



# First Congregational United Church of Christ February 4, 2024



## 5th Sunday after Epiphany

Partners in Ministry: All who are a part of this church

Pastor: **Rev. Enno K. Limvere**

Musician: **Ben Nichols** Choir Director: **Linda Noble**

Peace Candle Lighter: **Mike Carlson** Liturgist: **Steve Aldrich**

Greeter: **Steve Aldrich** Usher: **Barbara Chiles**

Coffee-Hour Host:

Wailing Wall and Dome of the Rock Photo by Laura Siegal

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**Gathering Music**  
**Words of Welcome**  
**Prelude**

**Words to Enter Worship** (Based on Psalm 122)

One: How I rejoiced when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD!” And now our feet are standing within your gates, Jerusalem.

**Many**: Jerusalem restored! The city, united whole! Here the tribes ascend, the tribes of the LORD. They come to praise the LORD’s name, as God commanded, here where the tribunals of justice are, the judgment seats of David’s house.

One: Prayer for peace within Jerusalem: “May those who love you prosper! May peace be within your walls! May your citadels be always secure!”

**Many**: For the sake of my family and friends, I say, “Peace be within you!” For the sake of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.

**Opening Hymn #459** Come, O Fount of Every Blessing ([click here](#))

**Words of Lament** For Boundaries in our Empathy (Cole Arthur Riley)

**God of shared tears,**

**This is too much to hold. Our bodies cannot take it. Release us from the underlying guilt that we are not doing enough, crying enough, working hard enough. Sometimes it is easier to cry for another than ourselves. Help us encounter our own emotions with the same attunement we possess for others. Develop our discernment for when we experience the pain of others is good, and when it is an exercise of self-escape or saviorism. We confess that we too often give our attention only to receive attention. We perform empathy to feel a part of something. Protect us from the commodification of our shared lament. In all our efforts toward emotional solidarity, help us to truly center those who are hurting, and decenter the forces of whiteness that would leverage tragedy for profit. Expose how public performers of lament only serve to mask the detached morality of the most privileged. If we weep with the suffering, may their cries always ring louder. If we feel anything at all, make it honest. Amen.**

**Time of Silence**

**Blessing of the Earth**

**Words of Poetry & Lighting the Candle of Peace**

It is a custom in our congregation to light our Peace Candle during worship, as a witness to the Prince of Peace and our communal intention to be peacemakers as a Just Peace Church.

**Isaiah 1:10-20**

**10** Hear the Lord’s word, you leaders of Sodom.

Listen to our God’s teaching, people of Gomorrah!

**11** What should I think about all your sacrifices? says the Lord.

I’m fed up with entirely burned offerings of ram and the fat of well-fed beasts.

I don’t want the blood of bulls, lambs, and goats.

**12** When you come to appear before me, who asked this from you, this trampling of my temple’s courts?

**13** Stop bringing worthless offerings. Your incense repulses me.

New moon, sabbath, and the calling of an assembly—

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I can't stand wickedness with celebration!

**14** I hate your new moons and your festivals.

They've become a burden that I'm tired of bearing.

**15** When you extend your hands, I'll hide my eyes from you.

Even when you pray for a long time, I won't listen.

Your hands are stained with blood.

**16** Wash! Be clean! Remove your ugly deeds from my sight.

Put an end to such evil; **17** learn to do good.

Seek justice:

help the oppressed;

defend the orphan;

plead for the widow.

**18** Come now, and let's settle this, says the Lord.

Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be white as snow.

If they are red as crimson, they will become like wool.

**19** If you agree and obey, you will eat the best food of the land.

**20** But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.

The Lord has said this.

### Passing of the Peace

**Hymn #170** Your Ways Are Not Our Own ([click here](#))

**Scripture Reading** – Mark 6:1-29 (Common English Bible)

**6** Jesus left that place and came to his hometown. His disciples followed him. **2** On the Sabbath, he began to teach in the synagogue. Many who heard him were surprised. "Where did this man get all this? What's this wisdom he's been given? What about the powerful acts accomplished through him? **3** Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't he Mary's son and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" They were repulsed by him and fell into sin.

**4** Jesus said to them, "Prophets are honored everywhere except in their own hometowns, among their relatives, and in their own households." **5** He was unable to do any miracles there, except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them. **6** He was appalled by their disbelief.

Then Jesus traveled through the surrounding villages teaching.

