



Photo source: Clay Banks on Unsplash

“I think for you, too, God cannot be contained.”

-Sue Monk Kidd

“Today is the day you break free
from the labels that have limited you.
God has a limitless life that awaits you.”

-Anonymous

“God cannot be squashed into any formula or confined to a narrow explanation, and God doesn’t want our dreams to be small and manageable either. [Our God is a God who blasts who human boundaries].”

-Kasey Van Norman

Founded in 1916, we are an Open & Affirming (LGBTQ+), anti-racist, and justice seeking church that is part of the greater United Church of Christ.

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

July 21, 2024, 10:55 am

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

Prelude "I Surrender All" arr. L. Smith
Dawn Robinson, Jon Weddell, piano duet

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 "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 the Heart Robert Shepherd
Please take a comfortable posture that supports your worship and reading...
One: Come out of your busy lives for a time of peace and quiet.
Many: **Our souls' thirst for peace and quiet.**
One: Come and rest in the Lord who will restore your souls.
Many: **Our lives need moments of rest.**
One: Come and find refuge here. Come, be at peace.
Many: **Praise God who offers us shelter and rest.
We now worship, amid all our beauty and diversity,
In the midst, of God's pure holiness.**

* Hymn 573

“Lead On Eternal Sovereign”

LANCASHIRE

Lead on eternal Sovereign, we follow in your way;
Loud rings your cry for justice, your call for peace this day:
Through prayerful preparation, your grace will make us strong,
To carry on the struggle to triumph over wrong.

Lead on eternal Sovereign, we follow not with fear,
For in each human conflict your words of strength we hear:
That when we serve with gladness, you will not let us fall,
Our trust is in your promise that love will conquer all.

Lead on eternal Sovereign, till sin’s fierce war shall cease,
And all your saints together will sing a hymn of peace;
Then all in your dominion will live with hearts set free,
To love and serve each other for all eternity.

Affirmation

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Yourself: I open myself to God’s endless possibilities for my life.

Neighbor: You open yourself to God’s Endless possibilities for your life.

World: We open ourselves to God’s endless possibilities for our life.

Prayer for Transformation and New Life (*unison*)

Robert Shepherd

God of life and love, this morning we confess the ways we try to contain You. The ways we try to limit Your love, exclude others from being made in Your image, or believe You have a preferred people, political affiliation, or religion. Help us broaden our understanding to see that You and Your presence are without limits and are so much bigger. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Throughout our sacred scriptures we see God showing up through burning bushes, arching rainbows, mountaintop voices, thunderous clouds, as well as prophetic acts and people. Our God is a God who cannot be confined or restricted, checked or enclosed, but is unbound, limitless, and unrestrained in its grace, mercy, and love. May we not only behold God’s infinite presence but seek through our lives and actions to embody it. Amen.

Stories for All People

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

We love your realm, O God, all places where you reign
 We recognize, with hope and joy, the world as your domain.

We love your church, O God, for Christ has given life
 To form communities of love that seek to heal our strife.

We recognize, with pain, that we have not achieved
 The faithfulness of our resolve when we at first believed.

Yet Christ, our friend and guide, continues to forgive,
 Delivering us from our mistakes, inviting us to live.

Beyond our brokenness, we seek to know your ways
 Of deep communion, solemn vows, and hymns of love and praise.

We know your truth will last. We trust your reign is sure.
 Equip us for those daily tasks that help your world endure.

Pastoral Prayer

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

On this day we lift-up the prayers of our hearts, our joys and concerns, as we pray...

For the sick and ailing, those recovering and mending...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For the unhoused, hungry, and those living in poverty...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For an anti-racist world, and respect for human dignity...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For an end to gun violence, and the lives it horrifically takes...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For breaking hearts and love that's been shattered...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For ceasefires to be agreed upon and pathways to peace...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For laws to protect the environment and people to do their part...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For queer-affirming spaces instead of inequalities or divisions...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For children to grow without fear and a future better than ours...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For those in harm's way or living through natural disasters...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For those holding to hope or struggling through the difficulties of addiction...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

In faith that we can be more and live better.

In anticipation that we are transforming and changing.

In the belief that Christ lives within, and we have its power.

For the things we will still do and the lives we will altar.

In knowing this isn't the end but just the beginning.

Put us where we are needed,

Endow us with the gifts to succeed.

And wherever we are or find ourselves,

May we allow God's love to just be.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Amen.

Prayer for Illumination 283 (*sung*)

IVERSON

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me (2x)

Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me

Modern Lesson

Terry Raley-Dennis

Our Modern Lesson for today comes from John Pavlovitz book "*A Bigger Table: Building Messy, Authentic, and Hopeful Spiritual Community*". In his book he says...

