

ORDER OF SERVICE FOR SUNDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2021  
NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST / CREATION TIME 4 / WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY

*Due to copyright limitations, we are unable to print the words to the songs. However, our musicians have chosen music to fit the scriptures. We invite you to look up the words in your worship book and ponder them. If you do not have a worship book, ponder the words to one of your favourite hymns and listen for God's voice. Those who have internet may find the songs on YouTube.*

**QUOTE OF THE WEEK:**

*The solution to alone-ness is not more solitude, but companionship and community.*  
~Robert Fulghum

**BEFORE WE WORSHIP, WE REFLECT...**

*In many contexts, today's gospel is approached with trepidation. Listeners have been stung by its words before. Unfair conclusions have been drawn. Unhelpful sermons have been preached. From the introduction to the ELCA social statement "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" (2009): "As justified and forgiven sinners, our efforts to create trust are in response to God's faithful (trustworthy) relationship of love for the world in Christ. We are called therefore to be trustworthy in our human sexuality and to build social institutions and practices where trust and trustworthy relationships can thrive" (p. 2).*

*The United Church affirms that gender and sexuality are gifts of God, and that all persons are made in the image of God. We welcome into full membership and ministry people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. The United Church is opposed to discrimination against any person on any basis by which a person is devalued ("Commitment to Inclusion" on United Church Commons).*

*We cannot view the scene from Mark's gospel with only our modern understanding of the role and place of children in society. The life of many children in North America is one of relative privilege, with carefree days in which they often experience the care and love of grown-ups. Jesus, by bringing the children to him, identifies himself with those who were among the most vulnerable and helpless in society. In ancient times, children often were treated like property. They had few protections from those who would treat them badly. But Jesus came into the world for ones such as these children. Who, in our communities, is in the place of the children of ancient times? As Christ's church, do we provide a place of welcome and care for the most vulnerable and weak in our society?*

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

God, as a gentle rain soaks the earth,  
**may your peace and love fall upon us, bringing growth and life.**

Soak into our innermost being.

**Quiet all that makes us anxious.**

Help us to linger in your presence,

**and send us out refreshed, to carry your peace to others. Thanks be to God!**

**CHILDREN'S SONG** *Jesus Loves The Little Children*

**CENTERING PRAYER** (from *Parables, Prayers, and Promises: Daily Devotions on Jesus* (UCPH, 2016))

Thank you, Jesus, for the opportunity to remember you in the ordinary things of our lives. When we eat our daily bread, rice, tortilla, or potato, we remember how you shared what you had with your friends, breaking yourself open. When we drink from the fruits of our harvest, we are reminded of how you continually bless us with your teachings; our chipped and well-used cups overflow. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

**A NEW CREED**

We are not alone; we live in God's world.

We believe in God: who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church: to celebrate God's presence, to live with respect in Creation, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

## **CHILDREN'S CHAT**

Way back when, people wrote letters if they wanted to share information with each other. Then the telephone was invented. People could talk to each other from opposite sides of the country! After that, computers and the internet were invented. Now, you could get a message out to the whole world at the same time!! Wow!

Way back when, God chose certain people to tell people what God wanted them to know. These people were called prophets. They told people about how much God loved them, forgave them, desired a relationship with them.

Then, Jesus was born, God in person, and it was Jesus who not only told the people that God loved them and forgave them, Jesus hugged people, touched the sick, held children, had lunch with those the rest of society did not want to be near.

Now, Jesus has given us the task of sharing our faith and God's love with others. If we all share the Good News of Jesus love for us, then, hopefully, no one will feel left out and lost. Every time kindness is given, a person respected, love shared, Jesus' message is being proclaimed, and, hopefully, heard.

## **MINUTE FOR MISSION**

### **Your Support Is There When Disaster Strikes**

When emergencies strike, people need help right away. First with the basics—shelter, food, clothing—and then with rebuilding. Increasingly, people around the world are facing a variety of disasters. Climate change, health crises, food insecurity, and violent conflicts that forcibly displace thousands are just some of the catastrophes that affect millions of people every day.

The United Church is part of a worldwide network that makes a difference in the lives of those most at risk. United Church partners and ecumenical relationships in over 120 countries mean that we are on the ground ready to help in times of emergencies.

Recently, generous supporters have helped people struggling as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the devastating explosion in Beirut, and the earthquake in Haiti. From vaccines to hygiene kits to food to farm implements, your support is there when it is needed most. In return, our partners minister to us in a variety of ways, including spiritually.

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines, a Mission & Service partner, shares this prayer with us:

Most gracious and merciful God, amidst the din of howling winds above the noise of rampaging waves atop the earthquakes and the shaking of the earth we hear your voice: "Be still and know that I am God."

