



Unsplash photo by Kelly Sikkema

“When you feel unloved,
you are being called to love yourself more.”

– Desmond Tutu

“Feeling the oneness of yourself
with all things is true love.”

– Eckhart Tolle

“How you love yourself
is how you teach others to love you.”

- Anonymous

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
FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 1, 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 "Pisgah Sleeps" Kathleen Blackwell-Plank
Kristin Andes, harp

Note: This piece celebrates the beauty and awesomeness of God's creativity. "Pisgah" is a Hebrew word meaning "summit," used both to describe the highest point of a mountain, as well as someone's best achievement. The Pisgah National Forest, part of the Appalachian Mountains in North Carolina, was the site of the first school of forestry in the United States.

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 "We Are an Offering" D. Liles
We lift our voices; we lift our hands; we lift our lives up to you.
We are an offering.

God, use our voices; God, use our hands;
God, use our lives; they are yours. We are an offering.

All that we have, all that we are,
All that we hope to be we give to you, we give to you.

We lift our voices; we lift our hands; we lift our lives up to you.
We are an offering. We are an offering.

* Call to the Heart

Kevin Decker

Please take a comfortable posture that supports your worship and reading...

One: O Holy One, who may abide in your heart?

Many: Those who've hit a rough patch, those who've missed a turn, those who are struggling through difficulties.

One: O Holy One, who may abide in your heart?

Many: Those searching and seeking, those holding doubts and hopes, those bearing smiles and tears.

One: O Holy One, who may abide in your heart?

Many: Those who try and give up, those who are cast aside and rejected. Those who are beautifully, wonderfully, and imperfectly human - all of us! Let us give thanks and now worship God.

* Hymn

"We Are Your People"

WHITFIELD

We are your people: God, by your grace,
You dare to make us Christ to our neighbors of every nation and race.

Called to portray you, help us to live
Closer than neighbors, open to strangers, able to clash and forgive.

Glad of tradition, help us to see
In all life's changing where you are leading,
Where our best efforts should be.

Joined in community, breaking your bread,
May we discover gifts in each other, willing to lead and be led.

God, as we minister in different ways,
May all we're doing show that you're living,
Meeting your love with our praise.

Affirmation

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Yourself: I am worthy of God's love and acceptance just as I am.

Neighbor: You are worthy of God's love and acceptance just as you are.

World: We are worthy of God's love and acceptance just as we are.

Prayer for Transformation and New Life (*unison*) Kevin Decker
Eternal God, this day help us to break the bonds of our hindered past and to be released from the forces of our compulsions. Help us to discern what needs to be left behind, or what needs to be lamented and let go, so we move forward toward a better future. Change us and by your grace transform us, O God, into Christlikeness. Not just for us, but in hope for the world. Amen.

Hymn 544 “If I Have Been the Source of Pain, O God” CAMACUA
If I have been the source of pain, O God;
If to the weak I have refused my strength;
If, in rebellion, I have strayed away; Forgive me, God.

Words of Grace Rev. Christopher Czarnecki
In his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul says, *“I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. The goal I pursue is the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus”* (3:13-14). What if grace is knowing we are not tethered to our past, but in each moment given the opportunity to reclaim our Christ identity. What if grace is remembering to lay hold of all the divine capacities we possess through which, like Jesus, we can share God’s peace, justice, and love. In pursuit of laying claim to the Christ within, may we be given the grace to shed all in this world that keeps us from it.

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 Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Song of Preparation “In an Age of Twisted Values” CHURCH UNITED
In an age of twisted values, we have lost the truth we need.
In sophisticated language we have justified our greed.
By our struggle for possessions, we have robbed the poor and weak.
Hear our cry and heal our nation; your forgiveness, Lord, we seek.

Responsive Pastoral Prayer

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Lord God, our Maker, the work of your hands displays your goodness and glory; it is marvelous to behold. From the most intricate snowflake to the grandest of mountain peaks, with each inbreaking of the sun's rays that paint the sky until day's end,

Many: Your limitless love creates it all.

As we gaze, then, upon your children, the special co-creators you have made to experience you and your beauty, may we always appreciate the dignity of each person: Straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender. May we witness your extravagant artistry of each beloved, celebrate your Divine imprint upon each heart, and recognize how you fashion each human being with purpose and wonder.

Many: Your limitless love creates us all.

Forgive us, Lord, for the constraint of our eyes that fails to take in another's beauty, for choosing the comfort of our own apathy instead of bearing one another's burdens, for not remaining silent to listen and silent when we should have cried out,

Many: Your limitless love forgives us all.

