

ZION UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST OF TREMONT

July 3, 2022

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

A Service of the Word



Ancient Icon, Sending Out the 70

Artist: Unknown

*Called, Set Apart, and Sent/The Ohio River Valley District
of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church*

<https://www.orvumc.org/district/ohiorivervalley/news/called-set-apart-and-sent>



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

a just world for all

July 3rd, 2022
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
A Service of the Word

*“We cannot save others, it is Christ who does so,
but we do have the authority to live into Christ’s reign
and declare it is at hand, in word and deed.
— The Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell*

WE GATHER IN COMMUNITY

**please stand as you are able*

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRELUDE – *Betty Funk*

*CALL TO WORSHIP

One: May a joyful sound to the Holy One. Let the earth rejoice.

Many: How awesome are your works, O Sovereign!

One: Creation groans under the pressure of war, environmental abuse, and communal disconnection.

Many: We cry out to you, Present God, and you hear and respond.

One: You turn our mourning into movement and stir our souls to action and to rest.

Many: Everlasting God, we will give thanks and praise you for you clothe us in joy and peace.

*INVOCATION

God with us, you send us into the world as your agents of restoration and change. You speak to us in the stillness of our rest and the chaos of a frenzied world. You guide us in troubling times, and you move us to dance in celebration. We give thanks for your presence among us. Open all points of receptivity within us as we worship you, Holy and Living God. Amen.

*HYMN – 592 – God of the Ages, Who with Sure Command

God of the Ages, Who with Sure Command

Author: Daniel Crane Roberts, 1876; alt.

Word alterations © 1992 The Pilgrim Press

Tune: NATIONAL HYMN 10.10.10.10.

**1 God of the ages, who with sure command
brought forth in beauty all the starry band
of shining worlds in splendor through the skies,
our grateful songs before your throne arise.**

**2 Your purpose, just, envisions mortals free;
God, set our path toward human liberty.
Still be our ruler, guardian, guide, and stay -
your Word our law, your paths our chosen way.**

**3 From war's alarms, from deadly pestilence,
with steadfast care be ever our defense;
Your love and faith in our hearts increase;
with bounteous goodness nourish us in peace.**

**4 Refresh your people on life's toilsome way;
lead us from night to never-ending day;
With truth and love guide us through error's maze,
and we shall give you glory, laud, and praise.**

A READING OF THE WORD

FIRST READING: 2 Kings 5:1-14

Our first selection in the Hebrew Scriptures follows the rise of the prophets, with the continuation of Elisha's story. You may recall that at the end of 1 Kings 19, Elijah was appointed to anoint a new king of Israel as well as a new king over Aram, and Elisha as prophet in his place. The commander of Aram's army, Naaman, suffered from leprosy. The servant of Naaman's wife, a young Israelite woman captured during war, told Naaman's wife that the prophet in Samaria, Elisha, could cure Naaman's disease. The king of Aram sent a letter to the king of Israel, but the king of Israel had no idea what he was talking about and freaked out that perhaps Aram's king wanted to find a reason to go to war. Elisha told Israel's king to calm down and have Naaman sent to him. Elisha then sent a messenger to Naaman, who had arrived, and told him to go wash in the Jordan River seven times and he'd be cured. Naaman was angry. He'd come all that way for what he expected, a flashy miracle, and instead was told to wash in the dinky river of Israel? There were nicer rivers in Damascus! But his servants advised him that if he had been told to do something difficult, wouldn't he have done it? If it's simple, does that mean it won't work? Naaman took the advice of his servants, and washed seven times in the Jordan, and was healed of his leprosy.

5 1 Now Naaman was commander of the army of the ruler of Aram. He was a great officer and highly esteemed. It was at Naaman's hand that God gave a victory to Aram. He was a mighty warrior. And he had leprosy.

2 On one of their raids the Arameans captured a young woman who was an Israelite. She served Naaman's wife. 3 One day she said to her mistress, "If only Naaman would see the prophet who is in Samaria. He would cure Naaman's leprosy." 4 Naaman went to the ruler and told him what the Israelite woman said. 5 "By all means, go," the ruler replied. I will send a letter to the ruler of

Israel.” So Naaman left, taking ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing. 6 The letter that he took to the ruler of Israel read, “With this letter I am sending my attendant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of leprosy.”