This is often the primary difference between him and so many of those of us who follow him. When we encounter the many ills of the world, we find ourselves growing more and more callous toward people, more and more judgmental, less and less hopeful. Rather than seeing the hurting humanity we encounter every day as an opportunity to be the very loving presence of Jesus, we see them as reason to withdraw from it all. Faith becomes about retreating from the world when it should be about moving toward it. As we walk deeper into organized religion, we run the risk of eventually becoming fully blind to the tangible suffering around us, less concerned about mending wounds or changing systems, and more preoccupied with saving or condemning souls. In this way, the spiritual eyes through which we see the world change everything. If our default lens is sin, we tend to look ahead to the afterlife, but if we focus on suffering, we'll lean toward presently transforming the planet in real time—and we'll create community accordingly. The former seeks to help people escape the encroaching moral decay by getting them into heaven; the latter takes seriously the prayer Jesus teaches his disciples, that they would make the kingdom come—that through lives resembling Christ and work that perpetuates his work, we would actually bring heaven down. Practically speaking, sin management seems easier because essentially all that is required of us is to preach, to call out people's

errors and invite them to repentance, and to feel we've been faithful. But seeing suffering requires us to step into the broken, jagged chaos of people's lives to be agents of healing and change. It's far more time consuming and much more difficult to do as a faith community. It is a lot easier to train preachers to lead people in a Sinner's Prayer than it is to equip them to address the systematic injustices around them.

One: May we hear what the Spirit is saying to the people.

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

Scripture Lesson

2 Sam. 7:1-14 (CEB)

Robert Shepherd

Our Scripture Lesson for today comes from 2 Samuel 7:1-14, where David is concerned God does not have a permanent building and requests to build one...

When King David was settled in his palace, and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "Look! I'm living in a cedar palace, but God's chest is housed in a tent!"

Nathan said to the king, "Go ahead and do whatever you are thinking, because the Lord is with you."

But that very night the Lord's word came to Nathan: Go to my servant David and tell him: This is what the Lord says: You are not the one to build the temple for me to live in. In fact, I haven't lived in a temple from the day I brought Israel out of Egypt until now. Instead, I have been traveling around in a tent and in a dwelling. Throughout my traveling around with the Israelites, did I ever ask any of Israel's tribal leaders I appointed to shepherd my people: Why haven't you built me a cedar temple?

So then, say this to my servant David: This is what the Lord of heavenly forces says: I took you from the pasture, from following the flock, to be leader over my people Israel. I've been with you wherever you've gone, and I've eliminated all your enemies before you. Now I will make your name great—like the name of the greatest people on earth. I'm going to provide a place for my people Israel, and plant them so that they may live there and no longer be disturbed. Cruel people will no longer trouble them, as they had been earlier, when I appointed leaders over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies.

And the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make a dynasty for you. When the time comes for you to die and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your descendant—one of your very own children—to succeed you, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a temple for my name, and I will establish his royal throne forever. I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me. Whenever he does wrong, I will discipline him with a human rod, with blows from human beings.

One: May we hear what the Spirit is saying to the people.

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

Invitation to Generosity

Robert Shepherd

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

God has given us a great gift in the life that surrounds us. The air we breathe, the sun that nurtures plants, and warms the earth, the rain that quenches thirst, trees that provide shade, and the presence of new life that is continually being born before us. Move us to give as we see God gives, freely, openly, and incessantly. May the gifts we now share, through the kindness of our hearts, be just as abundant and a blessing.

During the month of July, Holy Covenant UCC also receives its Annual Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and Emergency Fund. This fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years. We will receive these offerings in the month of July. If you are moved to share your gifts, please notate “Christmas Fund” in the memo. Thank you for sharing your generosity with others.

* Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God all creatures here below;
Praise God above, ye heavenly host;
Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost.**

* Prayer of Dedication (*unison*)

Robert Shepherd

Please join me in our unison prayer of dedication...

Generous God, for the gifts shared this day we give thanks. Through us use these gifts to do your work, to show your love, and to join others in the struggle for peace and justice. May their blessing be never-ending, their reach immeasurable, and the avenues through which they amplify the kingdom of God here on earth in the here and now be boundless. Amen.

* Hymn 531

“God, Speak to Me, That I May Speak”

CANONBURY

God, speak to me, that I may speak in living echoes of your tone;
As you have sought, so let me seek your erring children lost and lone.

O lead me, God, that I may lead some wanderers along life’s way;
O feed me so that I may feed your hungry ones without delay.

O fill me with your fullness, God, your overflowing love to know;
In glowing word and kindling thought, your love to tell, your praise to show.

O use me, God, use even me just as you will, and when, and where,
Until your blessed face I see, your rest, your joy, your glory share.

* Benediction

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

* Benediction Response 391

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

“Take Me In”

arr. D. Browing

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*The liturgy for today’s service was written or adapted by Worship Connections
at www.ministrymatters.com, 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.*

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

Today, we will assemble 400 sandwiches for our neighbors in need at the Men's Shelter/Roof Above. No experience needed! Join us for fun and fellowship!

COMMUNICATIONS TEAM INVITES YOUR PARTICIPATION TODAY

All are welcome to help out the Communications Team. Grab a snack and join us in the conference room at 12:30pm, as we chose the photos to be used on the website updating. Suggestions for content also welcomed. No tech training or knowledge is required!

GAME NIGHT, SATURDAY JULY 27, 6:30-8:30PM

BYOGames (Bring Your Own) or just come join us in the church Gathering Room and have some fun! Game "fanatics" as well as newbies are welcome! We've been having a blast playing "Scattergories". Snacks and beverages provided, or bring along your favorites. RSVP Suzanne Lamorey, slamorey@uncc.edu.

