopping to rest only on the far side of the ocean—
even there your hand would guide me;

even there your strong hand would hold me tight!

If I said, "The darkness will definitely hide me;
the light will become night around me,"

even then the darkness isn't too dark for you!

Nighttime would shine bright as day,
because darkness is the same as light to you!

You are the one who created my innermost parts;

you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb.

I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart.

Your works are wonderful—I know that very well.

My bones weren't hidden from you

when I was being put together in a secret place,

when I was being woven together in the deep parts of the earth.

Your eyes saw my embryo,

and on your scroll every day was written that was being formed for me,
before any one of them had yet happened.

God, your plans are incomprehensible to me!

Their total number is countless!

If I tried to count them—they outnumber grains of sand!

If I came to the very end—I'd still be with you.

If only, God, you would kill the wicked!

If only murderers would get away from me—
the people who talk about you, but only for wicked schemes;
the people who are your enemies,
who use your name as if it were of no significance.

Don't I hate everyone who hates you?

Don't I despise those who attack you?

Yes, I hate them—through and through!

They've become my enemies too.

Examine me, God! Look at my heart!

Put me to the test! Know my anxious thoughts!

Look to see if there is any idolatrous way in me,
then lead me on the eternal path!

One: For the word of God in scripture, for the word of God among us, for
the word of God within us.

Many: **Thanks be to God.**

The Good News "You Are Seen and Known" Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Invitation to Generosity

Jim Dwiggins

Now is the time for our ministry of giving and sharing...

Beloveds you are seen and known by God. God knows all the parts of us, every joy, and every sorrow. This is such a gift and in turn we now share our gifts with God. Gifts of treasure and service that will stir hearts, break barriers, and crumble divisions all in the hope of a more peaceable and just world...where the image of every person lives free and fully capable of flourishing. We now share our gifts in this hope.

* Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise God all creatures here below,

Praise God above all heavenly hosts,

Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication (*unison*)

Jim Dwiggins

God of all, may the gifts received this day unite our neighbors, both locally and globally, in bonds of love. May they work through the people and ministries of this church to liberate the oppressed and to serve the common good. Let these gifts equip us with compassion and courage to speak for those whose voices have been marginalized and to carry out your work of reconciliation in the world. Where all are seen, as God sees them. Amen.

Responsive Litany “We Answer the Call to Love”

Von McQueen-Simmons

One: In the face of hate,
Many: We answer the call of love.
One: In the face of exclusion,
Many: We answer the call of inclusion.
One: In the face of homophobia,
Many: We answer the call of LGBTQ rights.
One: In the face of racism,
Many: We answer the call of justice.
One: In the face of xenophobia,
Many: We answer the call of pluralism.
One: In the face of misogyny,
Many: We answer the call of women’s rights.
One: In the face of demagoguery,
Many: We answer the call of reason.
One: In the face of religious intolerance,
Many: We answer the call of diversity.
One: In the face of narrow nationalism,
Many: We answer the call of global community.
One: In the face of bigotry,
Many: We answer the call of open-mindedness.
One: In the face of despair,
Many: We answer the call of hope.
One: As people of God, we answer the call of love...
Many: now more than ever.

* Hymn 427

“God Made from One Blood”

ST. DENIO

God made from one blood all the families of earth,
The circles of nurture that raise us from birth,
Companions who join us to work through each stage
Of childhood and youth and adulthood and age.

We turn to you, God, with our thanks and our tears
For all of the families we’ve known through the years,
The intimate networks on whom we depend
Of parents and partners and children and friends.

Through families we’ve tasted the value of trust
And felt what it means to be loving and just,
Yet families have also betrayed their best goals,
Mistreating their members and bruising their souls.

Help families in all of their various forms
To face with integrity struggles and storms;
Grant peace to our homes that will nurture the bud
Of peace for the families you made from one blood.

* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

* Benediction Response

NEW DIMENSIONS

God of rainbow, fiery pillar, leading where the eagles soar,
We your people, ours the journey now and ever,
Now and ever, now and evermore.

