

Faith United Church of Christ

"An inclusive spiritual family shaping a better you for creating a better world.

A place to make a difference."

December 17, 2017

The 3rd Sunday of Advent

Sacred Fellowship 10:45

AM

We are delighted that you are here today! We hope you will find us an affirming, uplifting, and committed family of faith. Here we work to make everyone, without any exceptions, to feel accepted, inspired, and encouraged in their spiritual journey. In dialogue, we seek to understand. In encouragement, we seek to heal. In all things we yearn to live by love, for peace, with joy. This is a place where your intellect will be challenged, your heart will be nurtured, and your spirit refreshed. Varying beliefs are expressed openly and freely, and your doubts will not be suppressed. We trust that we are all, every person and part of creation, continuing to be blessed by God's grace; and that in community we can help each other to see this grace alive in our lives and relationships. We hope to share our gifts with you, even as we pray that you will want to share your gifts with us. Whoever you are and wherever you may be in your life's journey, we invite you to be a part of our lives and our spiritual home. Welcome!

POINTS TO PONDER

"We were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy."

— *Psalm 126.1b-2b*

"To those who have been oppressed and then given a glimpse of liberation, the rejuvenation of spirit is remarkable. Hope that finds its resolution in justice, and faith that finds its fulfillment in peace, invigorates the soul. Where there was once disillusionment are now dreams. Where once was weeping is now laughter. When once the mouth spoke no words of encouragement, now it sings with elation. It is amazing how lives can be revitalized when they are treated justly and regarded as having worth. This is the task of the followers of God – to create justice, and to help others see their own worth."

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 12/12/2017*

"May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves."

— *Psalm 126.5-6*

"Let us be honest: life can sometimes get us down. But in response to the trials and

tribulations that we or others face, the injustices all around, we can either take a position of powerlessness or one of faithful resolve. The former makes us immobile and resigned; the latter active and committed. Granted, we may sow the seeds of justice in tears, knowing full well that the powers that be may swoop down and gobble up our efforts; but to do nothing is to be complicit with those powers. It is the resolve of good people to continue doing what is right, despite all odds, if for no other reason than to testify to the way the world should work. With this vigilance to create justice in the world, things can and do change. Whether they do for us in our lifetime matters less than that we have helped God's will find root. The harvest will come if we will keep on planting. And this assurance is cause for joy. Faith in a just God is trust that the justice will be reaped if fairness is sown, no matter who is in power."

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 12/12/2017*

"God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God's servant."
— *Luke 1.48a*

"To acknowledge moments of grace and blessing not only makes us grateful, but empowers us to hold on to our resolve. Mary was at the lower end of the social ladder, victimized by systemic injustice against her as a Jew and also as a woman. But rather than allowing her disillusionment and outrage get the better of her, she kept her eyes on the prize. Her faith was to hold true to the vision of God's love, peace, and justice to reign upon all the earth – as was told by the prophets. Despite her small standing, she was determined to resist the evils of empire – if not through what she herself could accomplish, then by raising a son in whom she would sow the seeds of resistance and faithfulness. Amazing, is it not, that a woman of such lowly stature could have the sassiness to believe the son in her womb could change the world, not just the household or neighborhood, for the better. God knew that Mary, this young woman so often portrayed as timid and mild, was really a force to be reckoned with – an advocate for justice for all of God's people; an idealistic radical who somehow was steeped in the tradition of the prophets and would audaciously proclaim that God was on the side of the poor and not the side of the rich. God knows we could use a lot more Marys in our own time!"

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 12/12/2017*

"God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty."
— *Luke 1.52-53*

"Mary proclaims the glory of the past as the foreshadowing of the future. Justice once was more evident than now, but justice would reign again. And by projecting the overturning of the powerful and corrupt as a present reality, she set her resolve on doing all she could to make the justice she sought a reality for all. What did Mary teach her child that he would grow up to be a political dissident, a civil rights

provocateur, and one who would stand face to face with the powers that be with a confidence that God would be there with him every step of the way? Mary's values are evident in her 'Magnificat,' a prophetic statement that the world and its values would be upended by the reign of God's justice throughout all the nations."