JULY 28, 2024 "FEAST OF 5000" POTLUCK FOLLOWING WORSHIP

Special Offering to be taken to benefit those in the Gaza Strip - via World Central Kitchen. Bring a side dish, salad, or dessert, enough to feed your family. Remember vegan and vegetarian options, too.

RACIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY TEAM INVITES YOU

The Racial Justice and Equity Team is discussing a number of important issues, including the need for affordable housing. We are looking for people with expertise or interest in this area. Mel Anderson attended the city's Faith & Housing Summit on May 30 and provided an excellent overview of projects at several Charlotte churches. Several RJE members also have information and experience with these issues, and members of Holy Covenant's congregation have occasionally expressed interest in exploring whether we could use some of our land to meet the needs of the unhoused, the workforce or seniors. While Holy Covenant is not in the position now to launch a project of major scope, we could use a few interested people to learn more about the many available

resources and opportunities and how they might fit with our mission of being a welcoming church that cares for all. If you are interested in exploring the issue of affordable housing in any way, please let RJE know by contacting RJE co-chairs Melissa McQueen-Simmons, revmelmcsimm@gmail.com, or Alix Felsing, alixfelsing@gmail.com.

SUMMER ALL-CHURCH READ: “OUR TRESPASSES”

All are invited to join Holy Covenant’s All-Church Read this summer, which will culminate in an author visit Sept. 8.

“Our Trespases: White Churches and the Taking of American Neighborhoods” tells the story of Charlotte’s Brooklyn neighborhood through the North family, displaced by urban renewal, and the white congregation of the First Baptist Charlotte that purchased their land from the city. This local history examines how race, geography, policy and religion haunt landscapes in Charlotte, as they do in cities across the country. Understanding this history is a vital step in Holy Covenant’s journey to creating a more just and equitable community. **Author Greg Jarrell, an ordained minister, will preach at Holy Covenant during worship Sept. 8.** Following worship and a break for light refreshments, Jarrell will discuss what he learned about the values and biases that are woven into Charlotte’s development patterns. See the church newsletter for more data.

SOJOURNERS CLASS, SUNDAYS AT 9:45AM

We gather Sundays at 9:45am in the Conference Room, or via Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89561758099?pwd=d1gvUmh3K2hCNmdidm1QdjllNkF5QT0>

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WE PROVIDE OUR EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME WITH HELP FROM:

D Evans, Brian Hankins, Laura Hankins

Ushers: Greeters: Refreshments:

WORSHIP VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Greeters and ushers are needed starting at 10:30am every Sunday. Liturgists and readers roles are also available. **Please sign up in the Gathering Room or at <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44ACAD23A2FE3-ushers>.**

We welcome all in our congregation to participate in worship leadership.

Download the app to make signing up even easier!

<https://www.signupgenius.com/mobileapp>

IN THE COMMUNITY

- **Franklinton Center Day, Aug. 3**

Franklinton Center at Bricks is a historic landmark and a hub for education, empowerment, and social justice. For decades, this center has been a cornerstone in the fight for equality and a place where leaders are born. 281 Southbend Lane, Whitackers, NC <https://franklintoncenteratbricks.org/>

- **Youth Service Project, Aug. 3, 10:00am** -details at MeckMin.org

- **Interfaith Youth Summit, Aug. 10 & 11,** -details at MeckMin.org

- **Charlotte Pride Interfaith Service, Aug. 11, 4:00pm** at Sacred Souls Community Church

- **Non-Partisan Candidate Fair, Aug. 14 6:30pm** -co-sponsored by Charlotte Pride & other local Social Justice organizations. 332 W. Bland Street

PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER

Members

Terry Parrish & Lee Brigman and family in the recent death of Terry's mother, Fran Eric Miner & Ed Vickery and family in the recent death of Eric's brother, Jason Haydock

Linda Carver, The Czarnecki Family, Kevin Decker, Linn Finger, Tom & Kathy Habel, Jim Humphrey, Jeff Hughes, Kat Kerce, Sharon Landis, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Alice Phelan & Sally Young, Cynthia Simpson, Isabelle Reedy Powell, Jerry Rhyne, Ed & Beth Sharp, Anita Taylor

Friends & Family Members

Beth, Michael & Julian Bliss (Robert Shepherd), Melissa Brown, Phillip Cherry (Anne Pigg), Craig Chrismon (Melissa Noll), Pam Culp & Pam McGill (Melissa Noll), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Charles Jernigan (Lee Brigman), Dave Johnson, Judah L. Jones & Bill Englebreth, Richard Lease (Barb Schneller), Klye Morre (Akeera Czarnecki), Joe Parks (Beth Sharp), Michelle Sharp (Beth & Ed Sharp), Eulene Shepherd (Robert Shepherd), Randy & Crystal Taylor (Bill & Kim Tyler), Joyce Ward (Ed Vickery), Janet Wakefield (Linda Burby) Nelly Webb and parents (Kristin Andes), 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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