



"The moment we choose to love  
we begin to move against domination,  
against oppression. The moment we choose to love we  
begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that  
liberate ourselves and others. That action is the  
testimony of love as the practice of freedom."

– Bell Hooks

#### OUR MINISTRY TEAM

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

**September 17, 2023 10:55 am**

Prelude "Lord, I Want to Be a Christian" arr. R. W. Thygerson

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome and Announcements Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

One: May the peace of Christ be with you!

Many: And also with you.

Introit "Gather Us In" M. Haugen

Here in this place, the new light is streaming,  
Shadows of doubt are vanished away.

See in this space our fears and our dreamings,  
Brought here to you in the light of this day.

Gather us in, the lost and forsaken;  
Gather us in; our spirits inflame.  
Call to us now, and we shall awaken;  
We shall arise at the sound of our name.

\* Call to Worship Terry Raley-Dennis

One: To know the warmth of love,

Many: To have the assurance that someone cares,

One: To be confident of our worth,

Many: To be bold to love in return,

One: To be washed over with grace,

Many: To be accepted as we are,

One: This is to know a bit of God.

Many: Then let us worship our God.

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

\* Invocation (*unison*)

Terry Raley-Dennis

Spirit of love, as we stand in this sacred space, root us in the wisdom and guidance of God. Help us to set aside the worries which plague us, and rest in the assurance of your comforting presence. May the still small voice within speak loudly, clearly, and prophetically to the truths we as a community of Christ followers are called to. As we worship, revive us and awaken us to live in the power of resurrection. Amen.

\* Hymn 18

“Guide Me, O My Great Redeemer”

CWM RHONDDA

Guide Me, O my great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but you are mighty; hold me with your powerful hand.  
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,  
Feed me till I want no more, feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain, where the healing waters flow.  
Let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through.  
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer,  
Ever be my strength and shield, ever be my strength and shield.

When I reach the River Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside.  
Death of death, and hell’s destruction, land me safe on heaven’s side.  
Songs of praises, songs of praises,  
I will ever sing to you; I will ever sing to you.

A Reading for Transformation & New Life

Terry Raley-Dennis

*As we imagine the possibilities of transformation and new life hear these words from the book “Untamed” by Glennon Doyle...*

I don’t know if I call myself a Christian anymore. That label suggests certainty, and I have none. It suggests the desire to convert others, and that’s the last thing I want to do. It suggests exclusive belonging, and I’m not sure I belong anywhere anymore. Part of me wants to peel that label off, set it down, and try to meet each person soul to soul, without any layers between us.

But I find myself unable to let go fully, because to wash my hands of the Jesus story is to abandon something beautiful to money-hungry hijackers. It would be like surrendering the concept of beauty to the fashion industry or the magic of sexuality to internet porn dealers. I want beauty, I want sex, I want faith. I just don’t want the hijackers’ commodified, poisonous versions. Nor do I want to identify myself with hijackers.

So I will say this: I remain compelled by the Jesus story. Not as history meant to reveal what happened long ago, but as poetry meant to illuminate a revolutionary idea powerful enough to heal and free humanity now.

Words of Assurance (*unison*)

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

**No matter how far we have wandered from the goodness of God, we are always invited back. For ways in which our words or actions have hurt others, we now have the power to respond with regret and seek the healing of divine reconciliation. We can lay aside our shame, quiet our egos, and cast out the thoughts that leave us with doubt. We are forgiven and given a chance to live life anew, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Amen.**

Response to God's Grace "Know That God Is Good"

MUNGO NI MWEMA

**Know that God is good. (3x) God is good; God is good.**

Stories for All People

Laura Hankins

Pastoral Prayer

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

The Lord's Prayer (*unison*)

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

**Our Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kin-dom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kin-dom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

Prayer for Illumination (*sung*)

OPEN OUR EYES

**Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus,  
To reach out and touch you and say that we love you.  
Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen.  
Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus.**

Christian Scripture Philippians 4:8-9 (*INT*)

Barbara Schneller

*Our Christian Scripture for today comes of the epistle to the Philippians 4:8-9, where Paul is offering his readers words of encouragement...*

Finally, my siblings, your thoughts should be wholly directed to all that is true, all that deserves respect, all that is honest, pure, decent, admirable, virtuous or worthy of praise. Live according to what you have learned and accepted, what you have heard me say and seen me do. Then will the God of peace be with you.

