

United Church of Christ, First Congregational
Norwich, New York
June 27, 2021

Celebrate Diversity – Discover Unity

PRELUDE *Safe Within Your Arms*
Meena Conant and Jason Handy

by Mark Hayes

Whether I'm right or whether I'm wrong
whether I'm weak or whether I'm strong,
whether I'm sure or maybe confused,
feeling loved or feeling used:
I know a place where I can go,
somewhere that winter winds don't blow.
There I am warmed by loving arms,
held with care next to your heart.

And I'm safe within your arms, Lord.
I've become a child again.
I've come back to the source of love,
where healing can begin.
Though the word would say I must be strong
and prove my worth by what I do,
I will rest assured in Your embrace
and find my strength in You.

Whether I'm walking in the light
or whether I'm stumbling through the night,
you are a god whose promise endures;
Though undeserved, your love is sure.

When I am tempted to pursue plans
that may lead me far away from You,
gently You call, "My child, come home.
I will never let go of one of my own."

And I'm safe within your arms, Lord.
I've become a child again.
I've come back to the source of love,
where healing can begin.
Though the word would say I must be strong
and prove my worth by what I do,
I will rest assured in Your embrace
and find my strength in You.

WELCOME (Pastor John)

ANNOUNCEMENTS (Linda Oehme)

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 (Jason Handy, Mary Williams)

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.

CHILDREN'S MOMENT (Linda Oehme)

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONGREGATIONAL GREETING OF PEACE

ONE: May the peace of Christ be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

HYMN *In the Midst of New Dimensions* (#391)

Julian Rush, 1985
Tune: NEW DIMENSION
by Julian Rush, 1985

SCRIPTURE (Meena Conant)

Genesis 18:1-15

18 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."

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."

ANTHEM *In the House of God*

Words by Pamela Martin
Music 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.

TESTIMONIALS AND ONA STATEMENT

PRIDE PRAYER (Pastor John)
(a prayer by Alydia Smith for Pride month)

Constant Friend, because

People of every sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity have the right to live with dignity and without persecution or discrimination, we

Remember in our prayers:

LGBTQ+ people of Russia, Uganda, Zambia, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and elsewhere who have been murdered and tortured because of who they are. We remember them and the people who love them.

LGBTQ+ refugees from around the world seeking safety and sanctuary. We remember them and the people who welcome them.

Trans and gender-diverse people in the United States, in Canada, in Brazil, and elsewhere, who are targeted victims of hate crimes and assaults. We remember them and the people who love them.

LGBTQ+ people whose dignity and self-esteem have been eroded by hateful systems and structures. We remember them and seek to be people who love more fully.

Individually, we each uniquely reflect your glory and express your love, but anti-gay violence, homophobia, and transphobia have blocked many from recognizing your beauty in all people. All of creation suffers from the effects of such hate, fear, and violence.

Daily, may we dedicate ourselves to building bridges of love and hope where harmful divisions have been made, making equity and equality for all people our goal, while working continually for justice, so that

Everyone can live fully in your love. Amen.

INTERLUDE – *The Rainbow Connection*
Izze Natoli, piano

by Paul Williams and Kenneth L Ascher
Arr. Nancy and Randall Faber

RECOGNITION OF MEMBERS IN LONG STANDING

Every year on the day of our Annual Meeting in June we honor our long-term members of 40, 45 and 50 and above years of faithful membership.

70 Years Edwin Tucker
69 Years David Hall
65 Years Patricia Whitmore
61 Years Jane Prime
55 Years Allan Sawyer
51 Years Gary Gray
51 Years Victoria Gray
50 Years Joan Griffith

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION (Pastor John)
[A time of silence is kept after each intercession.]

Knowing that God hears our prayers,
and trusting in the Spirit who intercedes with sighs
too deep for words,
let us pray together, saying,
Merciful God, hear our prayer.

Death is all around us, Lord;
the world groans with the weight of it.
Hear our prayers for your warring world. . . .
Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

The rulers of the nations need your wisdom, Lord;
oppression and injustice prevail.
Hear our prayers for the leaders of the world. . . .
Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

The church is divided, Lord;
we fight and splinter.
Hear our prayers for the peace and unity of the church. . . .
Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

Your children suffer, Lord;
they are hungry and can find no rest.
Hear our prayers for those who are poor or have no homes. . . .
Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

We are sick, Lord,
and some of us are dying.
Hear our prayers for healing and peace. . . .
Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

Our hearts are troubled, Lord;
guide us until we find our rest in you.
Hear our secret prayers. . . .
Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

We give you thanks, O God,
for you are faithful and your love never ends.
Gather our prayers and conform them to your will,
we pray in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

BLESSING (Pastor John)
May God our Guardian protect you,
Christ the Healer restore you,
and the Holy Spirit sustain you
this day and forevermore.

POSTLUDE – *Unruly Heart* from *The Prom*
Jason Handy and Brad Morrison

Lyrics by Chad Beguelin
Music by Matthew Sklar

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