

**October 25, 2020**  
**Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Proper 25)**  
**Be the Church**



“But you, speak out for those who cannot speak, and for the rights of those abandoned by others. Speak out, issue decrees, vindicate the rights of the homeless and the hungry.” - Proverbs 21:8-9

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.”  
- Acts 4:32

“We loved with a love that was more than love.” - Edgar Allen Poe

“You are the resurrected body of Jesus when you rise up in love.” - Rev. Jacqui Lewis

“Our challenge today is to stay the course of love in a world that resists love, fears love and rejects the cost of love.” - Fr. Richard Rohr

“We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and, in the process, heal our own – indeed, to embrace the whole creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder.” -Wangari Maathai

“I would like to see the church come to some better understanding of what it means to be an inclusive fellowship, how to more fully exhibit the love of Christ in the world.”  
- The Rt. Rev. Barbara C. Harris

## **ORDER OF WORSHIP**

**PRELUDE:** "Angel's Serenade" G. Braga, *Patty Meyer, piano*

## **GREETING/WELCOME/ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Good morning and welcome! My name is Elisa Lucozzi and I am pastor to the beloved community that is Guilford Community Church. We're so glad you have joined us this morning for the third sermon in our series featuring United Church of Christ themes and slogans.

Although we really miss being together in person, we continue to gather online because we love and care about our congregation and our community, because we want to maintain physical distancing in a way that helps us to feel connected but also keeps us all safe. Although it is hard to be physically distant from one another, we also know that it can't keep our hearts from connecting and we know it is indeed the best way of caring for one another right now. Let us keep creating new ways of being church because we know that being church has nothing to do with a building and everything to do with loving each other. Let us gather to be the church in a new way with a welcome wide enough for all.

### **All Saints/All Souls**

On November 1<sup>st</sup>, All Saints/All Souls, we will be asking for you to offer names and to light a candle for souls we have lost in this last year: family, friends, saints of this congregation or people in our human family we have lost. We will also light special candles to honor the souls lost to the COVID virus and those lost to violence fueled by racism. After worship on Sunday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, I will set up a special zoom meeting to record these tributes for inclusion in our All Saints/All Souls service. If you would like someone to come and record your tribute, please call the office and speak with Patty. You can also mail a photograph of a loved one to the church for inclusion in the video memorial.

Bulb planting for those who have passed over this last year, will happen Sunday November 1<sup>st</sup>, here on the church grounds at 1:00 pm. Please use masks and social distancing to keep each other safe.

### **20 Days of Prayer for Election Season** (see enews for explanation)

So, as we begin today let us acknowledge and honor this land we occupy, by honoring and acknowledging those First Nation people to whom this land belongs:

We gather here on the bank of the Broad Brook  
In the shadow of the great Mount Wantastiquet  
In the valley of the rushing Connecticut  
to worship and discern together the call of God  
to the United Church of Christ for these days,  
let us know that we do so on the hunting grounds  
and homelands of the Mahican and Penacook people,  
as well as the southernmost members of the Abenaki Tribe.  
These people used this land since time immemorial  
and are still among us in the present.  
We offer them our gratitude and respect,  
Our repentance and hope in solidarity with them...

**It is a holy communion we share of life on earth,  
of past and present, of pain and reconciliation,  
of mystery and majesty...let us begin.**

### **LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES & SILENT MEDITATION**

**CALL TO WORSHIP:** by Richard Bott, and posted on **Sharing Liturgy**. <http://liturgy.richardbott.com/>

In a world that cries out, "Fear me!"  
**We will listen to Jesus' words,**  
**"Don't be afraid!"**

In a world that wants us to hate the other...  
**We will live Jesus' call to,**  
**"Love God.**  
**Love your neighbor, as you love yourself."**

In a world that radicalizes...  
**We, too, will be radical.**  
**Radical with our hospitality.**  
**Radical with our hope.**  
**Radical with our love.**