We pray, O God, for the wounds the world inflicts, in thought, word, and deed, against what your hands have made and ultimately, against you. Soothe and comfort, renew and redeem.

Many: Your limitless love restores us all.

We pray for unity, for tenderness, for belonging and justice and freedom, for solidarity and bountiful compassion that the world may know who you are by the way we love one another and how willing we are to enter the splendor of co-creating with one another and with you.

Many: Your limitless love heals us all.

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.**

Our modern lesson for today comes from R.M. Drake, who is a social media poet and the author of the book Beautiful Chaos. He writes...

“Tell me exactly how you fell. Tell me why you’ve distanced yourself and why the space is comforting. Tell me what I can do to make you feel at home and what I can do to give you what you need to heal. Tell me about your wounds, the scars you’re hiding. The ones too sad to ignore. Tell me about the people you’ve given too much to and the ones who’ve left you behind: empty and even more confused. Tell me about what’s keeping you awake at night. About your horrors and worries. Tell me. You can trust me with all your flaws. Tell me, and I will show you how you are worthy of love and belonging. Tell me, because isn’t it time someone did things for you for once? Isn’t it time, someone put you first? You deserve the space within you to be filled with love. To be filled with a kindness so deserving that only the ones with a broken heart understand. Because you’ve earned it. Make today the kind of day that starts and ends with you.”

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

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

Our Hebrew Lesson for today comes from the Song of Solomon 2:8-17, where two lovers express the passionate desire to be with each other...

The voice of my beloved!
Look, they come,
leaping upon the mountains,
bounding over the hills.
My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young stag.
Look, there they stand
behind our wall,
gazing in at the windows,
looking through the lattice.
My beloved speaks and says to me:
“Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away,
for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtledove
is heard in our land.
The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.
O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
in the covert of the cliff,
let me see your face;
let me hear your voice,
for your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely.
Catch us the foxes,
the little foxes,
that ruin the vineyards—
for our vineyards are in blossom.”
My beloved is mine, and I am theirs;
they pasture their flock among the lilies.
Until the day breathes and the shadows flee,
turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle
or a young stag on the cleft mountains.

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

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

The Good News

“Dare to Believe in Love”

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Invitation to Generosity

Kevin Decker

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

Song of Solomon offers a rich tapestry of love, longing, and the splendor of nature. Through the exchange between the lover and the beloved, we see the power of divine love, God’s love for us. Let us take a moment to express our gratitude for this love through the sharing of our gifts, our support for the mission and ministry of the church.

* 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. Amen.

* Prayer of Dedication (*unison*)

Kevin Decker

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

Gracious God, we bring these offerings with hearts full of love and gratitude, inspired by the beauty of your creation and the love that binds us. Just as the Song of Solomon celebrates love's arrival, we dedicate these gifts to further the arrival of your kin-dom here and now. May they bring hope, peace, and transformation, reflecting your love for all. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

THE MYSTIC SUPPER
ALL ARE WELCOME AT CHRIST'S TABLE

The Invitation

One: God is with you.

Many: **And also with you.**

One: Lift up your hearts.

Many: **We lift them up to God.**

One: Let us give thanks to the Holy One, our God.

Many: **It is good and beautiful to give God our praise.**

One: God, Beloved, we thank you. We love you. We desire you.

Many: **We gather at your table, drawn by your love and your beauty.**

One: In your grace and mercy, you are like a gazelle, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.

Many: **You create us as the image of your love. You claim us as your Beloved. You set us free from all that oppresses us.**

One: Your Spirit calls to us, "Arise, my love, and come away."

Many: **We leave all our worries and judgments, and come to you.**

One: We come in thanksgiving. We come because we love you.

Many: **Our Heavenly Lover, you are beautiful, and we desire you. So, we come to feast on your presence, singing your praise with all Creation...**

*Holy, holy, holy One, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.*

LAND OF REST

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God.

Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna in the highest.

One: Blessed are all who come in your name, and blessed is Jesus, your Christ, the body of your loveliness.

Many: **He is our Beloved, who does not merely speak of you; he draws us into delight in you.**

One: In him we fall in love with you.

Many: **In Christ we taste of your goodness; we die for love of you and rise in the ecstasy of faith.**

One: Pour out your Holy Spirit on these gifts of bread and cup, that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ.

* Hymn "We've Come This Far by Faith" arr. R. Smallwood
Refrain: We've come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord,
Trusting in God's holy Word—God's never failed us yet.
Oh, can't turn around, we've come this far by faith.

