

United Church of Christ, First Congregational
Norwich, New York
RALLY DAY
September 20, 2020

PRELUDE *Cradle Song From "Eight Duets Opus 39"*

by Rheinhard Gliere

Alyssa Jutting, violin and Allie Rehn, cello and Eloise (age 1)

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS (Linda Oehme, Meena Conant)

CALL TO WORSHIP (Jay, Neil, Kyle Conant)

ONE: God called the people of Israel to be ready to leave slavery in Egypt.
Are you ready for God to lead you into new life?

ALL: Yes, we are ready!

ONE: St. Paul reminds us of Jesus' call to love our neighbors as ourselves.
Are you ready to love one another?

ALL: Yes, we are ready!

ONE: Jesus calls us to work out our differences and find ways to get along.
Are you ready to work together to proclaim the Gospel?

ALL: Yes, we are ready!

ONE: Our psalm calls us to sing a new song to God.
Are you ready to sing praises to God?

ALL: Yes, we are ready!

ALL: Then let us worship God!

OPENING PRAYER (Luci Yantz)

Loving God,
Help us to be patient as we travel the road of life.
Help us to trust you, and love you, and serve you.
We pray in Jesus's name. Amen!

HYMN *Surely No One Can Be Safer*

Linda Sandell, 1855

Elspeth Hunter, Kacie Turnbull, Leona Tyler
Bob Oehme, organ

Transl. The New Century Hymnal, 1994
Tune: TRYGGARE KAN INGEN VARA, Swedish folk melody
Harm. Song Book for Sunday School, 1871

CONFESSION (Elspeth Hunter)

God created us to be whole and healthy people, to live our lives to the fullest, and to bring life to others.
Sometimes we do things that are wrong, and we feel badly about that. We feel like we are being torn apart.
Sometimes we worry about things and get all tied up in knots.
Sometimes we complain and get angry when things don't go the way we want.
But when we say we're sorry, God forgives us
And then sets us free from our sin.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON (Miranda Hunter)

God is loving and forgiving,
ready to give renewed hope and assurance,
ready to give strength and salvation.
Let us celebrate the good news:
We are a forgiven people!
Thanks be to God!

“PASSING” OF THE PEACE (Mary Williams)

Today is Recovenanting Sunday, a time when we come together after a summer filled with a variety of experiences. Most of us haven't seen each other in person for a while. Others among us are new. We have gathered online in the sacred circle of our church family to worship God and to make promises--to God and to each other--about the year of uncertainty that lies ahead. We have confessed our sins and been assured that we are forgiven. Now in joy and freedom as God's forgiven people, let us reach out in friendship to one another, passing the peace of Christ "God be with you" by responding, "And also with you!" (High five)

INTERLUDE *Take Courage Now My Feeble Soul*

John Schopp

Meena Conant, organ

MESSAGE (Linda Oehme)

The first Unit of Whole People of God curriculum is entitled, "Gathering into the Sacred Circle". It's remembering our story. What better time than to remember our story while in Transition and to move forward in looking to what God wants us to become. The whole unit is based on the stories of Exodus and the people who are in them. You will meet 4 very important women in that time who have stories to tell and who are part of Sarah's circle...her sacred circle. Listen to the stories of Sarah, Leah, Dinah and Miriam.

Stories and Blessings from Sarah's Circle

Sarah (Mya Yantz): Hello. My name is Sarah. My husband's name is Abraham. A long, long time ago, God called us to leave the land where we lived and to set out on a journey to a new land. All we had was a promise that God would bless us with many descendants and give us a new land, a promised land, in which to live. We trusted that God would guide us and help us along the way. When we arrived in Canaan, we knew that it was the land that God had promised, but we still had no children.

We were getting old and having children didn't seem possible anymore. Then one day some messengers came, saying that God had sent them to tell us that we were going to have a child. Well, when I heard that I almost split my sides laughing. I know it wasn't polite to laugh, but I couldn't help it, and neither could Abraham. Two old folks like us having a baby? But strange as it may seem, I did become pregnant and we had a son. We decided to call him Isaac, which in the Hebrew language means "laughter." And so it was, that in our last years together, our life was filled with the laughter and fun of Isaac's childhood. I pray that God will bless your community here with the laughter of many children.