Then come to this place,  
ready to be who we are called to be.  
**Let us gather in spirit and worship God.**

**OPENING HYMN:** #381 "In Christ There Is No East or West"  
words John Oxenba, 1908, music African-American melody, arr. Harry T. Burleigh, 1939  
*Louisa Sullivan Hungate, Terry Sylvester, Patty Meyer, Peter Amidon and Tom Green; Peter Amidon piano*

1. In Christ there is no east or west, in him no south or north;  
 2. In Christ shall true hearts ev - ery - where their high com - mu - nion find;  
 3. Join hands, dis - ci - ples of the faith, what - e'er your race may be;  
 4. In Christ now meet both east and west, in him meet south and north;

but one com - mu - ni - ty of love through - out the whole wide earth.  
 his ser - vice is the gold - en cord close - bind - ing hu - man - kind.  
 all chil - dren of the liv - ing God are sure - ly kin to me.  
 all Christ - ly souls are one in him through - out the whole wide earth.

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION/OPENING PRAYER**

“Love Is the Most Ancient Law, A Blessing”

Open to it  
 and you will know  
 how love is  
 its own blessing  
 and most ancient  
 of laws.

Pursue it  
 entirely  
 with everything  
 in you—  
 your heart  
 (all)  
 your soul  
 (all)  
 your mind  
 (all).

Spend it  
 all—  
 this love  
 so generous  
 this love  
 that goes out  
 to each  
 it finds  
 this love  
 that gives itself  
 in lavish and  
 unimagined measure  
 everywhere and  
 to all—

yourself  
 not least.

**ANTHEM:** "Give Us a Song" by Jonathan Edwards, arr. Peter Amidon  
GCC Virtual Choir, Mary Alice Amidon banjo, Peter Amidon piano

# O Give Us a Song

by Jonathan Edwards

**VERSES 1 & 4**

O give us a song, a song to sing sweet Je - sus, Give us the words you  
7 know to be so kind, Make it as long as the day's work be - fore us,  
13 Give us the tune to teach the peo - ple just in time. *finis*

**CHORUS**

18 Day be - gins, the fields are fil - ling. Wor - kers out to do their share.  
26 Song be - gins, we all are wil - ling, Let me hear his chil - dren e - v'ry - where.

**VERSE 2**

33 You'll ne - ver know how hard I tried to find you, Tra - velled here and  
39 end - ed up out there, De - vil has tried to sing a song of e - vil;  
45 He'll ne - ver know the kind of ma - gic peo - ple share. **To CHORUS**

**VERSE 3**

50 Oh when I am gone, sweet Je - sus take me o - ver; Let me come home and  
56 sing the song a - gain, Lift - ing my heart from the pain of grow - ing ol - der,  
62 Ma - king me feel like life with you will ne - ver end. **To CHORUS**

## **PRAYER OF RECONCILIATION**

One: We say we know love. We declare that we love You. But our actions reveal otherwise.

**Many: We hold onto biases and bigotries, which divide us further from You and our neighbor. For this, we are genuinely sorry. Starting today, may our love for You inspire us to love our neighbors. May our relationship with You urge us to have greater respect for ourselves. Help us to know that we are all connected to all of creation by Your love. Amen.**

## **Moment of Silent Reflection**

### **ASSURANCE OF GRACE**

God's grace is larger than we will ever know. God's mercy extends to the farthest reaches of our universe. Let us embrace this Grace and share it with our neighbors.

**CHILDREN'S STORY:** "Wangari's Trees of Peace" by Jeanette Winter

## **PRAYER FOR THE CHILDREN**

**CHILDREN'S HYMN:** "To Be a Doer of the Word" text: James 1:17-27; adapted by Thomas Cary Kinder 2018, music- Tallis Canon, arr. Peter Amidon, *Bev Langeveld, Patrice Murray, Elizabeth Christie and Mike Mayer; Peter Amidon piano*

**READINGS:** *Helen Merena*

"Letter from Our Better Angels", by Sean Parker Dennison

Dear One,  
We have received your letter  
and we hate to tell you—  
not hate so much, but are a bit afraid to say—  
we cannot grant your requests as stated,  
but can only remind you of familiar things:

First, faith.  
Faith in yourself and trust in others.  
We know it can be terrifying to be  
vulnerable, but only when you  
share your softest side will we be able  
to break through.

