

Sunday June 18, 2017 - 10:00 a.m.
*Please stand if you are able

Prelude
Welcome and Announcements

We Gather Around God's Word

Bells and Chimes Call To Worship:

Introit: "Awesome God" (See PowerPoint)

Call to Worship: (Based on Psalm 100 NLV)

L: Call out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.

P: Be glad as you serve the Lord. Come before Him with songs of joy.

L: Go into His gates giving thanks and into His holy place with praise.
Give thanks to Him. Honor His name.

P: For the Lord is good. His loving-kindness lasts forever.

And He is faithful to all people and to all their children-to-come.

***Hymn of Praise: #4** "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You"

***Prayer of Invocation:** (NCH p. 13) In Unison
*Eternal God, companion of all who seek you
and seeker of all who turn away from you,
draw near to us that we may draw near to you,
and grant us grace to love and serve you
that we may find in your will our true freedom;
through Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life. Amen.*

***Hymn of Assurance #293** "Sweet, Sweet Spirit"

Passing of God's Peace

In the spirit of peace and the hope of unity,
let us offer each other a sign of Christ's peace!

Special Music: Offered by Jay Gurske – "There Is Power in the Blood"

We Engage God's Word

Scripture Readings: Romans 5:1-8
Matthew 9:35-10:23

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Youth Moment/Lord's Prayer

Reflection: "The Kingdom of Heaven has Come Near"

"The kingdom of heaven has come near." These are the words Jesus tells the apostles to proclaim after he gave them authority and sent them into the harvest to Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. What is it that comes to mind when you hear these words? What is it that you experience? Do you hear words of warning almost like a threat like you had better get all your ducks in a row or incur the wrath of God? Maybe you hear words of hope, compassion, deliverance and liberation? Maybe for you it is not an either/or but a both/and.

This passage tells us that Jesus looked at the crowds and had compassion on them. Jesus knew the need was great and so would require more workers not on their own power but on the power of God given to them. He then tells them to stay where they are welcome, but to leave where they are not. Where they do stay, as they heal the diseases, cure the sick, cleanse the lepers and cast out demons they are to proclaim the good news that "The kingdom of heaven has come near." In this healing and deliverance they have experienced a touch of heaven here on earth. They are experiencing God's compassion and healing through the sent ones and as they are experiencing that they are drawn into the harvest out of a desire to be a part of it.

In this passage we also experience the Kingdom of heaven coming near when we take a closer look at some of the people Christ commissions to carry out the work of God. *"As you look over the list of those early disciples, you may notice the several descriptive details given, about Matthew the tax collector and Simon "the Cananaean," two people who would have been on opposite sides of the Roman controversy, since Matthew was a tool of the empire and Simon would have been a passionate revolutionary opposing it. Yet they both found their lives transformed by their encounter with Jesus."*

(http://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_june_18_2017)

In that transformation they are able to work together. The kingdom of heaven is able to break down barriers and bring people together to work for healing, deliverance, and liberation from all kinds of ills that seek to destroy life. The United Church of Christ is filled with people at all ranges of the spectrum politically and theologically, yet we find ways to work together to further God's reign here on earth. Today and next week we will be taking an offering to "Strengthen the Church." We were supposed to launch that offering last week, but hearing how God gives authority to participate in Christ's mission, this is a perfect week to launch that campaign.

This past Friday we celebrated the gift of Don Kubitz's life. For those of you present you heard me speak of how Don experienced the kingdom of heaven here on earth, that he knew one didn't have to die physically to experience a touch of heaven here and now. He also knew that walking with God didn't keep one from experiencing a time of trial, but being aware that God loved one and cared for one opened one up to seek God and hear God's guidance. On several of my visits to him he would share with me how he had seen and experience things he would not want to talk about while he served in WWII to help liberate those oppressed and by a regime who sought to obliterate an entire group of people based on their heritage, but he also said that he

wouldn't change a thing because he knew each event helped to make him who he was and that God was there to guide him through each and every circumstance. As it says in our passage from Romans *"suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."*

Don's words to me on my second to last visit were these, *"If you know Jesus loves you, you can make it through anything."* The kingdom of heaven has come near. In all of his trials and joys, Don knew that. Don used to sing for us the first Sunday of every month when he was able to be here. One of the songs he shared was a song that he wrote, composed, had copyrighted, and even had recorded by another person. Though we have heard the song, we didn't have the history of him being inspired to write the song. You see, Don lost his brother, father-in-law, father, and niece all within a one year time span. Even amidst all that trial he composes a song touting the wonders of God and the knowledge that one didn't have to die to experience a touch of heaven here on earth. His song speaks of his wonder of God's creation especially that he thought to create him. It goes on to proclaim, when I walk with the Lord I'm in heaven, when I talk with the lord I'm there too.

The kingdom of heaven has come near! Have you, like Don, experienced it? How is Christ commissioning you and empowering you to participate in it? How is Christ commissioning this church and empowering it to participate the realm of God. Thomas Long says that *"Any notion that the church ought to quit getting involved in non-spiritual matters and get back to its 'real job' of preaching the gospel and saving souls misses the point. 'Preaching the gospel and saving souls' means grappling with disease and the demonic, with social segregation and the powers of death. It means, therefore, wrestling with issues of public health care, with racial and social alienation, with the powers of domination and oppression that bleed the life out of a community"* (Matthew, Westminster Bible Commentary). Whether you agree with this statement fully or not, you, as the body of Christ have time and again been moved to compassionate response, to outreaching and proclaiming, to being about the work of God in the world. How might we re-claim our role as evangelists, as bearers of Good News more fully and continue be Christ's compassion and healing in the world today while proclaiming "The kingdom of heaven has come near?"

Compassionate God, the kingdom of heaven has come near and is still near. Help us to open ourselves to the power and insights you grant to us and gladly be the vessels through whom your caring, healing, deliverance and liberation are made known. We ask all this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We Respond to God's Word

Hymn of Response #495v.v. 1 & 4 ***"Called as Partners in Christ's Service"***

Sharing Joys, Concerns, and Prayers for the World

Offering Invitation/Offertory/

***Doxology:**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

**Praise God all creatures here below.
Praise God for all that love has done.
Creator, Christ and Spirit one. Amen.**

***Prayer of Dedication:**  (In Unison)

***Grow these gifts in your love, Emmanuel.
Bless our offerings, our hearts and our hopes in your love
To make us worthy of your work in this world.
Fill these gifts and each of us with your goodness. Amen.***


We Are Sent Into the World

Sending Hymn: #584 v.v. 2-4 *“I Am the Light of the World”

*** Benediction and Response:**

GO NOW IN PEACE

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