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Meditations

“I cannot remember the books I’ve read any more than the meals I have eaten; even so, they have made me.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Though you recite much scripture, if you are unaware and do not act according, you are like a cowherd counting others’ cattle, not a sharer in the wanderer’s life.”

— Anonymous, The Dhammapada

“There’s a lovely Hasidic story of a rabbi who always told his people that if they studied the Torah, it would put Scripture on their hearts. One of them asked, “Why on our hearts, and not in them?” The rabbi answered, “Only God can put Scripture inside. But reading sacred text can put it on your heart, and then when your hearts break, the holy words will fall inside.”

— Anne Lamott

**HOLY COVENANT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

July 16, 2023 10:55 am

Prelude "God of Great and Small" Natalie Sleeth

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome and Announcements Cheri Dennis

One: May the peace of Christ be with you!

Many: **And also with you.**

Introit "In This Very Room" Carol & Ron Harris

In this very room, there's quite enough love for all of us

And in this very room, there's quite enough joy for all of us

And there's quite enough hope

And quite enough power

To chase away any gloom

For Jesus, Lord Jesus

Is in this very room.

* Call to Worship Lloyd Spencer

One: The Word is a lamp and a light. The word illuminates our life.

Many: **We welcome The Word with praise and thanksgiving.**

One: The Word comes from the mouth of God and accomplishes its purpose.

Many: **We hear The Word that loves and embraces, challenges and convicts, renews and restores.**

One: The Word is life, offers a future with hope, and creates peace in the midst of the storm.

Many: **We receive The Word among us with rejoicing. We worship The Word in spirit and in truth!**

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

* Invocation (*unison*)

Lloyd Spencer

Creator, your presence among us illuminates our lives. Make us fertile soil, receptive to the seeds planted by your word. Nourish us with Living Water and grow us through the energy of your empowered and healing rays of sunshine. Let us encounter you afresh as we gather in community. May our worship show our love for you and each other. Make your presence known to us and through us for your glory. Amen.

* Hymn

“God of Great and God of Small” GOD OF GREAT AND SMALL

God of great and God of small, God of one and God of all,
God of weak and God of strong, God to whom all things belong,
Alleluia, alleluia, praise be to your name.

God of land and sky and sea, God of life and destiny,
God of never-ending power, yet beside me every hour,
Alleluia, alleluia, praise be to your name.

God of silence, God of sound, God by whom the lost are found,
God of day and darkest night, God whose love turns wrong to right,
Alleluia, alleluia, praise be to your name.

God of heaven and God of earth, God of death and God of birth,
God of now and days before, God who reigns forevermore,
Alleluia, alleluia, praise be to your name.

Prayer for Transformation & New Life (*unison*)

Lloyd Spencer

God our Redeemer, the words of our mouths often lead to hurt and harm. We tear down when we could build up. We speak of death and destruction when the power of life resides in our tongues. We say what is unnecessary and unhelpful while hesitating to offer encouragement and hope. Transform our speech as you write your word into our hearts. Stir us to speak life, joy, and love in all things. Amen.

Words of Grace

Cheri Dennis

Romans 8:1 tells us, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” God does not shame or condemn; rather, the One who is holy makes us holy, restored, and whole. Receive the grace of God as it is freely given. Be empowered by the one who observes you and declares your good. Know that you are loved, forgiven, and transformed in Jesus Christ.

Pastoral Prayer in Word & Song

Alix Felsing, Robert Shepherd, Cheryl Milam, Lloyd Spencer

Sung Response ☩ “For the Troubles and the Sufferings” PELAS DORES DESTES MUNDO

Alix: We come to you, O God, the God who is able to calm seas and quiet storms, to ask for mercy. While natural disasters have been happening since the world began, we also know that many of our current disasters are caused by humanity’s overuse and destruction of the resources you have given us. Destruction leads to climate change which shows up as increasingly more destructive disasters. Help us to recognize our part in causing these disasters. Teach us what to do to reverse climate change. Be with those who are suffering from these disasters-the floods in Vermont, the wildfires in Canada, the drought in the Midwest, the unlivable high temperatures in much of the US and the world. May they have hope for recovery. Lord, grant us your mercy.

All ☩: **For the troubles and the sufferings of the world,
God, we call upon your mercy: The whole creation’s laboring in pain!**

Robert: We come to you, O God, the God who desires peace to ask for a change of heart that leads to peace. Much of humanity is infected with a desire for power over others that leads to war. We fool ourselves into believing that war is the only way to keep our countries safe, so we put our trust in guns and battle plans. We think we understand the cost of war, but so often we miss the human cost in the mental torment of our soldiers. And the unnecessary loss of life. Change the hearts of men who go to war simply to gain power. Change the hearts of men who go to war using their religion as an excuse for war, believing they are following your command. Give hope to those living in the middle of war who have no say in what is happening. May they find a place of peace and safety. Lord, grant us your mercy.