Don't be discouraged with trouble in your life;
God will bear your burdens and remove all misery and strife. (R)

* Benediction Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

* Benediction Response "Song of Hope" ARGENTINA
May the God of hope go with us every day,
Filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.
May the God of justice speed us on our way,
Bringing light and hope to every land and race.

Praying, let us work for peace; singing, share our joy with all;
Working for a world that's new, faithful when we hear Christ's call.

Postlude "Finest Wheat" arr. A. M. David

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*The liturgy for today's service was written or adapted by UCC Worship Ways,
Catholic Health Association of U.S., www.umcdiscipleship.org, Steve Garnaas-Holmes at <https://unfoldinglight.net>, 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, Robert Shepherd, Keith Dennis, Jo Ann Jellison
Ushers: Shakti Subramanian

PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER

Members

Family & Friends in the recent death of Reverend Jerry Rhyne
Christopher & Akeera Czarnecki and family in the recent death of Chris'
grandmother, Domenica Haegele

Kathy Habel and family in the recent death of her husband, Tom Habel
Lee Brigman, Linda Carver, Kevin Decker, Linn Finger, Jim Humphrey, Kat Kerce,
Sharon Landis, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Alice Phelan & Sally Young, Cynthia Simpson,
Isabelle Reedy Powell, Ed & Beth Sharp, Anita Taylor, Cathy & Jay Whitley

Friends & Family Members

Beth, Michael & Julian Bliss (Robert Shepherd), Melissa Brown, Gretchen Calder
(Martha Bomely), Craig Chrismon (Melissa Noll), Debbie Coble (Cindy Coble), Pam
Culp & Pam McGill (Melissa Noll), George Miner (Eric Miner), Francesca Czarnecki
(Christopher Czarnecki), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Charles
Jernigan (Lee Brigman), Dave Johnson, Judah L. Jones & Bill Englebreth, Richard
Lease (Barb Schneller), Joe Parks (Beth Sharp), Mike Santino (Melissa Noll),
Michelle Sharp (Beth & Ed Sharp), 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.

OUR MINISTRY TEAM

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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/>

COVID cases within our congregation and community continue. We encourage those attending worship with us to consider wearing a mask should you feel more comfortable while worshipping with us. We know fellowship after worship is an important and meaningful time for our church community, so we have resumed our fellowship time.

*The Church office will be closed
Monday, September 2, 2024 in observance of the Labor Day holiday.*

RSVP FOR SEPTEMBER 8! GUEST PREACHER AND AUTHOR GREG JARRELL

Join us Sunday, September 8, when our guest Greg Jarrell will preach during service and afterward give a talk on his new book. This will be an action-packed day, so we're planning a catered lunch. You can help by completing the RSVP form at your earliest convenience so we know how best to prepare.

RSVP: <https://forms.gle/Lq95dGEWYfXJe5xB8>

Greg Jarrell is an author and community organizer in Charlotte. His book [Our Trespasses: White Churches and the Taking of American Neighborhoods](#), examines the influence of white churches and Christians in planning, executing, and profiting from the federal Urban Renewal projects of the 1950s and 60s, in Charlotte and beyond. Greg is Senior Campaign Organizer for The Redress Movement, a national nonprofit organizing local communities for housing justice. He is one of the co-founders of QC Family Tree, a cultural organizing group in his neighborhood, and a founding organizer of Charlotte's West Side Community Land Trust. Greg will bring copies of book to sell and sign. You can get the book now at Park Road Books (reserve a copy by calling 704-525-0293), at publisher fortresspress.com, or at Amazon.

Can you help us with set-up or clean-up? For questions, information, or to volunteer, contact Holly Middleton at hsmiddleton@gmail.com.



SOJOURNERS CLASS

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

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89561758099?pwd=d1gvUmh3K2hCNmdidm1QdjllNkF5QT09>

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[HolyCovenantUCC.org/give-2/](https://www.holy covenantucc.org/give-2/)

Mailing a check, from home or a financial institution? Please use this secure address: **Holy Covenant UCC, PO Box 481285, Charlotte NC 28269**

Questions can be directed to the church office, office@holycovenantucc.org or 704-599-9810.



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>.**

FELLOWSHIP HOUR HOSTS NEEDED

Please sign up in the gathering room for light refreshments after worship on Sundays, plus set-up and clean-up.

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C44ACAD23A2FE3-sunday1#/>