7 As soon as the ruler of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes, and said, “Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a fight with me!” 8 When Elisha the prophet of God learned that the ruler of Israel tore his robes, he sent a message to the ruler, “Why did you tear your robes? Have Naaman come to me and he will learn that there is a prophet in Israel.” 9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha’s house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to say to the warrior, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.”

11 But Naaman went away angry, and said, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand there before me, calling on the name YHWH and wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?” So he turned and went away in a rage.

13 Naaman’s attendants went to him saying, “Sir, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed’?” 14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the prophet of God told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a youth.

A READING FROM THE PSALMS: Psalm 30 (Responsively)

Psalm 30 is a song of thanksgiving for deliverance. The psalmist celebrates that God rescued them from their enemies, saving them from death. They praise God, who continues to be faithful, even in times of difficulty. Deliverance and joy will come, for God remains true. Even during a time of crisis, the psalmist could not be despairing for long, for joy will always come. The psalmist refuses to be silent because God always remains faithful.

30 I praise you, O God,
because you raised me up
and kept my enemies
from gloating over me.

**2 I cried to you for help,
God my God,
and you healed me.**

3 You brought me back
from the realm of the dead,
God;
you spared me from going down into the Pit.

**4 Sing to God, you who love God!
Praise God’s holy Name!**

5 God’s anger is fleeting,
but God’s favor endures forever.
There may be tears during the night,
but joy comes in the morning.

6 When I presumed I was secure,
I boasted,
“I will never be defeated!”

7 When I stood in your favor, God,
I stood as firm as a mountain.
But then you hid yourself from me,
and I was filled with terror.

8 So I called to you, God,
I pleaded for your help:

9 “What good will come from my destruction,
from my going to the grave?
Does dust praise you, God?
Can the dead proclaim your unfailing goodness?”

10 Hear me, God, and be merciful!
Help me, God!”

11 Then you changed my despair into a dance—
you stripped me of my death shroud
and clothed me with joy.

12 That’s why my heart sings to you,
that’s why I can’t keep silent—
God, you are my God,
and I will thank you forever!

SECOND READING – Galatians 6:1-16

The Christian Letter reading concludes the series in Galatians. The apostle Paul gives further instructions to this church that was divided on how to welcome and accept Gentile believers. In the first six verses, Paul calls upon the church to bear one another’s burdens, but all are responsible themselves for their own actions in how they live out the word of Christ. Paul reiterates the lesson from last week’s reading: those who live in the ways of this world, the flesh, will find those ways are dead ends. The way of Christ, the way of the Spirit, leads to eternal life. Paul encourages the church to work for the good of all, especially the family of faith, which includes Gentile believers. One last time, Paul reminds the church that belonging to Christ is about faith, not about circumcision—and that controversy ought to be over because everyone in Christ has become a new creation.

6 1 Sisters and brothers, if one of you is caught in any sin, the more spiritual among you should correct the offender in a spirit of gentleness—remembering that you may be tempted yourselves. 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.

3 But if you think you are important when you are not, you are deceiving yourself. 4 Examine your own work, each of you. If you find something to boast about, at least it’s something of your own and not just empty comparison with your neighbor. 5 Carry your own load!

6 Those under instruction in the word should always contribute to the support of the instructor.

7 Don’t be deceived—God cannot be cheated: where you sow, there you will reap. 8 If you sow in the field of self-indulgence, you will reap corruption. If you sow in the field of the Spirit, you will

reap the harvest of eternal life. 9 Never grow tired of doing good. We will reap a harvest at the proper time—if we don't grow weary. 10 So, while we still have time, do good to all and especially to those of the household of faith.

11 Look how big these letters are when I write to you in my own hand!

12 Those who are pressuring the men among you to be circumcised are only trying to win favor with others, so they won't be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 They themselves are circumcised but don't even keep the Law. They want you to accept circumcision just so they can boast about it.

14 May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Savior Jesus Christ! Through it the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. 15 It means nothing whether one bothers with the externals of religion or not. All that matters is that one is created anew.

16 Peace and mercy on all who follow this rule of life and on the Israel of God. 17 Henceforth, let no one trouble me, for my body bears the marks of Jesus.

