



FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH (Disciples of Christ)

Worship Service for 7/31/22



WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

--Next week is Camp Day—wear your comfy clothes. We'll have a picnic afterward. Please let us know on the pew pads if you plan on joining us for lunch next week (so we'll know how much fried chicken to get.) If you normally worship with us online and wish to join us....PLEASE join us! And please let us know to expect you so we'll have enough food. After picnic there will be games. AND...weather permitting...we'll end the event with an all-church water-balloon battle!

GREETING one another in the name of Jesus Christ

Opening Hymn-- In Christ There is No East or West #687 v. 1-3

JOYS AND CONCERNS

--Floods in Kentucky—death toll at least 25...horrifying stories of loss. Samantha Bryant, our office manager, is on her way down there today to take supplies to those in need.

--All those battling addictions.

--Our nation

--Our congregation

Hymn—Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying #305

PRAYER w/ Lord's Prayer

SCRIPTURE AND MESSAGE

A Disciples of Christ Community

Modern Christians like to think that the early church had perfect unity and agreement. Well, as our Sunday School class is learning...the early church had more than its share of conflict.

...There were riots...and arrests ...name-calling ...bad

communication ... disagreement on theology. ...Sounds

familiar... doesn't it.

Our scripture today comes from Paul's letter to the churches in and around Ephesus. This city was located in what is now Turkey. And... it was no backwoods village. Ephesus was an impressive place...a major city. It had a population of 300,000. Its people were sophisticated. **[PHOTO]** Its buildings were grand...and ornate.



It also boasted an awe-inspiring temple to the Greek goddess ... Artemis. **[PHOTO]**



And...Ephesus had a theatre. **[PHOTO]**



Historians believe that this theatre...may have been the largest amphitheater in the ancient world. **[SERMON SLIDE]**

Ephesus...had all kinds of people...with all kinds of beliefs and traditions...and cultures. And as a port city...it also had ships...with a lot more people...just passing through...bringing in newer ideas...and different customs. It was a complex place!

On both his second and third missionary trips...Paul spent time teaching...in Ephesus. He loved these people. Yet, he also saw...division and anxiety, even among those who believed in...and followed Jesus. We know, don't we, that being members of a church... doesn't mean there aren't squabbles...and hurt feelings.

Paul's letter...that we know as Ephesians...provided guidance on how to live...as a community. It's a lesson we

modern Christians...need to hear just as much as the Ephesian church back then. Let us hear...Paul's teaching from his **Epistle to the Ephesians 4:1-6**

I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: ⁴ there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. **SCRIPTURE PRAYER**

I am a Disciple of Christ. I love the Disciples' Chalice Logo. (I'm wearing it today!) Whenever I drive through towns, I smile when I see the Chalice on a church sign...because it tells me something about that congregation.

For those of you...who may not know...the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) began about 200 years ago...when two sets of followers of Jesus Christ became unhappy with the squabbling among denominations. Various church groups...then...and

now...disagreed on issues regarding how to baptize...who can preside at the Table...who can partake of Communion ...was there to be ordained clergy or not. Each faction said the other groups were wrong...and...because of that wrongness...they were... “unChristian.”

Two groups, one led by Barton Stone...one led by Alexander Campbell...came to believe...independently...that one need not agree on these issues...in order to be a follower of Jesus Christ. The only required belief...was that Jesus was...AND IS...the Christ and that we are obedient to Him.

Stone called his groups...Christians. Campbell referred to his group as Disciples. In 1832, the two groups joined hands to work toward the unity of Christ’s church. ...Our denomination, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) grew from that unity movement. We, therefore, are a “movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord’s Table as God has welcomed us.”

Seven years ago, I came to interview for the position of interim pastor for this Disciples congregation. As I pulled up, I saw the church's sign. It had no Disciple Chalice. And yet...I noticed something on the sign that spoke very plainly about this Disciples congregation. Do you know what it is?

Our big sign on A street...says in RED letters... that we are..."A Disciples of Christ *Community*." Those words...speak volumes about who we are called to be. This is a community for Jesus Christ. ...one I have been blessed to come to know and love over the past 7 years.

We humans tend to pigeon-hole ourselves into exclusive groups --into nationalities...races...politics...and denominations. There are divisions about how we experience God...and Christ in our lives. How we feel the Spirit moving in us and... amongst us.

Then there are those ways that we separate ourselves as individuals. We may tell ourselves...I think church people won't accept me because... I'm gay...I'm bi-sexual...I'm transgendered. Or maybe even...I don't know who I am. I'm still questioning.

