

**First Church of Christ in Mansfield
(Congregational) United Church of Christ**

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All the Members, Ministers

Rev. Joseph Blotz, Pastor + Erik Haeger, Organist

Olivia Russell, Worship Circle Coordinator

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME + JULY 23, 2023

Chimes and Prelude

Welcome and Greeting

Centering in the Spirit

Jacob's Ladder

Andrea Skevington

Sitting on the window seat, in this box of light,
I drink warm, bitter coffee, my mind waking slowly from sleep.

There is a fly buzzing against the glass, black and slow,
not getting through. On the other side is the cool sun,
the flowerheads and flowerbuds swaying in the breeze,
their stems crossing and crisscrossing in straight green lines,
Making rhomboids, diamonds of the brightness.
And so I sit here, as if among the flowers,
not feeling the breeze, not catching the scent.

There are the bright, tissue paper flames of poppies,
and the soft deep pinks of the columbine,
dove among flowers,
And the euphorbia – black with bees –
their green flowers full of sweetness.

But there, suddenly, are the tall spikes of Jacob's ladder,
new dazzling white, startling, perfect.
They must have opened early while I slept.
Those flowers – small, spread out skirts
of pure white, anthers gold with pollen,
the delicate deep ring of purple veins –
drawing you deep to the green-dark heart of the flower,
curled, mysterious, where the heavy bee probes
for nectar as sweet as the honey yet to come.
Angels ascending and descending,
ascending and descending
as the stiff green stems are swaying,
are still swaying in the cool breeze. The day begins.

Hymn

Let the Whole Creation Cry

CH21

Confessing our Brokenness and Opening Prayer

Hear these words from the Gospel according to Matthew: He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

When in this past week have considered someone to be an enemy?
When have acted hastily?

Silence

God of Jacob, you speak in the light of day and in the dark of night when our sleeping is filled with dreams of heaven and earth. May Jacob's vision remind us to be open and watchful, ready to discover your presence in our midst. Amen.

Song of Praise

Gloria

Christopher Grundy

Glo - ry to the Cre - a - tor, and the Christ, and the Spir - it so near, as it
9
was from the start so it shall be for - ev - er one God, al - ways here.

Christian Scripture

Romans 8:12-25

In last week's reading from his Letter to the Romans, Paul claimed that God's solution to humans' inability to live completely for the good is the gift of the of the Holy Spirit who makes a home within each person and makes a new way of living in Christ possible. In this week's reading, he extends the argument about the present gift of the Spirit to the future renewal, redemption, and wholeness of all creation.

So don't you see that we don't owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent. There's nothing in it for us, nothing at all. The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life. God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go!

This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike "What's next, Papa?" God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what's coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance! We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him!

That's why I don't think there's any comparison between the present hard times and the coming good times. The created world itself can hardly wait for what's coming next. Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens.

All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it's not only around us; it's within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We're also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don't see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy.

Psalter

Psalms 139

CH765

Hebrew Scripture

Genesis 28:10-19a

Yaakov went out from Be'er-Sheva and went toward Harran, and encountered a certain place. He had to spend the night there, for the sun had come in. Now he took one of the stones of the place and set it at his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamt: Here, a ladder was set up on the earth, its top reaching the heavens, and here: messengers of God were going up and down on it. And here: the LORD was standing over against him. He said: I am the LORD, the God of Avraham your father and the God of Yitzhak. The land on which you lie I give to you and to your seed. Your seed will be like the dust of the earth; you will burst forth, to the Sea, to the east, to the north, to the Negev. All the clans of the soil will find blessing through you and through your seed! Here, I am with you, I will watch over you wherever you go and will bring you back to this soil; indeed, I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you. Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said: Why, the LORD is in this place, and I, I did not know it! He was awestruck and said: How awe-inspiring is this place! This is none other than a house of God, and that is the gate of heaven! Yaakov started-early in the morning, he took the stone that he had set at his head and set it up as a standing-pillar and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of the place: Bet-El/House of God— however, Luz was the name of the city in former times.

Reflection

Call to Prayer

Lord Listen to Your Children Praying

CH305

Lord, li-sten to your chi - ldren pray - ing. Lord, send your Spi-rit in this place.

9 Lord, lis-ten to your chi - ldren pray - ing. Sendus love, sendus power, sendus grace.

Prayers of the People and the Prayer of Jesus

God of the harvest, you sow good seed in our hearts. Help your church throughout the world to be both diligent and patient, full of resolve and gentleness, that our witness may be faithful to your call.

God of all space and time, your whole creation groans in labor pains, awaiting the gift of new birth. Renew the earth, sky, and sea, so that all your creation experiences freedom from the bondage of decay.

God of the nations, teach us your ways, that we may walk in your truth. Mend the fabric of the human family, now torn apart by our fearful and warring ways. Guide us by your mercy, grace, and steadfast love.

God of hope, you accompany those who suffer and are near to the brokenhearted. Open our hearts to your children who are lonely and abandoned, who feel trapped by despair, and all who suffer in any way.

God of the seasons, in the midst of summer, give us refreshment, renewal, and new opportunities. We pray for the safety of those who travel. We pray for those who cannot take the rest they need.

God of life, those who have died in you shine like the sun in your endless kingdom. We remember with thanksgiving the saints of all times and places and saints close to us. Gather us with them on your great and glorious day.

Please pray the Prayer of Jesus in whatever language is most comfortable for you.

The following are offered as examples...

**Our Father/Mother/Creator, 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 our debts/sins/trespasses
as we forgive our debtors/those who sin/trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

Offering Hymn

Surely the Presence of the Lord

CH263

*Financial offerings may be placed in the collection plates,
mailed to: First Church of Christ in Mansfield UCC. Box 36. Mansfield Center, CT 06250,
or given online at www.myfcc.info*

Doxology

Praise God from whom all bless - ings flow; Praise God all crea - tures here be low; Praise
5 God for all that love has done: Cre - a - tor, Christ and Spi - rit, One. A - men!

Prayer of Dedication

God of all goodness and grace, receive the gifts we offer; and grant that our whole lives may give you glory and praise. Amen.

Hymn

Nearer My God to Thee

CH577

Benediction

Postlude

The Week Ahead...

Sunday, July 23	10:15am Worship and Worship Circle
Monday, July 24	10am First Church Leads Worship at St Joseph Center
Tuesday, July 25	4pm Summer Musical Theater Intensive in Fellowship Hall
Wednesday, July 26	4pm Summer Musical Theater Intensive in Fellowship Hall
Thursday, July 27	12:15pm Contemplative Communion in Yellow Office
Sunday, June 30	10:15am Worship and Worship Circle