Next, hope.  
Hope is not an empty fairy tale.  
It is the true story of all the times  
human beings like you have  
found a way to create the future,  
though you didn't know how.

And of course, Love.  
Love that demands you cherish  
all people, not just yourself and safety.  
Love that is not satisfied until every  
argument ends abruptly when one  
child says, “That hurts.”

There is so much to learn and relearn.  
The world teaches you to be hard,  
to negotiate and defend,  
to avoid giving too much and to the wrong people.  
There are no wrong people.  
You also are not wrong, and when you encounter  
the poor, the broken, the unhoused and unwelcome,  
you are looking, if you pay attention,  
at us, calling to you, calling you to  
answer your own prayers.

If you want to change the world,  
first, be sure you are changing yourself.  
Be tender. Be kind. Be at peace.  
Be all the things you wish for.  
Be your own better self.  
It isn't without cost  
But it will be free.

#### **Matthew 22:34-40**

<sup>34</sup>When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, <sup>35</sup>and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup>“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” <sup>37</sup>He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” <sup>38</sup>This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

**CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: HYMN #617 “Write These Words in our Hearts”**

**SERMON: “Be the Church: The Bottom Line”**

As I mentioned in our introduction today, we are diving into the third slogan in our accidental sermon series on slogans of the United Church of Christ. Today, we talk about what it means to “Be the Church.” As the Holy Spirit would have it, I didn't hand select today's Gospel Scripture. It was the prescribed Gospel reading for this Sunday, and it couldn't be more perfect. More about that later.

I invite you to pray with me – **May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, loving and gracious God.**

The “Be the Church” banner was the brainchild of Marchaé Grair, former Digital Content Manager at United Church of Christ. Of the slogan she writes:

“I wrote “Be the Church” when I was sitting in my office thinking about what being the church means to me. In “plain speak”, I came from a somewhat conservative church, so when I came to the UCC, it also started an important part of my personal faith journey. She continues - I wrote it at a time when I was newly on staff and new to attending a UCC church. So I wanted to explain this new idea of more progressive religion to the average person by saying what I thought church could be—and what in fact I thought UCC churches could be at their best.”

Indeed – what we could be at our best? The pandemic remix of Marchaé’s beautiful vision was actually written on a chalkboard. This chalkboard reminder was created by Julia Roberts, LCSW from St. Paul’s UCC in Ft. Washington, PA, who just so happens to be the spouse of St. Paul’s pastor, Mark Roberts.

I juxtaposed the two banners because, well, we are all trying to figure out how to “be the church”, now that most of us continue to not hold any church activities, including worship inside the church building. So, who are we now? Who are we without the church building? For the answer to that question, I turn to a hymn that doesn’t appear in any UCC hymnal, and sounds to me more like a church camp song, but is a perfect summary. It’s called “We are the Church.” Perhaps you’ve heard it.

*The church is not a building;  
the church is not a steeple;  
the church is not a resting place;  
the church is a people.*

*I am the church! You are the church!  
We are the church together!  
All who follow Jesus,  
all around the world!  
Yes, we're the church together!*

So, if in fact this 1970s hymn has some truth to tell us, then how is it that we are meant to be the church in this time, in our broken yet still beautiful world? It’s tempting from here to go through each of the lines on both banners and unpack a little more about what they mean and how we could enact each of them and “be the church.” It would be all too easy to go line by line and pair it with a headline from the evening news –

“Protect the environment” - all you have to do is look at the wildfires still burning on the west coast, or the hurricanes hitting the gulf coast.