**7** He called for the Twelve and sent them out in pairs. He gave them authority over unclean spirits. **8** He instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a walking stick—no bread, no bags, and no money in their belts. **9** He told them to wear sandals but not to put on two shirts. **10** He said, "Whatever house you enter, remain there until you leave that place. **11** If a place doesn't welcome you or listen to you, as you leave, shake the dust off your feet as a witness against them." **12** So they went out and proclaimed that people should change their hearts and lives. **13** They cast out many demons, and they anointed many sick people with olive oil and healed them.

**14** Herod the king heard about these things, because the name of Jesus had become well-known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and this is why miraculous powers are at work through him." **15** Others were saying, "He is Elijah." Still others were saying, "He is a prophet like one of the ancient prophets."

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**16** But when Herod heard these rumors, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised to life.” **17** He said this because Herod himself had arranged to have John arrested and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of Herod’s brother Philip. Herod had married her, **18** but John told Herod, “It’s against the law for you to marry your brother’s wife!” **19** So Herodias had it in for John. She wanted to kill him, but she couldn’t. **20** This was because Herod respected John. He regarded him as a righteous and holy person, so he protected him. John’s words greatly confused Herod, yet he enjoyed listening to him.

**21** Finally, the time was right. It was on one of Herod’s birthdays, when he had prepared a feast for his high-ranking officials and military officers and Galilee’s leading residents. **22** Herod’s daughter Herodias came in and danced, thrilling Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the young woman, “Ask me whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.” **23** Then he swore to her, “Whatever you ask I will give to you, even as much as half of my kingdom.”

**24** She left the banquet hall and said to her mother, “What should I ask for?” “John the Baptist’s head,” Herodias replied.

**25** Hurrying back to the ruler, she made her request: “I want you to give me John the Baptist’s head on a plate, right this minute.” **26** Although the king was upset, because of his solemn pledge and his guests, he didn’t want to refuse her. **27** So he ordered a guard to bring John’s head. The guard went to the prison, cut off John’s head, **28** brought his head on a plate, and gave it to the young woman, and she gave it to her mother. **29** When John’s disciples heard what had happened, they came and took his dead body and laid it in a tomb.

**Children’s Message** Prophets 101

**Choir**

**Message** Losing your Head

**Musical Reflections**

**Joys and Concerns, Pastoral Prayer, and the Lord’s Prayer**

**Our Father, Mother God, you are in heaven, holy is your name. Your kingdom come, your 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 yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen**

**News of God at Work in our Congregation & Community**

**Our Time of Giving**

**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*

**Closing Hymn #576** For the Healing of the Nations ([click here](#))

**Benediction**

**Sending Music**

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## Opening Hymn #459 **Come, O Fount of Every Blessing**

1. Come, O Fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing your grace;  
streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of endless praise.  
Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above.  
Praise the mount; I'm fixed upon it, mount of God's unfailing love.

2. Here I pause in my sojourning, giving thanks for having come,  
come to trust, at every turning, God will guide me safely home.  
Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the love I've known:  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for your very own.

3. O to grace how great a debtor daily I am drawn anew!  
Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to you.  
Prone to wander, I can feel it, wander from the love I've known:  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for your very own.

**[return to bulletin](#)**

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## Hymn #170 **Your Ways Are Not Our Own**

1. Your ways are not our own, O gracious God most high,  
Yet we would follow in your paths and your love rely.
2. Christ teaches us to bless the one who curse and harm,  
To turn the other cheek when struck, attackers to disarm.
3. Yet, we cannot excuse abuse in any form,  
For all are children of your care, and love must be our norm.
4. How shall we show your love, your pardon to believe?  
You bid us share as we are blessed and give as we receive.
5. Forgiveness is our joy, receiving, receiving, giving, too.  
Keep us from judgments hard and cruel, that we may dwell with you.

**[return to bulletin](#)**

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## Closing Hymn #576 **For the Healing of the Nations**

1. For the healing of the nations, God we pray with one accord;  
for a just and equal sharing of the things that earth affords;  
to a life of love in action help us rise and pledge our word.
2. Lead us forward into freedom; from despair your world release,  
that redeemed from war and hatred, all may come and go in peace.  
Show us how through care and goodness fear will die and hope increase.
3. All that kills abundant living, let it from the earth be banned;  
pride of status, race, or schooling, dogmas that obscure your plan.  
In our common quest for justice may we hallow life's brief span.
4. You, Creator God, have written your great name on humankind;  
for our growing in your likeness bring the life of Christ to mind,  
that by our response and service earth its destiny may find.

**[return to bulletin](#)**

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