



Unsplash Photo by Oladimeji Odunsi

**“We’re all connected in this struggle for justice,
and we must lift one another up in love.”
– Tanara Burke**

**“Justice is not just a concept; it is the action of love in the world.”
– Miriam K. Taylor**

**“I have learned that love, not fear, is the path to justice.”
– Barack Obama**

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
SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY - BLACK HISTORY MONTH

February 23, 2025, 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 "Soon and Very Soon" arr. J. Carter
Patrick Washburn, Jon Weddell, piano duet

Welcome and Announcements Rev. Christopher Czarnecki
One: May the peace of Christ be with you.
Many: **And also with you.**

Chiming of the Hour

Choral Introit "Yonder Come Day" arr. J. C. Tucker
(Georgia Sea Islands)

*Yonder come day, day is a breakin'
Yonder come day, O my soul
Yonder come day, day is a breakin'
Sun is arisin' in my soul.*

* Call to the Heart Jackie Freeze

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

One: We gather in the presence of the God who calls us to love, not just our friends, but even our enemies.

Many: **We come, seeking the courage to love as Christ has.**

One: Through the centuries, our ancestors faced hatred with dignity, oppression with resilience, and violence with a vision for justice.

Many: **We remember those who marched, preached, resisted, and dreamed, calling this nation to live up to its highest ideals.**

One: Yet history also holds those who opposed justice, those who stood in the way of Black freedom, those who denied the image of God in all people.

Many: **Still, love remains our guide. Love, even in the face of pain and hatred, is our calling.**

One: So today, we worship the God of justice and mercy, the One who strengthens our resolve and expands our heart.

Many: **Come, let us worship the God who calls us to love boldly, even as we work for justice.**

* Hymn 454

“Lord, I Want to Be a Christian”

SPIRITUAL

Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart, in my heart;

Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart.

In my heart, (*in my heart*), in my heart (*in my heart*).

Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart.

Lord, I want to be more loving...

Lord, I want to be more holy...

Lord, I want to be like Jesus...

Affirmation

Yourself: I am an expression of God’s love in the world.

Neighbor: You are an expression of God’s love in the world.

World: We are an expression of God’s love in the world.

Prayer of Transformation (*unison*)

Jackie Freeze

Join me in prayer as we confess the ways we seek to be changed and transformed...

Merciful God, we confess that loving our enemies does not come easily. We hold the weight of injustice, the wounds of history, and the pain of the present, and at times, we would rather cling to our comfort than open our hearts. Forgive us when we forget that love is not passive but powerful, that it demands truth, accountability, and the courage to seek justice. Teach us to love as you love, so that we might be part of your healing in the world. Amen.

Song of Response

LET US BREAK BREAD

When I fall on my knees, with my face to the rising sun,

My God, have mercy on me.

Words of Grace

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

God’s love is not fragile, nor is God’s grace reserved for the perfect. Across generations, our ancestors have witnessed a love that liberates, a grace that renews, and a mercy that does not run dry. In Jesus, we see that love is fierce, justice is holy, and reconciliation is possible. So, may we hear and believe that we are forgiven and called to love boldly. Amen.

Song of Response

GLORY TO GOD

**Glory to God, whose goodness shines on me,
And to the Christ, whose grace has pardoned me,
And to the Spirit, whose love has set me free.
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. Amen.**

**World without end, without end, Amen. (3x)
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. Amen.**

Black Christian History Moment

Kristin Andes

During each Sunday of Black History Month, we will recognize someone of African American descent who has contributed to the theology and breadth of the Christian faith. Today we will hear about some of the history of Black leadership in the United Church of Christ.

Song

“I Love the Lord”

R. Smallwood

**I love the Lord, who heard my cry and pitied every groan.
Long as I live and troubles rise, I'll hasten to God's throne.**

**I love the Lord, who heard my cry and chased my grief away.
O let my heart no more despair while I have breath to pray.**

Stories for All People

Rev. Christopher Czarnecki

Song

“Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying”

K. Medema

**Lord, listen to your children praying.
Lord, send your Spirit in this place.
Lord, listen to your children praying.
Send us love, send us power, send us grace.**

Responsive Litany

Lloyd Spencer

One: As we join in prayer today, we remember that God's love calls us to act for justice, peace, and healing in the world. We come with hearts burdened by struggles but know that love will guide us through.

Many: **Let love transform our hearts, our communities, and the world.**

One: We pray for our country, that we may work toward unity, equality, and justice for all people. May we challenge systems of oppression and be the hands of justice in places where we work and live.

Many: **Let love transform our hearts, our communities, and the world.**

One: We pray for migrants and refugees, seeking sanctuary and refuge, free from deportation. May they find open arms and hearts in a world that too often turns them away.

Many: **Let love transform our hearts, our communities, and the world.**

One: We pray for the unhoused, those forced to the streets, those facing hunger and poverty. May their dignity be restored, and may we seek solutions that honor their humanity.

Many: **Let love transform our hearts, our communities, and our world.**

One: We pray for those struggling with addiction, for those who feel trapped in cycles of pain and sorrow. May they find paths of healing and support in their journey toward wholeness.

Many: **Let love transform our hearts, our communities, and our world.**

One: We pray for the long-embedded wounds of our racist history, that we may face the truth of our past and work toward genuine reconciliation and justice.

Many: **Let love transform our hearts, our communities, and our world.**

One: We pray for the trans and LGBTQ+ community, that they may feel the embrace of love and acceptance, and that our world may grow more inclusive and just.