“Care for the Poor” - who got the most out of the “stimulus” monies given out? Who continue to be the frontline workers during this pandemic?

“Reject Racism” - George Floyd, Ahmaud Arberry, Breonna Taylor – still Breonna Taylor, and recently, the rash of BLM signs being stolen from yards in Guilford.

I’m sure you could do the same with the rest.

Instead of focusing on each line, I’m going to take us to the foundation of the church, the bottom line of all of those phrases you see on the banners. The Bottom Line – all of these on both banners are about love. They are rooted and grounded in love. They have love as their foundation. Love is the bottom line.

So, as we continue this journey together, we will learn things about one another. Here’s something you may not know about me. I love board games and despite the fact that I’m terribly bad at them, I love trivia games like Trivial Pursuit.

In our Gospel reading this morning, it seems that Jesus has been invited to trivia night with the Pharisees. Actually, through much of this part of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is being posed questions, most certainly as a way to try and “trip him up” or discredit him. You know, "let's give the savior a pop quiz and see if he passes."

On the surface, the question "Which is the greatest commandment?" doesn't seem like much of a test. But the question about which of the 613 commandments in the Law was the greatest, was hotly debated at the time.

### **Love God**

Jesus doesn’t hesitate – he quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 -the greatest commandment is, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” While I appreciate the quick and concise answer, I also have a question for Jesus. What does that mean? What does it look like to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind? I don’t think a single one of us has a quick and easy answer for that.

Does loving God mean going to church every Sunday? I probably shouldn’t say this, but I don’t think it does. I think this is especially true if we can open ourselves to thinking about the church, not as a place, but as a people.

Perhaps loving God means putting God at the center of your life, making God your true north, for all you mariners out there. Maybe it means that we should pray more. Perhaps loving God means we should follow Jesus’ example.

Even though the Pharisee asked one question of Jesus, he went for the bonus round and shared the second greatest commandment with them ,saying that it was like the first – love your neighbor as yourself.

### **Love yourself**

It always strikes me how we forget the second part of the commandment – love yourself. It is powerful to think that love of ourselves was presumed, otherwise, it wouldn’t have been included. Loving yourself often has some egotistical connotations to it. Someone who “thinks a

lot of themselves” is usually seen as self-centered and narcissistic, but there is a difference between arrogance and self-confidence.

What if we thought of loving ourselves simply as showing compassion toward ourselves. How easily we forget that on the sixth day, God looked over all of creation and declared that it was very good. What if we remembered that we were born of love for the purpose of loving? It reminds me of a quote from the Lebanese poet and writer Kahlil Gibran’s book Broken Wings: “And God said , ‘Love Your Enemy’, and I obeyed him and loved myself.”

### **Love Your neighbor**

Love your neighbor as yourself. There is a lot to unpack there. Just like the first commandment, Jesus was quoting from a book of the Torah – Leviticus to be exact. Biblical scholar, mystic and teacher Cynthia Bourgeault, shed new light on this for me in a way that opened it up to an even deeper meaning. Love your neighbor as yourself isn’t just about loving yourself. In her interpretation, it is about seeing no difference, nothing that separates us from our neighbor. She is talking about the interconnectedness of all things – loving your neighbor as if they were a part of you.

Also, in order to love your neighbor, you first have to know who your neighbor is. So, I’ll ask you, who is your neighbor? Scripture tells us that our neighbor is anyone in need. Well isn’t that all of us on some level? If you follow Cynthia’s interpretation, our neighbor is a part of us and we all need something – food, shelter, a job... love.

We live in a world fraught with things that divide us, where we are leery of anyone we don’t know. We are constantly sizing people up by what they wear, what kind of car they drive, how they speak – are they friend or enemy, stranger or neighbor, in order to feel safer in the world. In a world facing this new reality, infected with a pandemic which keeps us separate from one another, a nation festering with racism, we are more separate than ever.