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

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

Hebrew Scripture Gen. 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67 (CEB) Terry Raley-Dennis  
*Our Scripture reading for today comes from the Book of Genesis 24, where Abraham instructs his servant on how to find a wife for his son Isaac...*

“I am Abraham’s servant,” he explained. “And the Lord has greatly blessed my master; he has become a wealthy man. The Lord has given him flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, a fortune in silver and gold, and many male and female servants and camels and donkeys. When Sarah, my master’s wife, was very old, she gave birth to my master’s son, and my master has given him everything he owns. And my master made me take an oath. He said, ‘Do not allow my son to marry one of these local Canaanite women. Go instead to my father’s house, to my relatives, and find a wife there for my son.’ So today when I came to the spring, I prayed this prayer: ‘O Lord, God of my master, Abraham, please give me success on this mission. See, I am standing here beside this spring. This is my request. When a young woman comes to draw water, I will say to her, “Please give me a little drink of water from your jug.” If she says, “Yes, have a drink, and I will draw water for your camels, too,” let her be the one you have selected to be the wife of my master’s son.’

Before I had finished praying in my heart, I saw Rebekah coming out with her water jug on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, ‘Please give me a drink.’ She quickly lowered her jug from her shoulder and said, ‘Yes, have a drink, and I will water your camels, too!’ So I drank, and then she watered the camels.

Then I asked, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ She replied, ‘I am the daughter of Bethuel, and my grandparents are Nahor and Milcah.’ So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her wrists. Then I bowed low and worshiped the Lord. I praised the Lord, the God of my master, Abraham, because he had led me straight to my master’s niece to be his son’s wife. So tell me—will you or won’t you show unfailing love and faithfulness to my master? Please tell me yes or no, and then I’ll know what to do next.

So they called Rebekah. “Are you willing to go with this man?” they asked her. And she replied, “Yes, I will go.” They said good-bye to Rebekah and sent her away with Abraham’s servant and his men. The woman who had been Rebekah’s childhood nurse went along with her. They gave her this blessing as she parted: “Our sister, may you become the mother of many millions! May your descendants be strong and conquer the cities of their enemies.”

Then Rebekah and her servant girls mounted the camels and followed the man. Abraham’s servant took Rebekah and went on his way.

Meanwhile, Isaac, whose home was in the Negev, had returned from Beer-lahai-roi. One evening as he was walking and meditating in the fields, he looked up and saw the camels coming. When Rebekah looked up and saw Isaac, she quickly dismounted from her camel. “Who is that man walking through the fields to meet us?” she asked the servant. And he replied, “It is my master.” So Rebekah covered her face with her veil. Then the servant told Isaac everything he had done. And Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah’s tent, and she became his wife. He loved her deeply, and she was a special comfort to him after the death of his mother.

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

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

“The Choice She Didn’t Get to Make”

Invitation to Generosity

Terry Raley-Dennis

Like Rebekah, who shared her water with a stranger, we are invited to share our gifts with others. In doing so, we demonstrate God’s care is something that extends far beyond ourselves. When we act as vessels through which the gifts of God’s goodness flow, needs are met, miracles are made possible, and the world is brought closer together as one. As we prepare our gifts, may we be moved to share in the same spirit as Rebekah did.

Prayer of Dedication

Terry Raley-Dennis

*Please join me in a responsive prayer for the gifts we are dedicating to God...*

One: We make our offerings, small and large, with the hope and confidence that

Many: **all we offer, all we think, all we say, and all we hope**

One: will take root in this world and be the source of new expressions

Many: **of God’s love, of God’s justice, of God’s mission, and of God’s reign.**

One: May God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Many: **through us, alongside us, despite us, and for us. Amen.**

\* Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;**

**Praise God, all creatures here below;**

**Praise God, above you heavenly host;**

**Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

\* Hymn 460

“Be Not Dismayed”

MARTIN

Be not dismayed whate'er betide, God will take care of you;  
Beneath God's wings of love abide, God will take care of you.

*Refrain:* God will take care of you, through every day, o'er all the way;  
God will take care of you; God will take care of you.

Through days of toil when heart grows frail, God will take care of you;  
When dangers fierce your path assail, God will take care of you. (R)

All you may need God will provide; God will take care of you;  
Nothing you ask will be denied, God will take care of you. (R)

No matter what may be the test, God will take care of you.  
Lean weary one, upon God's breast, God will take care of you. (R)

\* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

\* Benediction Response

WORLD PEACE PRAYER

Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth,  
From despair to hope, from fear to trust.  
Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace;  
Let peace fill our hearts, let peace fill our world,  
Let peace fill our universe.

Postlude

“Breathe on Me, Breath of God”

arr. J. Innes

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*Portions of this service adapted from Worship Ways and Life in Liturgy.*

*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, 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 **Daytime Saints Covenant Group** for providing today's refreshments following worship. 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](mailto:ed.vickery@att.net), if you'd like to be a part of any of our Covenant Groups: Daytime Saints; EastSiders; Southside; Bold & Beautiful; Plaza Midwood; Mountain Island, and Unstructured.

