

United Church of Christ, First Congregational
Norwich, New York
June 21, 2020
Celebrate Diversity – Discover Unity

CHIMING OF THE HOUR

PRELUDE: “No One is Alone” from *Into the Woods*
Meena Conant, voice

By Stephen Sondheim

No one here to guide you
Now you're on your own
Only me beside you
Still you're not alone
No one is alone, truly, no one is alone
Sometimes people leave you
Halfway through the wood
Others may deceive you
You decide what's good
You decide alone, but no one is alone
People make mistakes, fathers mothers
People make mistakes
Holding to their own
Thinking they're alone
Honor their mistakes everybody makes
One another's terrible mistakes
Witches can be right, giants can be good
You decide what's right, you decide what's good
Just remember Someone is on your side
Someone else is not
While you're seeing your side Maybe you forgot
They are not alone No one is alone
Hard to see the light now Just don't let it go
Things will come out right now
We can make it so
Someone is on your side
No one is alone.

WELCOME (Brad Morrison)

ANNOUNCEMENTS (Judy Smith)

PRAYER OF THE DAY (Ericka Tyler)

Gracious God, you love all that you have created, and you celebrate the diversity of your creation. Throughout your history with your people, you have reminded us that those whom the world sees as the least are the greatest in your eyes. We ask that you give us the grace to celebrate with our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender family as they choose to live authentically in the world. Teach us to honor and celebrate their gifts and help us to create a world in which individuals who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender are loved, accepted, and celebrated. We ask this in your many names. Amen.

CALL TO WORSHIP (Mary Williams and Jason Handy)

ONE: We are grateful for the gift of our lives and the gift of other people in our lives.

ALL: Each of us is created with dignity and worth.

ONE: We are called to love one another and to do nothing to others that we would find hateful to ourselves.

ALL: We honor the many ways that people live and love.

ONE: Our common life is enriched when people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender can live and learn without fear in their homes and communities.

ALL: True justice flourishes when all people can live with authenticity and integrity.

ONE: We repent of our silence in the face of cruelty in our homes and communities. Our silence leads to death.

ALL: We weep at this senseless loss of life.

ONE: We suffer when people who are LGBTQ+ are oppressed, excluded, and shamed by those who overlook the fundamental call to justice in our scriptures.

ALL: Love does not exclude. We are all worthy.

ONE: May we work to build a world where all people, no matter their perceived differences, are celebrated and loved.

ALL: Please God, help us celebrate sexual and gender diversity as your blessing that enriches us all. Amen.

HYMN *Help Us Accept Each Other*
UCC Choir Members and Friends
Bob Oehme, organ

Tune: AURELIA

CONGREGATIONAL GREETING OF PEACE

ONE: May the peace of Christ be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

SCRIPTURE (Meena Conant)

Genesis 18: 1-15

¹ The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. ² Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. ³ He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵ Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." ⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread." ⁷ Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸ He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. ⁹ "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. ¹⁰ Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. ¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?" ¹³ Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son." ¹⁵ Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

ANTHEM – *In the House of God*
UCC Choir (recorded 09/09/18)

by Craig Courtney

In the house of God, you will find a place
in the warm embrace of an open door,

In the house of God, leave the past behind,
come inside and find what you're longing for.

In the house of God, solace can be found,
comfort will surround the bruised and broken,

In the house of God, children live in peace,
war and hatred cease and love is spoken,
in the house of God, in the house of God.

In the house of God, you will find a place
in the warm embrace of an open door,

In the house of God, leave the past behind,
come inside and find what you're longing for,

In the house of God, pardoned from all sin,
free from what has been, life can start again,

In the house of God, prodigals come home,
no one walks alone, come and enter in,
in the house of God, in the house of God,
in the house of God.

SCRIPTURE (Ericka Tyler)

Matthew 22: 34-40

³⁴ Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

TESTIMONIALS

Beth Garry
Jason Handy
Miranda Hunter
Brad Morrison

CONGRATULATORY REMARKS

Rev. Shernell Edney Stilley, Associate Conference Minister for Congregational Vitality
New York Conference, United Church of Christ

Andy Lang, Executive Director of the Open and Affirming Coalition
United Church of Christ

INTERLUDE - *Hear Our Prayer O God*
Mary Williams, voice

Psalm 134:1
Music by George Whelpton, 1897

PASTORAL PRAYER (Pastor John)

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Cheri Oakley)

CLOSING HYMN *In the Midst of New Dimensions*
UCC Choir Members and Friends
Bob Oehme, organ

Tune: NEW DIMENSIONS

BLESSING (Jason Handy)

POSTLUDE *Singing for Our Lives*
Brad Morrison, voice
Jason Handy, piano

by Holly Near

Singing for Our Lives was written by activist Holly Near in response to the assassination of politician and gay rights advocate Harvey Milk in 1978. On her way to Milk's candlelight vigil following his assassination, Near wrote the lyrics to *Singing for Our Lives*, and they were sung for the first time by the crowd gathered there.

Lyrics

We are a gentle, angry people, and we are singing, singing for our lives.
We are a gentle, angry people, and we are singing, singing for our lives.

We are a land of many colors, and we are singing, singing for our lives.
We are a land of many colors, and we are singing, singing for our lives.

We are gay and straight together, and we are singing, singing for our lives.
We are gay and straight together, and we are singing, singing for our lives.

We are a justice seeking people, and we are singing, singing for our lives.
We are a justice seeking people, and we are singing, singing for our lives.