Even some churches have become deeply divided about whether to begin worshipping in person again, or continue to worship remotely. Debates about wearing masks or not, whether to trust medical science or simply pray for protection from the virus and what is a “safe” activity to engage in and what is not. So much to divide us - how can we possibly love our neighbor? How can we possibly love those who are “other” to us?

Hindu sage and spiritual teacher, Ramana Mashari, was asked “Teacher, how are we to treat others?” Mashari simply replied, “there are no others.”

In this morning’s Gospel, Jesus is countering a notion that love of God and love of neighbor are two parallel but separate spheres of human responsibility. Rather, he shows us that they are mutually interdependent loves. To love God is to love the neighbor. To love the neighbor is to love God. Because to love God is to love the neighbor, we are even empowered to love our enemies. And let me be clear about something – love is an action word.

Jesus has clearly passed his pop quiz on the Torah with flying colors. How will we do on his test? Matthew 25:1-26 shows us what will be on that test. Will we keep our light burning? Will

we invest our talents? Will we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned? In short, will we be the church?

In every answer and in every action of his life, Jesus chose love. By choosing love as his interpretive lens, Jesus echoed the theme of compassion, which is the beating heart at the center of each of the world's major wisdom traditions.

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion compels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the center of our world and put another there, and to honor the sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

It is compassion then that opens our hearts to loving. Love, then, is not only our goal, but also our means of getting there. We are invited to achieve the love of God and neighbor through acts of love. Loving God and loving our neighbor makes us more human. Loving God and loving our neighbor *is* being the church. Jesus ends by adding "On these two commandments hang the law and the prophets." What I hear in that, is that it *all* hinges on love. In everything we do, every word, every interaction, for every question - love is the bottom line. Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:** by Anne M. Osdieck

The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments:

"Love the Lord, your God  
with all your heart  
with all your soul  
and with all  
your mind.

And love your neighbor  
as yourself."

Lord,  
let this be.  
Show us how.

Let your love be  
the lens that lets us see,  
the search that takes us where we go,  
the power that enlivens our lives,  
the light that points to the path,  
and the very grace  
that saves  
us.

O God,  
kindly fill us with your love.

**ANTHEM:** “Psalm 126” by Mary Alice Amidon, arr. Peter Amidon *Cathy Hess, Mary Alice Amidon, Sue Owings, Rachel Johnson, Fred Breunig and Andy Davis; Patty Meyer piano*

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:**

This is the time in our service where I invite your prayers – prayers of concern or sorrow, prayers of celebration and joy. If you have something or someone you would like our gathering to pray for, you can type it into the comments section that accompanies this live feed.

*Julie Peterson and Jack Wesley*

Our prayer today is for all who are victims of cruel laws and petty laws, those who're subjected to prejudice denied opportunities, excluded, pushed to margins. We are called to be the church and show the world that God is love:  
We will love with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength.

**Our prayer today is for all those who're betrayed, who don't know loyalty, who fear to trust, or to love, and who don't realize that they're already loved by you. We are called to be the church and show the world that God is love:  
We will love with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength.**

Our prayer today is for the landless and homeless, the refugee and evicted, those who find themselves in foreign places and strange places.  
We are called to be the church and show the world that God is love:  
We will love with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength.

**Our prayer today is for the overworked and the underpaid, for those in dangerous work and those in compassionate work, for those who long to work but are denied the opportunity. We are called to be the church and show the world that God is love:  
We will love with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength.**

Our prayer today is for the Church, for all the branches of the vine including this one we gather as part of, today:  
body of Christ and people of Christ, who are called to be the church and show the world that God is love: We will love with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength.

**Our prayer today is for the creation gifts, this earth in all its mighty wonder, yet tender fragility, the gifts of life and resources to treasure. We are called to be the church and show the world that God is love: We will love with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength.**

Our prayer today is for those who lie close to our hearts those whom we worry about, those whom we miss, those who carry disproportionate burdens at this time ... (Pause 5 seconds)  
We are called to be the church and show the world that God is love:

We will love with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength.