GOSPEL READING – Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Luke 10 points to the ministry of Jesus as it grew beyond the twelve disciples. This time, Jesus appointed seventy-two (other ancient manuscripts read seventy) to go out into the world and carry nothing with them, they were simply to rely on other's hospitality. They were to go where they were welcomed, to eat and drink and have fellowship, and where they were not welcome, they were simply to shake the dust from their shoes as a sign of protest and move on. All who wanted to know God would listen to them. When they returned, they shared stories with Jesus of how even the demons submitted to them, and Jesus declares that Satan had no power over them. Nothing evil could overcome them, for the authority of Christ was with them as they ministered among the people. This authority was recognized by others in their action of hospitality.

10 1 After this, Jesus appointed seventy-two others, and sent them on ahead in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. 2 He said to them, "The harvest is rich, but the workers are few; therefore, ask the overseer to send workers to the harvest.

3 "Be on your way, and remember: I am sending you as lambs in the midst of wolves. 4 Don't carry a walking stick or knapsack; wear no sandals and greet no one along the way. 5 And whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be upon this house!' 6 If the people live peaceably there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will come back to you. 7 Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you, for the laborer is worth a wage. Don't keep moving from house to house.

8 "And whatever city you enter, after they welcome you, eat what they set before you 9 and heal those who are sick in that town. Say to them, 'The reign of God has drawn near to you.' 10 If the people of any town you enter don't welcome you, go into its streets and say, 11 'We shake the dust of this town from our feet as testimony against you. But know that the reign of God has drawn near.'

16 "Anyone who listens to you, listens to me. Anyone who rejects you, rejects me; and those who reject me, reject the One who sent me."

17 The seventy-two disciples returned with joy, saying, "Rabbi, even the demons obey us in your name!"

18 Jesus replied, "I watched Satan fall from the sky like lightning. 19 Look: I've given you the

power to tread on snakes and scorpions—even all the forces of the enemy—and nothing will ever injure you. 20 Nevertheless, don't rejoice in the fact that the spirits obey you so much as that your names are inscribed in heaven."

CHORAL RESPONSE – 283 NCH – Spirit of the Living God

Choir: Keith Kone, & Barbara Rossington

Accompanist: Betty Funk

REFLECTION - Eyes on the Prize – The Rev. Doug Horner

WE RESPOND

SPECIAL MUSIC – Eyes on the Prize

- Mavis Staples – We'll Never Turn Back

- performed by Rev. Doug Horner

**Paul and Silas, bound in jail
Had no money for to go their bail
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on
Hold on, (hold on), hold on, (hold on)
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on!
Hold on, (hold on), hold on, (hold on)
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on!**

**Paul and Silas began to shout
Doors popped open, and they walked out
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on
Hold on, (hold on), hold on, (hold on)
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on!
Well, the only chains that we can stand
Are the chains of hand in hand
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on
Got my hand on the freedom plow
Wouldn't take nothing for my journey now
Keeping your eyes on the prize, hold on!**

**Hold on, (hold on), hold on, (hold on)
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on!
Hold on, (hold on), hold on, (hold on)
Keep your Eyes on the Prize, hold on!**

**Hold on, (hold on), hold on, (hold on)
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on!
Hold on, (hold on), hold on, (hold on)
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on!**

(Hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on)
(Hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on)
(Hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on)

***PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE**

Spirit of the Living God, temptation surrounds us.
Self-preservation lures us to indifference.
Fear of confrontation coaxes us to keep silent
about things that matter.
The desire to be right entices us
to ignore the cries of our neighbors.
Too often we ignore the call to go and to be
in favor of staying stuck in our attitudes and behaviors.
Too often, we are the ones who refuse to welcome you
into our intimate space, who resist the work of transformation,
and who remain unresponsive to the burdens of our siblings in creation.
Spirit of Gentleness, redirect us back to the path of life,
the way of justice, and the hope of peace. Amen.

*** HYMN - 610 NCH – My Eyes Have Seen the Glory vv. 1, 3, & 4**

My Eyes Have Seen the Glory

Author: Julia Ward Howe, 1861; alt.

Tune: BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC irr.

Source: United States camp-meeting tune, 19th century

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**1 My eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,
who is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored,
And has loosed the fateful lightning of a terrible swift sword;
God's truth is marching on.**

Refrain:

**Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
God's truth is marching on.**

**3 God has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
and is sifting out the hearts of all before the judgment seat;
O be swift, my soul, to answer and be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on. [Refrain]**

**4 In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
with a glory in whose bosom that transfigures you and me;
As Christ died to make us holy, let us live to make all free;
While God is marching on. [Refrain]**

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY

The generous life responds to the call to mutuality and burden sharing. The generous life recognizes the abundance of creation and trusts the generosity of the Giver of every good and perfect gift. The generous life follows the steps of Jesus in meeting needs, spreading hope, and sharing love.