Leah (Melodie Posner): I'm Leah. I am married to Jacob, who has four wives. Don't be shocked. We live in a very different time from you, and in our time, it is perfectly acceptable for any man who can afford it to have more than one wife and many children. Jacob has 13 children. But that is not what I want to tell you about. I want to tell you about an event that changed the life of our whole family. It all happened one night when we were on our way back to Jacob's homeland, the land that had been given to his grandparents, Abraham and Sarah. Jacob ran away from home as a teenager, because he tricked and hurt his twin brother, and he was afraid. He fled to Haran and we raised our family there, but now it was time to go back to face his brother and ask for forgiveness for what he did.

Jacob was troubled for days because he was afraid that his brother, Esau, would still be very angry with him. One night he asked us all to go ahead and set up camp because he wanted to stay behind and spend the night alone. He told us later that, from the moment he lay down, he realized that he was not alone. Someone, or something, seemed to be wrestling with him. He wasn't sure whether it was real or a dream. Sometimes he felt as if he was struggling with himself, sometimes he felt as if he was struggling with God. Whatever it was, Jacob struggled all night long and hung on for dear life. He would not let go until the stranger gave him a blessing. Jacob not only received a blessing, but the stranger also gave him a new name, "Israel," which means "the one who struggled with God." Our family is now called "the people of Israel."

The next day, we met Esau and his family. Esau welcomed all of us and forgave Jacob. What a homecoming that was, back in the land that God had given to Abraham and Sarah. And what a big family we were! Abraham and Sarah had many grandchildren and great-grandchildren!

God travelled with us through happy times and our worried times. You can be assured that God will travel with you as well.

Dinah (Gwendolyn Breese): I'm Dinah, daughter of Jacob and Leah. Abraham and Sarah were my great grandparents. Joseph, my half-brother, was our father's favourite child. My brothers were terribly jealous of him, to the point where they wanted to get rid of him. One day when they were out in the fields with the sheep, they took Joseph and sold him to a passing caravan that was on its way to Egypt. Then they told our father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. My poor father! He cried and cried. When they saw our father's grief, my brothers realized what a terrible thing they had done.

In the meantime, Joseph was taken to Egypt. He started as a slave, but with help from God he became an advisor to the king. My brother Joseph, advising the king of Egypt! Incredible! We did not hear about this until many years later, when there was a famine in our land. Some of my brothers went to Egypt to buy food and Joseph saw them there. My brothers didn't recognize Joseph at first, but he told them who he was, and he forgave them for what they had done to him. Joseph persuaded them to bring our whole family to live in Egypt where he could take care of us. I've never seen anything like the reunion between Joseph and our father, Jacob. What a celebration!

That's how the people of Israel came to be living in Egypt. I hope that your community will have great times of reconciliation and celebration like we did.

Miriam (Leona Tyler): My name is Miriam, and I am a descendant of Jacob. A lot of years and generations have passed since Dinah and her family moved to Egypt. The people of Israel flourished and had many children. But over time, some of the Egyptians started to resent their prosperity and forced them to become slaves. By the time I was born, the people of Israel were treated very, very badly. I will never forget when the order came to kill all of our baby boys. My mother and I hid my baby brother, Moses, in the bulrushes at the river's edge. He was found by the princess, who raised him in the palace. The princess hired my mother to look after him, so we were able to tell him who he really was, and the stories of our people.

One day Moses saw a slave driver beating one of our people. Moses became very angry and beat up the slave driver. He knew he would be in big trouble, so he ran away to Midian and we did not see him for a long time. Life was very hard. We had no freedom – only hard, hard work to do. We cried a lot and prayed a lot, asking God to please help us. We wanted to return to the land of our ancestors – the promised land that was given to Abraham and Sarah. And then one day my brother Aaron came running in to tell us that Moses had returned! God had spoken to Moses out in the wilderness and asked him to lead us all out of Egypt.

PARTICIPATION STORY - based on Exodus 12:1-14 (Ericka Tyler)

Moses came back to lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. I'm going to tell you the next part of the story, and I encourage you to participate. As I tell the story, I will sometimes pause and nod. When I do, help me with the chant *"It's time to get ready--let's go!"*

Moses has gone to see the king many times. He has told the king, "God says: Let my people go!" But the king has not let us go. Still Moses continues to tell us, "God loves us. God wants to help us.

It's time to get ready--let's go!

Soon we will be freed from slavery in Egypt. Soon we will be on our way to the promised land and a new life.

It's time to get ready--let's go!

This is what God wants us to do right now: we must gather all of the silver and gold we can find. We must prepare animals, clothing and food for a long journey. We must find a lamb for each family. God will tell us the last things to do just before it's time to go.

It's time to get ready--let's go!