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 12/12/2017

CALLED TOGETHER AS SPIRITUAL FAMILY

Welcome and Announcements

*Please sign the registration pads at the ends of the pews on the center aisle.
We ask that you please shut off cell phones and practice quietness during the service.*

*Please join us for fellowship and refreshments after the worship
in Romig Hall (lower level of elevator or stairs).*

* = *You are invited to stand as you are able*

Prelude

Welcoming the Light of Love in Our Midst *(acolytes light altar candles)*

We prepare ourselves for communing with the sacred as love's light is brought into our awareness. The light of love burns within and among each of us, and we carry that light into our sanctuary; visually reminding us of the image of the divine that lives in our hearts, minds, and souls – and that we nourish through our faith-filled fellowship.

Affirming God's Presence in Us All "You Matter!"

Sharing Christ's Peace

As a sign of our reconciliation with God and one another, greet and welcome those around you and share "the peace of Christ."

***Centering Our Souls** *"Dreamers of Justice, Sowers of Peace, Reapers of Joy"*

O God of those who imagine and work for a better world:

We are thankful for Mary, who dared to dream of a just and equitable society, and who believed her own son could lead the way.

We are grateful for the seeds of love, peace, and justice she sowed in her son's heart and mind; that created in him an impassioned prophet who sought to reverse the values of empire by practicing and advocating for your divine values.

The seeds she sowed in tears, she reaped with shouts of joy.

She considered herself blessed despite being a lowly servant. She saw God's favor despite the oppression of those in power.

She remembered the mighty deeds of God, and asserted that the blessings of the past would also be those of the future.

She trusted in God's providence, despite the pervasiveness of injustice.

She had faith that the powerful would be brought down, and that the lowly would be lifted up; for corruption and injustice are momentary, but God's will is eternal.

Like the prophets of old, she believed that the hungry would be filled with good things, and that the rich would be sent away empty; for all are equals in God's eyes, no matter how unequal the world may treat people.

With this faith and determination, she taught her son, Jesus, who became a saving grace to the world. Goodness sown is joy harvested! May we all be as faithful as Mary!

***Hymn of Blessings in Disguise "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming" #127**

Our Stories of Random Acts of Kindness & Intentional Deeds of Compassion

WE LISTEN FOR THE SACRED IN THE MIDST OF OUR LIVES

Musical Duet Gentle Joseph, Joseph Dear, a German carol paraphr. by Carol Birkland

Advent Wreath Ceremony The Candle of Love and Peace *The Reed Family*
Seann, Cindy, Abby, Jordan

A Time for All God's Children

Prayers

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Silent Meditation: The Prayers of the People

Pastoral Prayer

Unison Prayer "Prayer from the New Zealand Book of Common Prayer"

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver, Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother of us all, Loving God, in whom is heaven: The hallowing of your name echo through the universe! The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world! Your heavenly will be done by all created beings! Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth. With the bread we need for today, feed us. In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us. In times of temptation and test, strengthen us. From trials too great to endure, spare us. From the grip of all that is evil, free us. For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. May it be so.

***Hymn of a Faithful Dreamer**
#123

“Mary, Woman of the Promise”

Scripture Lessons

Psalm 126

Luke 1.46-55

Message

“The Mother Who Dreamed of a Just World”

***Hymn of Faith in Our Dreams**
#131

“It Came upon the Midnight Clear”

WE DEDICATE OURSELVES TO GOD’S SERVICE
THROUGH FAITHFULNESS

Giving of Our Tithes and Offerings

“Generosity arises from gratitude like heat arises from fire. Like fire, gratitude is lovely to see; but when it warms others with generosity, that is when it becomes a true blessing.”

Offertory “Organ Improvisation”

***Song of Dedication**

Tune: Old Hundredth; p. 7

The advent of the Christ draws near.

With hope and faith we conquer fear.

Let love and peace in us be found.

Let joy within our hearts abound.

***Unison Prayer of Dedication**

O God, whose coming was tender and mild, but whose presence is empowering and passionate: We are thankful for the hope you inspire in our world where poverty is painful and loving-kindness is lacking. Jolt us with justice that the world’s prayers for peace may be answered. Jostle us with generosity that we may know the joy of giving. In this season of Advent, enter into our hearts that hope may arise within us to expect that which has been promised: that nourishment will be provided for the hungry...that comfort will call upon the suffering...that freedom will ensue for the imprisoned...that justice will be imparted to the persecuted...that compassion will nurture the oppressed...that peace will pacify the violent...and that love will live in the midst of all peoples and creatures that you have declared good. May this gift of hope that you give to us be passed on to others by how we give of ourselves through our time, talents, tithes, and offerings. May it be so.