THE OFFERTORY – *Betty Funk*

*PRESENTATION OF OFFERINGS – DOXOLOGY

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

*PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING

Creator, bless these gifts that we bring to this community and the world. May our time be used preciously, our treasure shared faithfully, and our talents demonstrated gloriously in your name. Amen.

CHORAL HYMN – 468 NCH – The Care the Eagle Gives Her Young

Author: R. Deane Postlethwaite, 1980– Composer: Jesse Seymour Irvine, 1872 - Harmonizer: T. C. L. Pritchard, 1929
Harmonization © 1929, Oxford University press. From the SCOTTISH PSALTER, 1929

Choir: Keith Konet & Barbara Rossington
Accompanist: Betty Funk

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

THE LORD'S PRAYER – using “debts” and “debtors”

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,
for ever and ever. Amen.

GOING FORTH

* PARTING HYMN – 594 NCH – How Beautiful, Our Spacious Skies vv. 1, 2, & 3

How Beautiful, Our Spacious Skies

Author (St. 1): Katherine Lee Bates, 1893; alt.

Author (St. 2-4): Miriam Therese Winter, 1993

Word adaptations © 1993 Medical Mission Sisters

Tune: MATERNA C.M.D.

Composer: Samuel A. Ward, 1882

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**1 How beautiful our spacious skies,
our amber waves of grain;
our purple mountains as they rise
above the fruitful plain.**

**America! America! God's gracious gifts abound,
and more and more we're grateful for
life's bounty all around.**

**2 Indigenous and immigrant,
Our daughters and our sons:
O may we never rest content
till all are truly one.**

**America! America! God grant that we may be
a sisterhood and brotherhood
from sea to shining sea.**

**3 How beautiful, sincere lament,
the wisdom born of tears,
the courage called for to repent
the bloodshed through the years.**

**America! America! God grant that we may be
a nation blessed with none oppressed,
true land of liberty.**

*COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

One: Let us never grow weary of doing what is right!

Many: We will go to seek justice for all of God's children.

One: Let us not grow weary of leading others to the Christ's dominion!

Many: We will go to follow Jesus' example of gathering all into grace.

One: Let us not grow weary of speaking of hope and peace.

Many: We will go to sow the Spirit's seed of life and hope. Amen.

POSTLUDE – Betty Funk

* * * * *

Credits

- (1) The Call to Worship, Invocation, Prayer for Transformation and New Life, Invitation to Generosity, and the Prayer of Dedication and Thanksgiving are adapted from *May Peace Be: Service Prayers for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost*, written by Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay, Minister for Worship and Theology, United Church of Christ. Copyright 2022 Faith INFO Ministry Team, 700 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115-1100. Permission granted to reproduce or adapt this material for use in services of worship or church education. All publishing rights reserved.
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- (3) Permission to stream the music in this service obtained from ONE LICENSE, License #A-736636. All rights reserved.

Ministers, *All of Us*
Scott Rosenstein, *Pastor*
Betty Funk, *Pianist and Music Director*
Keith Konet, *Council President*



NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

God is Still Speaking...

No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you will find a spiritual home in this United Church of Christ congregation. WELCOME!

Tithes and Offerings - Checks and Money Orders can be made payable to: "Zion United Church of Christ" and mailed to:

Zion United Church of Christ
c/o Keith Konet
1039 Bridlewood Drive
Copley, OH 44321

Questions: Contact Keith Konet at 330.604.6939



Congratulations to Patti Augustine!

on the birth of her grandchildren, **Max and Lucy**, on Sunday, June 27th.
Best Wishes to Patti and Deborah – to Max and Lucy, and to their parents Cate and Noah!

Season after Pentecost - Ordinary Time



The longest season of the liturgical calendar is filled with Sundays called “Ordinary Time.” **The season - called the Season after Pentecost or Ordinary Time - began with Trinity Sunday and ends with Reign of Christ Sunday (the Sunday before the start of Advent).** If you’re like me, you might hear “ordinary time” as “boring time.” But that’s not the case! The word “ordinary” most likely means “numbered” here (think ordinal numbers), because

the Sundays of Ordinary Time are numbered. **In this season we move from concentrating on the event of Christ in the world to focusing toward the impact of being in Christ in the world. A life in the unity of the Trinity is one of being shaped and sent daily in the image and in the purpose of Holy Love.** The liturgical color for this season is green. During the Season after Pentecost, we focus on the life of the Church as it grows in the midst of the world.