We all believe Moses. We listen to what he says. Every one of Us--mothers, fathers, grandfathers, grandmothers, teens, little children--even babies listen. We hurry home to do what Moses has said.

It's time to get ready--let's go!

We're getting very excited, and a little bit scared.

It's time to get ready--let's go!

Quiet! Moses is giving the final instructions. We cook the lambs that we gathered and have a big meal. We take some of the blood from the lambs and put it outside on the door frames of our houses.

It's time to get ready--let's go!

The women bake bread that is flat because there is no time to let it rise.

It's time to get ready--let's go!

The king is terrified. He calls for Moses and says, "Get out of here!"

It's time to get ready--let's go!

And so, we get up. Moses and Aaron and Miriam say to hurry!

It's time to get ready--let's go!

We all get dressed and put on our best sandals. It is going to be a long, long walk.

It's time to get ready--let's go!

Miriam helps the women pack. Moses and Aaron help the men with loading the donkeys and getting the animals ready.

It's time to get ready--let's go!

As we get ready, we know we will always remember this night. We will tell our children about this night. Our children will tell their children, We will never forget how God helped us! And so, in the middle of the night, we leave our homes. We walk quickly. We walk with Moses out into the desert. As we walk, we feel God's love all around us. God is saying, "I love you. I am with you!"

And to this day, every year the Jewish people eat a special Passover meal of lamb and flat bread. They remember the story of how God saved from slavery in Egypt and give thanks to God.

ANTHEM *Make Your Home in Me*
Leona Tyler

By: Ben Walther piano
Arr: Rick Modlin

DEDICATION OF TEACHERS AND LEADERS (Linda Oehme, Jennifer Mallozzi, Jay and Neil Conant)

ONE: Today we recognize the beginning of the year for the Sunday School, a vital part of our congregation's ministry.

ONE: When children are baptized among us, we promise to love and support them. We need people to help us keep that promise. We need people to love our children with us and to share their time, their energy, and their faith with the children.

ONE: We're excited to accept the call to serve in this way. We're nervous, too. It's a big responsibility. We need the moral and material support of the adults of this congregation, and the patience, questions, acceptance, and enthusiasm of the children and youth. We look forward to learning with them as we share together.

ONE: We're glad there are opportunities for us to learn more about Jesus and about how we can help God love and heal the world. We want to find ways we can share the gifts God has given us. We want to share with you in this church's ministry.

PRAYER (Pastor John):

God, you have called us from our summer wanderings. You have brought us together as newcomers and familiar members, into this community of faith. We are grateful for your promise to lead us, to teach us, and to love us. Help us give each other--child and adult, newcomer and old-timer--an equal place in this part of your family. Help us to be honest with each other, and sensitive to each other's needs and gifts. May we learn from each other, and serve you faithfully in this hurting, wonderful, troubled, and loving world. We ask this in the name of Jesus whose word we treasure and share together:

LORD'S PRAYER (Luci Yantz)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us debts and we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen!

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE (Linda Oehme)

God of all life, you led our faith ancestors across a sea and through a wilderness into the promised land. We thank you for the heritage of song and story that has been passed down to us through the ages.

God of hope and promise, you brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey, a land of new life and new dreams. Help us offer milk, honey and new dreams to all your world.

God of peace, our faith ancestors followed you and Miriam and Moses in the wilderness and, with your help, found a way of living in harmony and cooperation. Help us to teach your way of peace and justice to all.

God of community, you give us families and friends, neighbors and new people so that we may not be alone. Help us open our community to all who need a home.

God of life and fullness, you nurture and tend to us wherever we are. Help us extend your loving kindness and generosity to all, and especially to who are sick, lonely, in prison or afraid.

God, you love us like a parent. You sent Jesus to be our comforter and our friend. Help each of us to find you whenever we seek you, that we may be strengthened, and our hearts may be lifted. Amen and Amen!!!

CLOSING HYMN *Where Charity and Love Prevail*

Latin hymn

Kacie Turnbull, Bonnie Connolly, Ericka Tyler,

Paraphr. by Omer Westendorf, 1961

Jason Handy, Linda Oehme, Bob Oehme

Tune: ST. FLAVIAN

Jason Handy, organ

COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION (Jennifer Mallozzi)

Go and tell the world what you have heard and experienced:

The marvels God has worked in the past,

And the wonderful ways God is with us now.

know that God--the giver of the waters of life--

Will be with you forever.

AMEN!

POSTLUDE *Hymn to Joy*

Beethoven

Bob Oehme, organ

Arr. Albert L. Travis

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