I say to myself that I need to keep my distance from others because I don't feel "good enough" to be among them. ...If they knew half the things I've done...or said...they'll shun me. I tell myself that I don't have nice enough clothes...to be in that group. I don't know enough about Jesus to go to church.

Or I say... I'm an addict...I'm a felon....I'm unemployed. So many ways...so many *excuses*...we use to keep ourselves... off on our own....separated from...*community*.

Let me say clearly...that all those excuses ...are just that... they are *excuses*. ...And each and every one of them...is a complete contradiction to the community Christ teaches. It is our belief...that there is nothing that that should ever keep you from experiencing the radically amazing Love and Grace of YOUR Creator. God adores you. You are a wonderfully made...deeply loved...member of God's family, whether you want to admit it or not.

As such...you should be...and are...welcomed here to worship God...to fellowship with this community of Christ's

followers...to find a place to deepen your faith and connection with God through Jesus Christ. This is what Christian community is...and should be. We are family...but we are an open family... happy to embrace all who choose to worship with us...and to share Christ's ministry with us.

...I know how marvelous this all sounds. Living as a unified ...loving community is an ideal we strive for because we believe it is what Jesus taught. It's what God wants for all people. And when it all works well...it IS marvelous.

Yet...trust me...when I say that I understand that humans are humans....even humans within a Christian congregation.

Sometimes we're better at loving... than other times. We bump into each other. We say or do things out of human ignorance or anger...or fatigue. Being in a community with so many different beliefs and traditions...and ideas...can be difficult.

This is when we need the guidance that the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesian church. ...that church that was so filled with varied cultures and traditions. Paul told them...and

us...that we are to walk in a manner worthy of bearing Christ's name. To walk with humility and gentleness. To bear with one another in love...making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

And we are to remember...that despite human differences that might otherwise divide us... there is one body and one Spirit, ...and one hope. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Creator of all. It is that Oneness that calls and claims us. It is that Oneness that draws us all together...into a community.

We Disciples have no creed. But we do have an affirmation that speaks to the important areas of our identity as people of faith...and our worship practices. If you are willing...I ask that you join me in reciting the affirmation for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). (It'll be up on the screen.)

As members of the Christian Church,
We confess that Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of the living God,
and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world.
In Christ's name and by his grace

we accept our mission of witness
and service to all people.

We rejoice in God,
maker of heaven and earth,
and in God's covenant of love
which binds us to God and to one another.

Through baptism into Christ
we enter into newness of life
and are made one with the whole people of God.

In the communion of the Holy Spirit
we are joined together in discipleship
and in obedience to Christ.

At the Table of the Lord
we celebrate with thanksgiving
the saving acts and presence of Christ.

Within the universal church
we receive the gift of ministry
and the light of scripture.

In the bonds of Christian faith
we yield ourselves to God
that we may serve the One
whose kingdom has no end.

Blessing, glory, and honor
be to God forever. Amen.

INVITATION—Each week, I stand here and offer an Invitation to enter into...or renew...a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In truth...the invitation does not come from me. It comes from the Head of this community...The invitation comes from Jesus who extends the invitation to “come and follow” Him. To find rest from a weary world and life. And to find purpose for living. He offers that Invitation now to anyone who wants to accept. He offers it to any who have strayed away ...but who wants and needs to find a way back. And He offers it to all of us...to recommit our lives to living in relationship with Christ...and in community with each other.

Hymn--Lord, You Give the Great Commission #459 v. 1- 2

MOMENT FOR MINISTRY

SPECIAL MUSIC—Carolyn Hoffman

COMMUNION—David Eilar just returned from vacation. He told me about a loooong stretch of road with no gas stations. So there was no opportunity to refuel. However, the Eilars did notice that there were lots of churches along that same long stretch. David said it would be a good fundraiser for those churches to provide a place for refueling...and rest. Perhaps a sign...Get gas...and Get God!

Well...this Table is our weekly pitstop in our lives. It's a time to stop...refuel...and rest for a moment...to reclaim our need for God. It's a place to ponder the gift of Jesus Christ and the gift of Grace. ...No charge. The cost for this...has already been paid... by Jesus Christ.

Hymn--Break Thou the Bread of Life #321 v. 1 & 2

Elder's Prayer of Blessing for Bread and Cup

Remembering Words of Jesus

Partaking

Closing Hymn--They'll Know We are Christians \$494

BENEDICTION