All ☩: **We pray for peace, the blessed peace that comes from making justice,
to cover and embrace us. Have mercy, Lord!**

Cheryl: We come to you, O God, the God who loves the human family, to ask for open eyes and caring hearts. Many in our human family, even those in the church, care for themselves more than others as evident in our selfishness and greed. As evident when one group believes they are better than another group. As evident in the desire to have power over others. Selfish power leads to oppression. Open our eyes to recognize when we are the ones caring more for ourselves than others. Open our eyes to the oppressive “isms” in our systems-racism, sexism, genderism, agism, and so many more. Give hope to all who are oppressed, to those living in refugee camps or on the streets, to those taken advantage of because of the color of their skin, or their gender identity, or their religion or country of origin. May we learn to love each other. Lord, grant us your mercy.

All φ: **Lend an ear to the rising cry for help from oppressed and hopeless people. Come! Hasten your salvation, healing love!**

Lloyd: We come to you, O God of power and might, to ask for power. Not the power that oppresses others but the power within us that becomes courage, the courage to speak up and speak out. Grant us courage, as individuals and as the church, to admit where we have oppressed others, the courage to ask for forgiveness, and the courage to let ourselves be transformed. Grant us courage to speak up for human rights - LGBTQIA rights, Black lives rights, Native American rights, immigrant rights, women’s rights, reproductive rights. Grant us courage to speak up for climate justice. Grant us courage to speak for a just peace. When all seems lost, grant us the courage to continue in the struggle, working for a just world for all. Grant us the courage to speak your word of love for all for you are the God of love. Lord, grant us your mercy.

All φ: **We pray for power, the power that will sustain your people’s witness: Until your kin-dom come, Kyrie eleison!**

Time of Silence

Cheri Dennis

The Abba Prayer (*unison*)

Cheri Dennis

O God - heart of the world: revealed through every aspect of creation: understood through our awareness. May we honor the holiness of creation and act accordingly so that your love is reflected in the way we live. May we always be thankful for the food we eat and the friends we have. May we forgive those who transgress against us and be forgiven for our own. In the freedom of love may we live as your heartbeat and not be compromised by hesitation. Through our freedom, may your justice be seen and heard and experienced forever and ever. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination (*sung*)

TRENTHAM

**Breathe on me, Breath of God, stir in me one desire:
That every earthly part of me may glow with holy fire.**

Hebrew Lesson

Isaiah 55:10-13

Robert Shepherd

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

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

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

Hymn 12

“I Sing the Mighty Power of God”

ELLACOMBE

**I sing the mighty power of God that made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at God’s command, and all the stars obey.**

**I sing the goodness of our God that filled the earth with food;
God formed the creatures with a word,
and then pronounced them good.**

**Oh, how your wonders are dis-played, where’er I turn my eye;
If I survey the ground I tread, or gaze upon the sky!**

**On earth there’s not a plant or flower but makes your glory known.
The clouds arise and spread their showers by order from your throne.
All life is but a gift from you and ever in your care;
Wherever people gather, you, O God, are present there.**

* Gospel Lesson

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Cheryl Milam

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!

Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

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.

Sermon

“Sower/Seed/Soil”

Cheri Dennis

Invitation to Generosity

Alix Felsing

We submit that all things came into being through The Word. All our gifts, resources, and blessings come from the Generous God, our Creator. The members & friends of Holy Covenant have returned a portion of these gifts in grateful generosity for the ministry of the kingdom. Let us now together dedicate those gifts.

Prayer of Dedication and Thanksgiving (*unison*)

Alix Felsing

Holy One, we thank you for revealing yourself to us and through us with abundance and flourishing. Give us generous hearts. May our offerings offer a testimony honoring your provision and giving glory to your name. Receive these gifts and magnify them for the needs of your creation. Amen.

Hymn of Thanks 785 “We Give You but Your Own”

SHUMANN

We give you but your own, whate'er the gift may be;
All that we have is yours alone, we give it gratefully.

RECEPTION AND WELCOME OF NEW MEMBER

* Congregation: We welcome you and celebrate your journey of faith. We promise to search with you for truth in Scripture, word and witness; to walk with you in life's joys and sorrows; to support you when life is shaken; to laugh with you when life lifts your spirit; to share silence, song and sacrament; and to grow in Christian love and mutual appreciation. We will rely on God's sustaining presence as we journey forward together.