Yes, even in times when we are prone not to be still, at moments when we are sorely tempted to resort to flight, we hear you and we pause to listen and to reflect, to stand still and recognize that indeed you are the God who is with us, that it is not in the wind or waves or in the earth's tremors that you speak, and that even when we walk through the shadow of the valley of death, that we are not alone that even when we are put in the crucible of a fiery furnace, that you are there to save.

In times like these, you speak to reassure us through that still, small voice through the concrete acts of solidarity of partners and friends through those who lovingly stretched out their helping hands to those ravaged by the storm to those who are desolate and in despair to those who are left with a threadbare of hope.

In times like these you assure us that we are not alone; that we have sisters and brothers who are moved to walk the lonesome valley with us. We thank you, for in times like these, your love and care are made more manifest and incarnate, made alive in concrete deeds of lovingkindness and compassion. To you we return all glory and praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thank you for giving generously through Mission & Service.

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

Gracious God, we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from your mouth. Make us hungry for this heavenly food, that it may nourish us today in ways of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. Amen.

### **READINGS AND PSALM**

#### **First Reading: Genesis 2:18-24**

*Genesis 2 stresses that people are not meant to live in isolation but in relationship. Out of love for humanity, God creates them male and female, to provide companionship for each other and to become with each other “one flesh.” The Hebrew words used here are ish (man) and ishshah (woman).*

<sup>18</sup>The LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” <sup>19</sup>So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup>The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. <sup>21</sup>So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup>And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup>Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
this one shall be called Woman,  
for out of Man this one was taken.”

<sup>24</sup>Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

#### **Psalm 8**

**R: You crown us with glory and honor.** (Ps. 8:5)

<sup>1</sup>O LORD our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!—

<sup>2</sup>**you whose glory is chanted above the heavens out of the mouths of infants and children;  
you have set up a fortress against your enemies, to silence the foe and avenger.**

<sup>3</sup>When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,

<sup>4</sup>**what are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them,  
human beings that you should care for them? R**

<sup>5</sup>Yet you have made them little less than divine; with glory and honor you crown them.

<sup>6</sup>**You have made them rule over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet:**

<sup>7</sup>all I flocks and cattle,  
even the wild beasts I of the field,  
<sup>8</sup>**the birds of the air, the fish I of the sea,  
and whatever passes along the paths I of the sea.**

<sup>9</sup>O I LORD our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in I all the earth! R

#### **Second Reading: Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12**

*Quoting from the psalms, this passage from Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus, the one through whom God created everything and who sits at God’s right hand, is also the one who experienced human suffering and death in order to blaze the path of salvation for us.*

<sup>1</sup>Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. <sup>3</sup>He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand

of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup>having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

<sup>2:5</sup>Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. <sup>6</sup>But someone has testified somewhere,

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them?

<sup>7</sup>You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, <sup>8</sup>subjecting all things under their feet.”

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them,<sup>9</sup>but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

<sup>10</sup>It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. <sup>11</sup>For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, <sup>12</sup>saying, “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”

### **Gospel: Mark 10:2-16**

*Jesus announced and enacted in history the new reality of God's surprising activity. These two stories demonstrate this new reality: Women and children are accepted and valued, not dismissed as inferior to adult men.*

<sup>2</sup>Some Pharisees came, and to test [Jesus] they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” <sup>3</sup>He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” <sup>4</sup>They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” <sup>5</sup>But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. <sup>6</sup>But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ <sup>7</sup>‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, <sup>8</sup>and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. <sup>9</sup>Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

<sup>10</sup>Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. <sup>11</sup>He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; <sup>12</sup>and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

<sup>13</sup>People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. <sup>14</sup>But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. <sup>15</sup>Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” <sup>16</sup>And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

### **SERMON:**

This text from Mark is not about God's law, it is about God's love. It is more a commentary on marriage than on divorce.

There are still places on this planet where women have no status at all. In 1<sup>st</sup> century Judah, a woman was not a person; a woman was the property of her father. Marriage in the ancient world, at least among the vast majority of social classes, was primarily a means of ensuring families' economic stability and social privileges by creating both offspring and inter-family alliances. Marriage was a legal contract of the transfer of property from a father to a husband. A woman's sexuality was understood to be under the control of her father and then her husband. Lest you think humanity has advanced tremendously from this mindset and legalese, I remind you that it wasn't until October 18, 1929, that women were finally declared "persons" under Canadian law.

In the Jewish culture, only men could initiate divorce for seemingly any reason, although adultery appeared to be the biggest motivator. This left the wife, and any children, vulnerable, often homeless and poverty stricken. Jesus implies that adultery involves more than violating the property rights of another man. It concerns accountability to a partner, just as marriage does. So when the Pharisees come to “test” Jesus to see how well he knows Mosaic law, Jesus turns aside the question of law and addresses the relationship between God and human beings instead.