***Encouragement for the Journey**

This is the season of Advent, the season of something divine coming into the world.

Prepare yourselves for the divine to come into your life.

Hope for it; but more than that, expect it.

Look for ways in which the divine can find its way into you.

Then look for ways in which you can share the divine with others.

Love like you want to be loved. Forgive like you want to be forgiven.

Be the peace to others that you want for yourself.
Give such that others will call you generous.
Live such that others see the beauty of your Spirit.

Postlude

***The Light of Love Goes into the World**

Love's light is not extinguished from our worship, but is transferred from the flame of the candles to the passion in our hearts that we may go forth to let the light of love shine through us as we go to serve in the world!

WE GO FORTH AS PEACEMAKERS **TO CREATE JUSTICE FOR ALL**

*Our worship is fulfilled, and our purpose is confirmed,
through our service as God's stewards to the world and all creation.
Use the blessings God has given you as you share
the joy in your heart, the wisdom in your mind,
the love in your spirit, and the peace in your soul.*

Thank you for sharing sacred fellowship with us.

Nourishment for the Journey

Tradition does not always accord with scripture. When we think of Mary, the mother of Jesus, we often conjure up an image of a meek and mild woman who submissively obeyed the angel who told her she would be the mother of one who would change the world. But a closer look at Mary's own words, especially in her "Magnificat," reveals a woman who is well versed in scripture, a prophetess in her own right, a dreamer of God's reign on the earth, and an advocate for the poor and oppressed who was critical of, and antagonistic against, the rich and powerful.

Why have we focused so much on her praise of God, and so little on her own response as an active servant of God? We emphasize how her soul magnifies and her spirit rejoices in God, and how she considers herself favored by God and blessed by generations to come; but what of her prophetic pronouncements about how the values of empire will be overturned as God's reign is revealed?

Mary says God has and will "scatter the proud" (i.e., those who make the rules of society, particularly to their own advantage), will "bring down the powerful from their thrones," and will send "the rich away empty." This is an indictment against the corruption of those in power in her own society. She is politically well aware of the policies that keep the poor, poor, and the rich, rich. She no doubt is cognizant of the systemic injustices that oppresses her people – a minority in the empire of Rome. And her outward vocalization of their misdeeds amidst her own good news is testimony that she is not a quiet, submissive, and meek woman who does whatever

she is told. She is force to be reckoned with, and she is not afraid to speak truth to power.

Moreover, she is fully intent on teaching her son to be as passionate for justice and peace as she is herself. Having been told that she will give birth to one who will bring about the reign of God, she prepares her own heart, mind, and spirit to give him the education and spiritual foundation in which will make this a reality. Any reading of the scriptures where we assume Jesus is preordained to be great despite the foibles and passivity of his parents, especially his mother, is patently unfair to why Mary was chosen by God in the first place.

God knew her to be a passionate proponent of peace and justice for his people. God knew she had not only the courage, but the intelligence and spirit, to rear Jesus to be the one he was called to be. Mary was not simply a vessel, a benign birth receptacle, for the incubation of a virtuous being; but rather she was a motivator, teacher, spiritual guide, and passionate advocate of the kind of world that accorded with God's own values.

How different would our celebration of Christmas be if we focused on Mary's social action, advocacy, and prophetic prowess instead of her being meek and mild? What if our sentiments about this time of Jesus' birth was less about the sentimentality of a newborn baby, and more about the role of one generation passing on to the next the importance of resistance to the values of empire? What if what we took from the message of the season was less about a savior who came into the world and did it all for us, and more about how he followed the lead of his mother, and that we are to go and do likewise in passing on a legacy of social justice and principles of peace?

Mary was a dreamer – a dreamer of a just world. She was a mother, yes, but a mother who instilled in her son the virtues and values of one who would advocate on behalf of the powerless and have the courage to vocally and physically resist the corrupt. We are told that this lowly family became refugees and immigrants. They fled the political persecution of Herod until a time in which they could safely return to carry on the mission of resistance to the rulers of this world while advocating for a world in which all are equals – respected, loved, and encouraged by a God who saw all peoples as siblings of one another.