**Now let us say together the prayer that Jesus taught us using whatever words help us to embody its promise. May we bring about one small glimpse of the (kingdom) of God, a kingdom where all are well, all are fed and free, where all are whole, where all know love, where *all* are beloved.**

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

Let us pray: Our Father, (Our Father/Mother, Our Creator) who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom (kin-dom) come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom (kin-dom) and the power and the glory now and forever. Amen.

**CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE:** Hymn #278 "Hear Our Prayer, Oh Lord"

### **OFFERTORY**

**CALL TO OFFERING:** by Rev. Kayla Bonewell,

Let us "Be the Church" by giving back a portion of what God has entrusted to us. May our sharing of earthly and spiritual resources reflect our love of God. May this treasure help us to protect the environment, care for the poor, forgive often, reject racism, fight for the powerless, embrace diversity, and enjoy this one precious life.

Supporting the church and the mission of the church is more important than ever. You can still send in your weekly offerings to the church via US mail 38 Church Dr. Guilford, VT 05301 or consider using our online "offering plate" by going to the church's website and clicking the Paypal donation button on the home page. So now let us gather up all these offerings as well as the offering of our time and talents and dedicate them to continuing the work of our still speaking God.

### **DOXOLOGY**

#### **PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

One: This is our church

**All: We make it what it is.**

One: Others will feel welcomed

**All: If I am welcoming**

One: It will do a great work

**All: If I work**

One: It will make generous gifts to many causes

**All: If I am a generous giver of my time, talents, and treasure**

One: It will be a sanctuary for social justice and peace

**All: If I advocate for marginalized communities & practice peace in every setting of my life**

One: Therefore, we shall follow in the reconciling ministry of Jesus as an inclusive, justice-seeking community.

All: And I shall dedicate myself to being all the things I want my church to be. Amen.

**CLOSING HYMN:** # 364 “This Little Light of Mine” by Harry Dixon Loes; arr. Peter Amidon  
*GCC Virtual Choir*

## 364 This Little Light of Mine

1. This lit-tle light of mine, (of mine) I'm gon-na let it shine; (Oh \_\_\_)

(of mine) (Oh \_\_\_)

The first system of music features a vocal line in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "1. This lit-tle light of mine, (of mine) I'm gon-na let it shine; (Oh \_\_\_)". The piano part includes the lyrics "(of mine)" and "(Oh \_\_\_)" below the staff.

This lit-tle light of mine, (of mine) I'm gon-na let it shine; (Oh \_\_\_)

The second system of music continues the vocal and piano parts. The lyrics are: "This lit-tle light of mine, (of mine) I'm gon-na let it shine; (Oh \_\_\_)".

This lit-tle light of mine, (of mine) I'm gon-na let it shine;

(of mine)

The third system of music continues the vocal and piano parts. The lyrics are: "This lit-tle light of mine, (of mine) I'm gon-na let it shine;". The piano part includes the lyrics "(of mine)" below the staff.

let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. (oh, let it shine.)

The fourth system of music concludes the piece. The lyrics are: "let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. (oh, let it shine.)".

**BENEDICTION:** by Rev. Michelle L. Torigian

“As we go forward help us to remember that we are your church. We are the body of Christ. We are never alone or and live in holy interdependence. May the God of connections, the Christ of wholeness and the Spirit which energizes us bring us together to make this world a peace-filled place.”

**THREEFOLD AMEN:** Hymn #291

**POSTLUDE:** "Largo" G.F. Handel  
*Piano, Patty Meyer*

**For additional prayer and reflection:**

*How to Be the Church in Quarantine by N. K. Carlson*

For a Just World Podcasts

<https://soundcloud.com/forajustworld>

*This page has educational resources on the justice issue “the church”/UCC is called to address:*

[https://www.ucc.org/justice\\_issues](https://www.ucc.org/justice_issues)