Many: **Let love transform our hearts, our communities, and our world.**

One: We pray for those grieving the loss of a loved one, that they may know comfort in their sorrow and find peace in the hope of resurrection.

Many: **Let love transform our hearts, our communities, and our world.**

One: We pray for the places of war and conflict, for those who are suffering in violence and displacement. May God's peace reign and restore wholeness in broken nations.

Many: **Let love transform our hearts, our communities, and our world.**

One: We pray for our Earth, that we may care for it as the sacred gift it is, protecting its beauty and resources for generations to come.

Many: **Let love transform our hearts, our communities, and our world.**

One: May we be faithful to the work of justice, the work of love, and the work of peace.

Many: Let love transform our hearts, our communities, and our world.

One: God, hear our prayers, and in your mercy, guide our steps.

Many: Amen.

Prayer for Illumination (*sung*)

RAIN DOWN

Rain down, rain down, rain down your love on your people.

Rain down, rain down, rain down your love, God of life.

Modern Lesson

D Evans

Our Modern Lesson for today is a poem titled "Interrupted" from Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ...

* Gospel Lesson

Luke 6:27-38 (NRSV)

Jackie Freeze

Our Scripture Lesson for today comes from the Gospel of Luke 6:27-38, where Jesus speaks of love for enemies...

But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive payment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap, for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.

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 Kind of Love that Changes You”

Invitation to Generosity

Jackie Freeze

Throughout history, those who have fought for justice have given their time, their strength, and their resources to build a better world. Today, as we give, we join in that long tradition of sacrificial love, love that resists oppression and works for liberation. Our offering supports the mission of Christ to bring justice, healing, and equality to all people. Let us give generously, knowing our gifts continue this sacred work.

Offertory Anthem

“Soon and Very Soon”

arr. J. Schrader

* Doxology

THANK YOU LORD

Thank you, Lord. (3x) I just want to thank you, Lord.

* Prayer of Dedication (*unison*)

Jackie Freeze

Please join me in a prayer of dedication for the gifts we have received...

Gracious God, we offer these gifts as a sign of our commitment to your work in the world. Bless these resources, that they may bring healing where there is hurt, hope where there is despair, and justice where there is oppression. We dedicate these offerings to the work of loving our enemies and standing for justice, so they may empower us to build a community where all are valued and free. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

* 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

AMEN SIAKUDUMISA (South Africa)

Amen, siakudumisa! Amen, siakudumisa!
Amen, bawo. Amen, bawo. Amen, siakudumisa!
(*Translation: Amen, we praise your name, O God.*)

Postlude

“Lord, I Want to Be a Christian”

arr. J. Carter

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The liturgy for today’s service was written by 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, Laura Hankins, Jo Ann Jellison

Ushers: Shakti Subramanian Greeters:

Refreshments: Hospitality Team

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/>

CHECK OUT OUR ONLINE CALENDAR AT holycovenantucc.org/events/

SEE THE E-NEWSLETTER FOR ABUNDANT LIFE WEBINAR SERIES BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE NORTH CAROLINA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

RELATIONAL WELLNESS EVENT TODAY

Join us following worship for the continuing conversation and fun activities as we explore the dimension of Relational Wellness and how we connect with others. We will meet in the Gathering Room after worship at 12:30pm and will last approximately 1 hour to 1.5 hours. Childcare and light food and beverages for all ages will be provided.

DROP IN BLANKET PARTY, AT HCUCC, TUESDAY, FEB. 25

Join the Project Linus Blanketeers in a drop-in day, Tuesday, February 25, from 9am-3pm at Holy Covenant UCC! All are welcome. Materials and tools provided. Let's make some blankets for children needing a little comfort by providing them with blankets made with love. No sewing skills needed!

BAGGED LUNCH BUILD, MARCH 9

No experience needed! We are making 100 bagged lunches for the Giles Center on March 9. This center is affiliated with A Roof Above and provides overnight shelter (and bags lunches) for homeless men. Stay after the worship service and join us!

SOJOURNERS CLASS BEGINS NEW STUDY, MARCH 9

Sunday, March 9, we will begin a book study of *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem* by Marcus Borg and John Crossan. Amazon has only an "acceptable" paperback plus hardback copies. Another good source is [thriftbooks.com](https://www.thriftbooks.com) where you will find "good: and "very good" paperback copies as well as less expensive hardback copies.

Hope you can join us either in person or via Zoom—no preparation necessary.

UCC CLIMATE HOPE ART CONTEST HAPPENING NOW

Entries should be turned in the first week of March. See Jo Ann Jellison for details.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER

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

Members

Linda Carver, Liz Colton, Kevin Decker, Jim & Faye Humphrey, Sharon Landis, Sue & Bill Pascucci, Isabelle Reedy Powell, Beth Sharp, Anita Taylor, Darline Warren

Friends & Family Members

Beth, Michael & Julian Bliss (Robert Shepherd), Melissa Brown, Reva Dixon, Kim Dixon VanFleet (Diane Neese), Jeanne Hord (Diane Neese), Pam McGill & Pam Culp (Melissa Noll), Cindy Hedrick (Barb Schneller), Henry Hildebrand (Bill & Connie Hildebrand), Charles Jernigan (Lee Parrish), Dave Johnson, Richard Lease (Barb Schneller), Earl & Susie Morgan (Ed Vickery), Larry & Karen Roark (Ed Vickery), Michelle Sharp (Beth Sharp), Janet Wakefield (Linda Burby), Brian Weddell (Jon Weddell), Kim Wiggs-Gamblin, Scott Whitley (Jay Whitley), John Zastrow (Barb Schneller)

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