## **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/>

### **UNION COUNTY PRIDE, SEPTEMBER 17, 2023**

Holy Covenant is supporting the Union County Pride festival in Sept 17. We will have a tent at the festival from noon to 6 pm. Join us to be part of the on-site group hosting our tent. Suzanne at [suzlam@yahoo.com](mailto:suzlam@yahoo.com). Belk Tonawanda Park, 217 IB Shive Drive, Monroe, NC.

### **CONSISTORY MEETING MOVED TO SEPTEMBER 24, 2023**

To allow our greater participation of Holy Covenant UCC to attend the Union County Pride this afternoon, our meeting has been moved forward to next Sunday.

### **RETIRED SERVANTS RETREAT**

Retired UCC and Disciples of Christ clergy are invited to attend the Retired Servant Retreat from October 9-11 at Blowing Rock Conference Center. Please the information table outside the office for event and registration info.

### **SOJOURNERS CLASS**

The Sojourners will begin a discussion of the book, *The Gnostic Gospels* by Elaine Pagels, on Sept 10. Join us in person or via Zoom, no preparation necessary. We gather at 9:45am in the Conference Room, or via Zoom Meeting ID: 87673409762 Passcode: 523903. Contact Cheryl Milam for more information, [docmilam@hotmail.com](mailto:docmilam@hotmail.com).



## YOUR OFFERING, YOUR WAY

Various methods are available for your convenience! Schedule offerings, one time or recurring, through your bank's online payment system. Mailing a check, from home or a financial institution? Please use this secure address:



**Holy Covenant UCC, PO Box 481285, Charlotte NC 28269**

Donate online at [HolyCovenantUCC.org/give-2/](https://HolyCovenantUCC.org/give-2/). Look for the *Give Today* button. Questions can be directed to the church office, [office@holycovenantucc.org](mailto:office@holycovenantucc.org) or 704-599-9810.

## AMERICAN RED CROSS SHORTAGE APPEAL

ARC is experiencing a national blood shortage. Blood donors of all blood types - especially type O - and platelet donors are urgently needed now to ensure patients at hospitals across the county continue to receive critical medical care. Make an appointment at [RedCrossBlood.org](https://RedCrossBlood.org), or call 800-RED CROSS (800-733-2726).



## Room In The Inn 2023

Prior to the recent pandemic, Holy Covenant had a history of participating in Room in the Inn when we welcomed 8 neighbors to stay with us overnight once a month in conjunction with the Roof Above program. This program relies on volunteer faith communities in Charlotte to host individuals overnight during the cold winter months. The Missions and Justice team at Holy Covenant would like to find out from the congregation if there are volunteers who might consider helping out with the important jobs of setting up the beds one Sunday per month, picking up the neighbors downtown Sunday evening, preparing food for dinner and breakfast, and joining us all together at the dinner table. Please consider participating in this worthy effort...families are especially invited to make this a special time. We don't have specific Sundays on the calendar for this yet, likely winter months...at this point we mainly want to know if there are enough interested volunteers to move forward. Contact Suzanne at [suzlam@yahoo.com](mailto:suzlam@yahoo.com) for more info.

## Duke Sexual and Gender Minority Wellness Symposium, Sept 17-19

<https://dukesgmhealth.org/>

Film screening & virtual panel discussion

(Registration Required) [bit.ly/SGMSympRegister](https://bit.ly/SGMSympRegister)

Experts from around the country will discuss such topics as: global sexual and gender minority health and human rights, recapping 2023 US policy updates and preparing for 2024, transgender teen well-being, emerging intersectionality in SGM health research, trans reproductive freedom, and bi+ health and well-being.

## **PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER**

### **Members**

Ed Vickery & Eric Miner, in the death of Ed's mother, Kathryn Vickery  
Linda Carver, Gary & 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, Bill Seaman, Shakti  
Subramanian, Anita Taylor

### **Friends & Family Members**

Karen & Billy (Kim Tyler), David & Cecelia Griffin (JP Griffin), Henry Hildebrand  
(Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Matty & Simone McKinnon (Joy Decker), Roxanne &  
Moose Meyer (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Sue Parrish (Terry Raley-Dennis),  
Marie Raley (Jean Raley-Dennis), Susan Rayfield (Martha Bomely), Suzie & John  
Robinson (Dana Endsley & Mike Yonkovig), Barbara Rutelonis (Eric Miner),  
Michelle Sharp (Beth & Ed Sharp), Christopher Sizemore (Tina Ettesen), Eulene  
Shepherd (Robert Shepherd), 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](mailto:prayers@holycovenantucc.org).