In our time when we call refugees, immigrants, and non-residents by the name "dreamers," and see how those in power seek to ban them if they try to get in and deport them if they are already here, what is the truth we need to speak to the powerful? When the rights of LGBTQIA persons, women, Muslims, and others are being denied by the powers that be, what are we doing to resist these policies in the name of that immigrant family we pay homage to from so long ago?

When the rich steal from the poor, and the powerful design laws to keep themselves in power while keeping the powerless unable to resist, what are we doing to say that this is not the faith of the Jesus we claim as the one who had divine values flowing through him? When we see increasing corruption, treason, and greed in our government, and we hear the claims of those in power speaking as if there is

nothing we can do about it, what are we willing to do to prove them wrong? When healthcare is only for those who can afford it, privilege is only for those whose flesh (unlike Jesus') is white, public lands and natural resources are being sold off to corporate interests, the legal system is skewed towards the wealthy, free speech is only for those who agree with the current administration, patriotism is redefined as consistent with nationalism, fascism, and authoritarianism, and the militarization of our national economy perpetuates a culture of perpetual warfare, all of which are antithetical to the values of Christ, we need to muster the courage of Mary to not only speak out, but to train and educate our children to do likewise.

Mary shaped her son to be a dissident – to proclaim God's values rather than those of Caesar. Maybe we need to relearn who Mary really was. Maybe we need to go back to the original story rather than the one in which our culture has shaped. If we do, we may discover that to be a Christian is not something we can do privately in the comfort of our homes where we don't have to observe the injustices against those oppressed in our own society, but rather something we have to do publically as a citizen of the community of God. If the world is unjust, we need to be like Mary and do something about it – speak first, but then proceed to act, and shape the next generation. Perhaps then there might finally be justice and peace on earth. Hallelujah to that!

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 12/14/2017*

Faith UCC is an open and affirming church, embracing diversity in our congregation and community, and affirming the dignity and worth of every person. We are an inclusive community of faith that celebrates God's presence through worship and the sharing of God's word. We welcome all persons into the full life and ministry of the church, regardless of race, ethnic background, gender identity, sexual orientation, capability, or circumstance of life.

Our Ministry

Ministers — All the Congregation
Trustee — Larry Bair

Interim Pastor — Rev. Bret Myers
Ushers — Larry Bair, Wayne & Edna Bicehouse

Liturgist —
Acolyte —
Fellowship — Consistory

Children's Message — Jean Cole
Nursery — Jean Cole, Michelle Barnard

Church Staff

Custodian — Scott Luzier
Chellman
Organist—Mark Ferraguto

Church School Coordinator — Barbara
Choir Director – Mike Dolan

Administrative Assistant — Jeff Stormer

The liturgies for this morning's worship, along with the Song of Dedication, were written by Rev. Bret S. Myers except where otherwise noted.

Prayers for healing and wholeness:

Bob Ritzman, the family of June Brown, the family of Bill and Mary Jane Wild, the family of Jean Weller, Lisa B. (JoAnn's daughter), Brandon G., Lisa Neidigh, Bunnie Hartswick, Katelynn Wilson, Darlene Ripka, April S., Randy Brown (Aimee's Dad), the Piggot family, Robert Zupp (Eileen Pfaff's nephew), the Snook family.



Welcome to all first-time (and returning) guests to Faith UCC! We would like to get to know you and for you to get to know us. Join us after worship for coffee and conversation.

There is free parking on Sundays at the meters and at the McAllister & Pugh Street parking garages – so, we hope you'll worship with us again next Sunday!

Electronic Giving Options: During the offering time you may place your offerings on the plates the bring around. If you prefer to give electronically **the QR code** with your smart phone to be directed to donation page.



in the service, ushers will simply **scan** our online

December Special Offering

The **Christmas Fund** benefits retired clergy and their families that live on very limited incomes. Last year, Faith gave \$512.

Make checks payable to Faith UCC with "Christmas Fund" noted in the memo line.



- **December 1-17 SERRV Sale--Ends today!**
- **December 17 108th Annual Meeting, After service**
- **December 18 Consistory Meeting 7 PM**

- **December 24** **4th Sunday of Advent**
Christmas Eve Service, 7 PM
- **December 31** **1st Sunday After Christmas**
New Year's Eve Service, 7 PM

Get In Touch with Us!

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Church Office Hours: 9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, & Fridays

Please make an appointment with Rev. Myers if you would like to meet with the
pastor.

You may call the church office, or his cell at 608-370-9472.