

Greetings to our members, those from United Congregational Church in Conway and all our friends at home,

This week we have witnessed a wave of celebration and optimism in the midst of a continued surge in COVID cases and deaths. I would encourage you to continue to pray for those affected by the pandemic, those who work on the front lines of this battle, and those in leadership positions as they discern the best course of action for our country.

The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 17. There are two Lenten program opportunities that we will be taking advantage of. Next week we will be posting these programs along with their dates and times for online participation.

Wishing you God's peace,

Pastor Rob

Welcome to Sunday Worship January 24, 2021

Good Morning to our members, those from United Congregational Church in Conway and all our friends at home,

This Sunday offers to us the story of the Prophet Jonah as we gather in worship. In our exploration of this tale, we will discover the mercy and forgiveness of God and the call to be merciful and forgiving in our daily lives.

Prayer Requests: We are accepting requests for prayer (healing, comfort, thanksgiving, and others). Please send your requests to the Pastor at pastor01089@gmail.com. Requests will then be sent out through our email list to the congregation for our common prayer life during the week. PLEASE remember that all prayer requests received become public knowledge. If you are uncertain if your request for another might be confidential, do not send it.

And now let us be in worship

Call to Worship (Responsive, L=Leader, P=People) Psalm 86

L All the nations you have made shall come before thee, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.

P For you are great and do wondrous things, you alone are God.

L I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name for ever.

Morning Unison Prayer & the Lord's Prayer

Almighty God, who created all of earth's peoples, who loves them all in your timeless care, be present to us in this sacred place. Be present to those who ask, that they may receive your mercy. Be present to those who seek, that they may find your healing. Be present to those who knock, that your door may be opened to them. Through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, who taught us to pray saying...*Our Father, 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 as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Hymn:

Prayers of the People

Today's Prayers: Focus on the difficulties and struggles of everyday life while praying for the ability to overcome them. These are a collection of first-person prayers written by Ted Loder.

Gracious and Holy One, creator in all things, I come to you full of much that clutters and distracts, stifles, and burdens me, and makes me a burden to others. Empty me now of gnawing dissatisfactions, of anxious imaginings, of nagging prejudices, of old scores to settle and of the arrogance of being right. Empty me of the ways I unthinkingly think of myself as a victim as determined by my sex, age, race, and orientation as being less than I am or as other than yours. Empty me of the disguises and lies in which I hide myself from other people and from my responsibility for my neighbors and for the world.

Hollow out in me a space in which I will find myself, find peace and a whole heart, a forgiving spirit and holiness, the springs of laughter, and the will to reach boldly for abundant life for myself and the whole human family. Plunge me into a sense of sadness at the pain of my sisters and brothers inflicted by war, prejudice, injustice and indifference, that I may learn again to cry until my tears baptize me into a person who touches with care those I now touch in prayer; victims of violence, or greed, or addictions; prisoners in ghettos, in old age, in sexism; people with broken bodies, with broken hearts, with broken lives, whom I remember now in silence before you because I have too often forgotten them in the shuffle of my fretful busy-ness.

(silent prayer and meditation) Gracious and Holy One, creator in all things, hear these my prayers.....Amen

Scripture Reading: Jonah 3:1-10, 4:1-5

The book of Jonah is unique among the prophetic books in Hebrew scripture because it does not include any prophesy for or against the nation of Israel. The entire book is dedicated to telling

the story of the prophet Jonah and the City of Nineveh. The prophet of this book lived in the early 700's B.C.E. Unlike other prophets in the scripture, Jonah does not embrace following through on what God asks of him. The story then becomes a call for the people of God to repent and to bring the message of God's mercy and forgiveness to the nations.

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying,

"Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you."

So, Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out,

"Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh:

"By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish."

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said,

"O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

And the LORD said,

"Is it right for you to be angry?"

Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

Here ends the reading from the Book of Jonah.

After the reading, you may reflect on this passage and share your thoughts.
The sermon for this text may be seen in this week's video.

Benediction

May God our Creator renew in us

the creative Spirit that brings healing and life to our world.

May Jesus, the Christ, uphold us in grace and love.

May the Holy Spirit fill us with courage to be bearers of God's song of hope in the world.

Amen.