



Church of the Isles UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

March 20, 2020

Dear Friends,

For the foreseeable future you will be getting a weekly letter from Church of the Isles with news, the worship service content, and other good stuff! Your moderators, pastor, and staff will take turns sending you notes, as did Jan Kreuger for this week's edition below. Our first attempt at an online service is now posted. This is a timed PowerPoint show. Click on the link below to go to the webpage where the presentation is. When you click on the sermon title, there will be a delay while it loads. Just be patient - it will load, but it takes some time. <https://www.trinityuccstpete.org/our-sermons> Be sure to turn up your volume so you can hear the voice narration that we have put on some of the slides. You can access this link any time, starting now!

A Message from your co-Moderator, Jan Kreuger

What a week it was. There has been an unusual degree of fear and chaos around us. But you know what? COTI has been blessed with smiles and good will.

The monthly Church Council meeting included the careful consideration of the four bids we have received for our long-awaited new air conditioning system. After detailed research, product and price comparisons, and financing options, the Council unanimously chose Arctic Air Conditioning of Largo as our contractor. They will be getting to work Thursday March 26, starting with the sanctuary. It will make it extra special to get back to our dear COTI for worship in comfort and safety. In coming news we'll be deciding on the best options to finance \$65,000 to complete this work. Together we will do a variety of things to help pay for this essential addition to our ministry: 1)use money from the Heritage Fund 2) draw on a loan from Cornerstone, the UCC funding agency, or from other lending institutions, depending upon best rates, 3)later in the summer offer fund-raising opportunities specific to replacing/repaying the money and 4)careful analysis of the budget to find untapped cost savings. So this is big and exciting news!

But there's more. COTI volunteers have been working in small groups to continue the clean up and clean out. This brought back both warm memories and sometimes questioning "what is this thing?" with wondering how some of the broken dusty stuff lasted on the back shelf as long as it did. Two dumpsters full and counting.

In addition to the Council meeting there was a vigorous executive committee meeting outside in a cool green and breezy spot. Also, Pastor Shelly continued Contemplative Prayer on the beach. She gave a poem and prayer which sparked a meaningful discussion about the relationship between humans and the Earth.

Yes, things are different and we are still Beginning Anew. If you are one of those who includes offering in the plate as part of your worship, please remember to fund the work of the church as you would have. As you know, because of the cancellation of Greenfest and the temporary closure of the Thrift Store, we have a significant reduction in income right

now, so our faithful stewardship is important. It would be a good first step if everyone who can, would increase giving by even 1 per cent to help those who are struggling.

Stay well. Stay in prayer. Stay in good faith. You'll be hearing more regularly. Jan Kreuger

ORDER OF WORSHIP

March 22, 2020

(If you want to participate in the online worship, www.trinityuccstpete.org/our-sermons) is the online link for both COTI and Trinity UCC. Go to that link, click on the sermon title that will be on your screen. A small box with the date march 22 2020 will appear in the lower left corner of your screen. When it is finished loading, click on it and the worship service will begin. Be sure that the volume is turned up on your computer. Volume can be found on many computers in the lower right corner of your screen. The parts of the worship service will advance automatically. When a link appears in a slide, click on it and it will take you to the activity that is part of the worship service.

If you prefer simply to read through the service, here is text below.

(We recommend finding your favorite spot of peace and relaxing there. Close your eyes, envision all the hurting world bathed in the light of God's love, and breathe deeply...)

Call to Worship:

For the treasure which is our community of faith and all the treasures we each bring to one another's lives, we give God thanks.

For the unexpected treasures we discover in shared troubles and the sustaining that sees us through hard times, we give God thanks.

All these treasures we receive with gratitude and open our hearts so that such grace may flow through us to all.

Special Music

"Wayfaring Stranger" (trad.)

I am a poor wayfaring stranger traveling through this world of woe but there's no sickness, toil or danger in that bright land to which I go. Well I'm going there to meet my mother, said she'd meet me when I come I'm only going over Jordan; I'm only going over home.

I know dark clouds will gather 'round me. I know my way'll be rough and steep but beautiful fields lie just before me where God's redeemed, their vigils keep. Well I'm going there to meet my loved ones gone on before me, one by one. I'm only going over Jordan, I'm only going over home.

Prayers:

I invite you now to envision yourself and all this hurting world wrapped in the light of God's love. Especially pray now for those who may be ill, for those who are the caregivers, researchers, healthcare workers, and all those affected by the economic hardships of this time. Pray for those who are afraid and those who need God's grace...

Reading: "A Blessing for a Friend in a Time of Illness" –Fr. John O'Donohue

Now is the time of dark invitation beyond a frontier that you did not expect.

Abruptly your old life seems distant. You barely noticed how each day opened a path through fields never questioned yet expected deep down to hold treasure.

When the reverberations of shock subside in you, may grace come to restore you to balance. May you find in yourself a courageous hospitality towards what is difficult, painful and unknown.

May you keep faith with your body, learning to see it as a holy sanctuary which can bring this night wound gradually towards the healing and freedom of dawn.

Scripture reading: Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Come and see what the LORD has done, God says, "Be still, and know that I am God."

Sermon "Ever-present Help" Shelly Wilson

A long time ago, Mr. Rogers' mother told him: "In any moment of challenge, look for the helpers, look for the neighbors." And, it is a perspective echoed in the Psalms when those ancient writers are searching for meaning in hard times and we have that opportunity in our own circumstances today. In a variety of languages, "help" is a universal cry of distress—needing assistance from another to do what one cannot do alone.

From its ancient roots to the present day, the word help is a versatile one—to help or be helped, active or passive, that is the question. And it can morph into a noun—shall I call for help? How can I be a help and do no harm in this moment?

Part of the spiritual journey for us these days is to discern what helps—what helps us to breathe deeply and provide good self care. What helps others in a world turned upside down where there are too many needs to triage them all? How may we bring what we can, offer what we have of our own joy and sorrow, our experience, raw and available, our gifts and abilities, how many we bring them and try, work, put ourselves in the place of availability when we are granted the grace to be able to help.

Sometimes, though, there is the spiritual practice that is part of the oath of physicians and nurses, and that is, that first we intend to do no harm.

Sometimes to be the help in certain circumstances is to stand down, step away, stay home, social distance, pay attention, actively listen, stay in touch with the awareness of helplessness, while accompanying another, even from our sense

of apart-ness. Sometimes being God's instrument for peace and help means we can assist in problem-solving. Sometimes it means being a loving witness to another's pain.

The hope I find in praying through this psalm is that God's very present help is revealed in the vulnerability of neediness, having to ask for, to receive, and to offer, help. Learning the grace of helplessness while at the same time balancing all that each of us can bring of our own gifted help to make a positive difference in our community and world is perhaps the spiritual journey of our lifetime.

When you are too tired or afraid to go on, may you find the help you need from Spirit, from others, from the beauty and peace of Earth, and from the opportunities embedded in this time of trial. May you discover quiet and healing and peace. My prayer every day is, please, God, help me recognize help when it comes, offer the help I can give with an open and clear heart and without the messy strings of my own fragile ego making me overfunction (as you know I can do) and the wisdom to know the difference.

My spiritual journaling in this time includes writing responses to this question and I hope you will use it in your practice: How is God inviting me to receive, to give, and to incarnate the Help in this world? May your journey be blessed.

Amen

Benediction: May we be blessed with a clarity of vision and compassion of spirit, so that we may be a source of God's peace for another this day and every day, Amen.