God creates the woman as a helper, a companion for the man in the Genesis text. God recognizes that it is not good for a person to be alone. When two come together in a relationship there is an understanding of dependence. Each will support the other, respect the other, work together to keep the relationship strong. God’s blessing indicates that God is part of the relationship. Jesus’ words, while they sound harsh, focus on the intent of marriage to be a relationship of mutual trust and faithfulness, just as God is faithful and trustworthy in relationship with each of us. Marriage is not about “me” or “us”. Marriage is about “we”, the two spouses and God. What does God desire for this relationship, and how can the partners best live out this calling?

I would like to believe that on the day of their wedding, couples have the intent to stay married for life. Yet there is more to marriage than the couple. There is the family in which each was raised and any trauma or issues that accompany that. There is the coming together of two personalities, two sets of convictions, a challenge of loyalties; two family circles that can either improve or impede the marriage relationship. It is enough to make one consider celibacy and solitude!

Yet for all the struggles and the work, Jesus is stating that the effort is worth it. It is worth being faithful, helpful, respectful and compassionate. We grow, change, get stronger through learning to step outside ourselves. We may have our corners rubbed off, and that can be a good thing! Jesus is advocating for working on the “we” relationship. God is always present, always faithful, always loving.

What do we do, then, when a marriage fails?

Keep holding on to and trusting God. Sometimes, depending upon the situation, divorce is the best of unhappy options. Thankfully, we are in a relationship with a God who remains faithful in helping us walk through the pain into healing.

And then suddenly we are observing Jesus getting indignant with his disciples over forbidding the children to come to him. Pardon me while I take a moment to recover from whiplash! Why does the lectionary throw these two stories together? What do they possibly have in common with each other?

Professor Mark Hoffman writes,

*“Welcome the kingdom like you would welcome a child.” Why is this significant? In the culture of Jesus’ time where honor and shame were decisive factors in determining behavior, people would be very eager to welcome someone of high status whose company could increase one’s own honor. Children, however, were of very low status. There was no perceptible value in hosting a banquet for a child. (Birthday parties for children are a quite modern invention.) So when Jesus says that the reception of God’s dominion is like embracing a child, he is asserting again that God is not experienced in power but in weakness. Entering God’s dominion is not a way to become first or great but a way to identify with the least and to serve simply for Jesus’ sake.<sup>1</sup>*

God is always on the side of the poor, oppressed and the vulnerable. A married woman and any children were at the mercy of the husband who, if he decided he wanted to be with someone else, could dismiss his family for the sake of lust, power or prestige. Jesus reminds his disciples that God places the vulnerable at the top of the list for ministry and care, and so should we.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-27-2/commentary-on-mark-102-16->

Divorce happens. Rather than shame and blame people, it is far more constructive to listen, learn, forgive and ask for forgiveness. A marriage may end, our relationship with God does not. It is that relationship that enlightens us, guides us, heals us and fills us with hope.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

### ***HYMN OF THE MONTH MV 217 Hey Ney Yana***

#### **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Made children and heirs of God's promise, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

Holy One, you have raised up faithful leaders throughout history. Empower those discerning a call to ministry and all seminarians, that they continue to be formed for the sake of the gospel.

Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

You have established a diverse and beautiful creation. Grant us the wisdom and the will to revive declining species and preserve endangered lands. Cultivate in us a sense of wonder for the world you created.

Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

You desire for us not to be alone and to live in community with one another. Strengthen relationships between nations and peoples, that we celebrate and support one human family.

Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

You share in our experiences and struggles. Bless all who live with any mental or physical disability. Inspire creative communities, spaces, and environments that are accessible and hospitable.

Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

You have established and nurtured relationships that extend beyond those gathered here today. Bless members who can no longer travel to worship with us and remind us of their continued role in this community of faith.

Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are struggling with cancer, dementia, or any other disease. Provide them with peace and resilience for the days ahead. We bring before you Carolyn & Douglas, Mike Froese, Dwayne and Tracy Skoglund. We pray for those healing from accidents and other forms of trauma. We hold up to you, gracious God, Kathryn [Janke] Schmidt, Brooke Alexiuk and Matthew Grossman. We pray for couples who must live apart. Grant patience and strength to Lorraine & Walter Pokrant.

Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

You promise eternal life to all your children. Thank you for the people of faith who have gone before us. Strengthen our trust we have in you.

Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Receive these prayers, O God, and those in our hearts known only to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

#### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**SENDING SONG** VU 602 *Blest Be The Tie That Binds*

#### **BENEDICTION**

People of God, you are Christ's body, bringing new life to a suffering world.

The holy Trinity, ☩ one God, bless you now and forever.

**Amen.**

***DISMISSAL***

Go in peace. The living Word dwells in you.

**Thanks be to God!**

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