Postlude

“We’ve Come This Far by Faith”

R. Smallwood

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*Parts of the liturgy for today’s service were written or adapted from UCC Worship
Ways, Unfolding Light, Paul S. Sawyer, Julia Corbett-Hemeyer,
Rev. Eliza Buchakjian-Tweedy, and Rev. Christopher Czarnecki.*

*Candid photographs and/or video recording share our work and witness
and invite others into the fellowship of our congregation. Some pictures/video
may be published in church print publications, on our website or on our
official social media sites. If you do not wish to have your image published,
please contact the church office by phone or email.*

WE PROVIDE OUR EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME WITH HELP FROM:

D Evans, Brian Hankins, Jo Ann Jellison, Shakti Subramanian,
Deborah Winston, Laurence Winston

We welcome all in our congregation to participate! Do you like talking to interesting people and being helpful? **Greeters and ushers, liturgists and readers are needed** starting at 10:30

every Sunday. Please sign up in the Gathering Room or on the SignUpGenius link: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44ACAD23A2FE3-ushers>



WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT

Stay connected! There are many new events in our future! Check out all the current happenings in the weekly newsletter via Constant Contact. *Not seeing it in your inbox? Sign-up here:*

<https://holycovenantucc.org/newsletters/>

SANDWICH BUILD TODAY FOLLOWING WORSHIP

Plan to stay to help make 400 sandwiches for A Roof Above/the Men's Shelter. No experience necessary. Fun and fellowship included! We'll be done in no time.

FOR OUR CHILDREN

The Christian Ed team has put together some packets for kids who find themselves in church for the whole hour and need some activity. The packets for our "regulars" will have their names on them. Packets for others will specify "non-reader" or "young reader", based on instructions to be read in the latter. The packets will include crayons and will be at the usher station.

MASKS WELCOMED

With respiratory virus season is upon us, and increasing levels of COVID, flu (influenza), RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), as well as colds and strep, please feel free to wear a mask to avoid exposure to colds and other respiratory viruses. Stay healthy and cozy this winter!

SONGS OF HOPE AND FREEDOM, WEEKEND OF JANUARY 20-21

Special Musical Event: Songs of Hope and Freedom with Reggie Harris, an interactive music workshop from **9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 20, 2024.**

Join us to enrich our worship and fellowship with this special musical event. No singing or musical ability required! An expert on the music of the Underground Railroad and the modern Civil Rights Movement, Mr. Harris will teach us songs that

together, we can make a part of our regular worship service. Among his many awards are the Spirit of Folk Award and the W.E.B. Du Bois Legacy Award. He is also a teaching artist in an education program for the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and a Woodrow Wilson scholar. **Mr. Harris will also join us for worship on Sunday, Jan. 21.** We are publicizing this event widely so we encourage Holy Covenant members to register ASAP! See the weekly newsletter for more information, or email Holly Middleton at hsmiddleton@gmail.com. This event is sponsored by your Racial Justice and Equity Committee. Thank you!

NEW MEMBER / INQUIRER CLASSES FEB. 4 & FEB. 18, 2024

Are you interested in learning more about our denomination, the United Church of Christ? Do you wonder why we do what we do? Would you like to get together with others who will be talking about it? Let's get together and talk about! Please RSVP the church office, 704-599-9810 or office@holycovenantucc.org. All are welcome!

PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER

Members

Lisa Cloninger & Kathleen Smith in the death of Lisa's father, Dennis Cloninger
Linda Carver, Linda Clark, Kevin Decker, Linn Finger, Tom & Kathy Habel, Jim Humphrey, Sharon Landis, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Isabelle Reedy Powell, Jerry Rhyne, Ed & Beth Sharp, Cynthia & Tommy Simpson, Shakti Subramanian, Anita Taylor

Friends & Family Members

Gwendolyn Washington and family, in the recent death of her husband, Clifton Washington Jr. (Deborah Winston)

Mary (Bill & Kim Tyler), Melissa Brown, Craig Chrismon (Melissa Noll), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Darin Jellison (Jo Ann Jellison), Judah L. Jones & Bill Englebreth, Matty & Simone McKinnon (Joy Decker), Roxanne & Moose Meyer (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Marie Raley (Jean Raley-Dennis), Suzie & John Robinson (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Michelle Sharp (Beth & Ed Sharp), Eulene Shepherd (Robert Shepherd), Joyce Tyler (Bill Tyler), Joyce Ward (Ed Vickery), Janet Wakefield (Linda Burby), John Zastrow (Barb Schneller)

If you wish to add someone to the list, please send a note to
prayers@holycovenantucc.org.

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

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