“When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall.

Think of it—always.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

Pastor Scott Rosenstein and Bob Bucklew will be on vacation

and out-of-state **until July 6th** with very limited access to phone, text, or internet. In case of pastoral need during this time, please contact Zion Church Council President Keith Konet at 330.604.6939. For routine matters, please e-mail tremont701@gmail.com – or leave a message on the church phone number: 216.273.7561. Pastor Scott can return e-mails, calls, and texts following his return to the office on July 7.



Guest Preacher Today, July 3rd, 2022

Is the **Rev. Doug Horner** of Ohio City. Rev. Horner is an ordained pastor in the United Church of Christ, US Marine Corp. veteran, Advocate for our Homeless neighbors, and served as Senior Pastor of St. Paul's Community UCC of Ohio City for 17 years of ministry – retiring in 2020. St. Paul's, with roots in the Inner City Protestant Parish movement of the 1950s, has always been a community center as well as a worshipping congregation. It hosts daytime drop-in programs, a thrift shop, free meals, after-school youth activities, occasional evening “coffee house” performances and more. Rev. Horner most recently served as an active staff volunteer on the Justin Bibb campaign for Cleveland Mayor. Please give Rev. Horner a very warm Zion Church welcome!



What Does the Bible Say About Transgender People (Part 3 of 3)

Produced by the HRC Foundation

Introduction

For several decades, political and theological debates related to LGBTQ+ issues have centered around same-sex relationships for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. While an exploration of that topic is important, the volume of faith resources dedicated to it have often excluded reflection on the unique considerations related to gender identity. Mistakenly, some Christians have suggested that taking the Bible seriously requires people of faith to stand in opposition to the existence, health and humanity of transgender people. Consequently, gender-expansive people of all demographics and Christian traditions have been made to feel that they must choose between their faith and living a whole, healthy and authentic life. Whether you are a ministry leader, the family member of a transgender person or a trans person of faith yourself, this page seeks to serve as a brief overview of the Bible's precedent for affirming the full inclusion of transgender, non-binary and other gender-expansive people in the full life of Christian community.

The language we use

Sometimes it can feel overwhelming to learn new terms and new concepts, especially if we see those terms change in meaning or use from one context to another. Whether we are talking about transgender issues or about faith, this seems to be true. This resource aims only to offer a starting place for a dialogue on both. For the purposes of our writing, when we use **gender identity** we are

referring to one's internal sense of being male, female, both or neither. When we use the phrase **"sex assigned at birth,"** what we mean is the sex that was assigned by a doctor at birth based on some combination of sex chromosomes, genes, gonads and internal and external genitalia, as well as physiological hormones. When we use the word **transgender**, we are describing a person whose gender identity is different than the sex they were assigned at birth. It is an adjective, a descriptive word, and can encompass any variety of non-binary and gender-expansive identities. For example, consider Josh, a transgender man who grew up with his parents assuming he was a girl. For as long as he could remember, he knew himself to be a boy. But he didn't know about transgender people until he was older and could finally see himself in their stories and come out. Or consider Sam, a non-binary person who uses they/them pronouns. Sam grew up being told they were a boy but they never knew themselves to be a boy. They came out as non-binary to reflect their authentic experience with their gender identity.

When we use **gender expression**, we are talking about the way that a person may outwardly reflect their internal sense of gender through presentation, such as through clothing, hair, voice and body language. **Sexual orientation**, which describes whom a person is physically and/or emotionally attracted to, is a separate category, and doesn't influence someone's gender identity or gender expression. It's important to understand that gender expression and sexual orientation are different from gender identity. In our examples above, Josh could be a transgender man who is gay, bisexual or straight. Sam could be a non-binary person who expresses their gender consistently in a more traditionally masculine or feminine way, or neither or both at the same time.

When we use the term **affirming**, what we are referring to is the theological view that all expressions of gender are an integral part of God's design for diversity within the created order. When we use **non-affirming**, we are referring to the theological view that transgender and other expressions of gender variance are either a) sinful within themselves or b) that they are morally neutral but nevertheless a kind of disorder, mental illness or other brokenness. Whether you already feel confident in your position or are searching for new possibilities, our hope is that researching, studying and wrestling with the Scriptures and questions most relevant to trans experiences are part and parcel of what it means for Christians to "love God with all of one's heart, soul, and mind" (Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37, Luke 10:7).