Greeting of Christian Love

Hosts: *On behalf of the entire congregation, it is our pleasure to welcome you as a full member of Holy Covenant United Church of Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, we extend to you the hand of Christian love and welcome.*

* Hymn “You Shall Go Out with Joy” The TREES OF THE FIELD
You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace;
The mountains and the hills will break forth before you;
There'll be shouts of joy, and all the trees of the field
Will clap, will clap their hands.

And all the trees of the field will clap their hands; XX
The trees of the field will clap their hands; XX
The trees of the field will clap their hands XX
While you go out with joy.

(X Clap hands) (Repeat 3 times, each time a little faster.)

* Benediction

Cheri Dennis

* Benediction Response “You Shall Go Out with Joy” The TREES OF THE FIELD
And all the trees of the field will clap their hands; XX
The trees of the field will clap their hands; XX
The trees of the field will clap their hands XX
While you go out with joy.

Postlude

“Song of Hope”

Alvin Schutmaat

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*Portions of this service adapted from **The Word: Service Prayers for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost** written by The Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay, Minister for Worship and Theology, United Church of Christ.*

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, JoAnn Jellison, Barbara Schneller, Shakti Subramanian

We welcome all in our congregation to participate! Please sign up in the Gathering Room or on the SignUpGenius link:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44ACAD23A2FE3-ushers>



Many thanks to the **Budget & Finance Team** for providing today's refreshments following worship.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOLY COVENANT

Stay connected! 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/>

WELCOME NEW MEMBER PATRICK WASHBURN!

Today, we welcome Patrick Washburn to the Holy Covenant UCC family. Patrick has been attending Holy Covenant for several years.

TODAY FOLLOWING WORSHIP:

- Join us in the conference room for an emergency sandwich build for the Men's Shelter of Charlotte. We'll assemble and pack 400 sandwiches! No experience necessary!
- Many thanks to all who have responded with such short notice! Items for the Secret Week 1 Shower for the Czarnecki Family can be dropped off in the new pastor's office (former Sojourner's classroom).
- Remember to sign up for participating in the Charlotte Pride Parade, Sunday August 20.

UCC CLIMATE HOPE

Join us July 30! Write out some UCC Climate Hope postcards before and/or after church. All ages. The cards will go to our NC legislators. Cards will be supplied. The postage for 100 cards has been donated. Let's get it done! Every day is Earth Day.

SOJOURNERS CLASS

All are welcomed to join us Sundays at 9:45am in the Conference Room or via Zoom. We are currently reviewing the book *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy* by Weaver-Zercher, Krabill, and Nolt. No preparation is necessary. Contact Cheryl Milam for more information: docmilam@hotmail.com.

COVENANT GROUPS are a way for you to stay connected with people in your area, neighborhood or zip code. Contact Ed Vickery, ed.vickery@att.net, if you'd like to be a part of any of our Covenant Groups: Saints & Sinners; EastSiders; Southside; Bold & Beautiful; Plaza Midwood; Mountain Island, and Unstructured.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER

Members

Suzanne Hopkins, in the recent death of their sister, Nancy Knapp
Linda Carver, Gary & Linda Clark, Cindy Coble, Kevin Decker, Linn Finger, Tom
& Kathy Habel, Jim Humphrey, Sharon Landis, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Isabelle Reedy
Powell, Jerry & Marion Rhyne, Bill Seaman, Ed & Beth Sharp, Cynthia & Tommy
Simpson, Shakti Subramanian, Anita Taylor

Friends & Family Members

Savannah (Beth Christian), Linda Burby, Laura Christian (Beth Sharp), David &
Cecelia Griffin (JP Griffin), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Matty
& Simone McKinnon (Joy Decker), Sue Parrish (Terry Raley-Dennis), Marie Raley
(Jean Raley-Dennis), Suzie & John Robinson (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovic),
Barbara Rutelonis (Eric Miner), Michelle Sharp (Beth & Ed Sharp), Christopher
Sizemore (Tina Ettesen), Tom & Silvia Smith (Laura Hankins), Eulene Shepherd
(Robert Shepherd), Kathryn Vickery (Ed Vickery), Joyce Ward (Ed Vickery), John
Zastrow (Barb Schneller)

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

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

Rev. Cheri Dennis, Interim Pastor

Jon Weddell, M.Div, MSW, Minister of Music

Dawn Simmons, BSBF, Executive Assistant

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