Wrestling with Scripture

Being wonderfully made - Psalm 139:13-14

Psalm 139:13-14's reference to "being wonderfully made" in the "womb," is frequently referenced within non-affirming theologies to support the idea that being transgender or non-binary and pursuing medically necessary health care is a rejection of God as the designer of life. But that is a severely limiting interpretation, with implications well beyond transgender experiences. Psalm 139 implies that we are all created with love and intention and that every part of us was divinely formed with dignity -- both our bodies and our inner knowledge of self. There is no textual reason to believe this excludes our gender identities or gender expressions. While it is true that physical transformation can be rooted in shame, unrealistic beauty standards and body-negativity generally, for many people it can also stem from a position of love, care and stewardship for their body. Transgender and non-binary people pursue physical change, not as an act of revulsion, but as an expression of being committed to integrity in body and spirit. They are acting on the conviction that being "fearfully and wonderfully

made” means that peace and wholeness is actually what God wants for us and for the world, whatever that journey looks like to each person.

Often times, transgender people know God through their transgender journeys. Trans experiences can be a rich source through which God speaks different words both to that person and to the people around them; a message that God loves diversity and variation; a message that God invites people into collaboration and co-creating how we will move in and shape the world around us; a message that sometimes knowledge about who we are and who God made us to be can come in different stages and evolve over time.

Gender in Christian community - Galatians 3:28

One of the most difficult things human beings have had to learn how to do is to work together despite our differences, and that’s no less true in the church. There are times when we emphasize the things that we share, and times when we have to emphasize our different gifts and talents even when they seem to put us at odds. We see this tension play out in many of the Apostle Paul’s letters to the early Christian churches, and in his letter to the Galatians he toes this line again when he says, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28, NRSV). While on the surface this verse may suggest that we ignore or even try to get rid of our differences, it’s also clear from the rest of Paul’s letters that he took these differences seriously during his ministry. He probably was not suggesting that a person ceased to be male or female after baptism, and yet perhaps, when we die and rise again with Christ, we might be made free from the cultural power dynamics that cause one person to oppress another based on race, ethnicity, class, ability, gender or any other difference we may have. Instead, rather than trying to destroy or ignore a facet of humanity that makes us all different, we might consider dissolving the harmful power dynamics that tear us apart. This balance between sameness and difference, between the individual and the communal, is necessary for life together in Christ.

But what if these interpretations are wrong?

The answer to this question will be different depending on the tradition of the person asking. For example, for some Christians, affirming or not affirming transgender and non-binary people is connected to salvation and eternity. For other Christians, the afterlife isn’t their main concern, but instead their focus is determining what it means for Christians to contribute to human flourishing and to the moral integrity of the church. Whatever is at stake for the person asking, it is important to note the role of humility, grace and having a consistent standard to apply in discerning what is true of God. We read in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians that until Christ returns we are bound to see truth in a way that is incomplete, a mere reflection, “as in a mirror, dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12, NRSV). The Bible calls its interpreters to the awareness that even if ultimate truth about any subject isn’t always in our grasp, we can still remain committed to the task of trying to find it.

As we wrestle, though, we can find solace in knowing that our salvation is not based on our ability to read God’s mind, or our ability to be absolutely perfect and hold all the right views--we are saved by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8, NRSV). Additionally, for many Christians, the metric Jesus provided in the Gospel of Matthew about good fruit and bad fruit is one of the most important tools for interpretation: “...[E]very good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit” (Matthew 7:17-18, NRSV). A quick survey of

the destructive fruit that has come from non-affirming teaching on transgender communities demonstrates the need to explore what other theologies might have to say. Conversely, the outcome of affirming theologies on gender identity lead to words and actions that are reconciliatory, restorative and profoundly “good news” -- not just for individuals, but families, churches and entire communities.

Conclusion

If you are new to this conversation, it's normal to feel overwhelmed, or fearful that other people will accuse you of affirming transgender and non-binary people merely because it seems politically correct or trendy. However, even though it is true that there has been an increase in transgender and non-binary visibility in media, our society has never seen as many trans-exclusionary bills in state legislatures, public faith statements made against transgender people in churches or higher rates of recorded crimes and violence committed against transgender people. Having the biblical and theological precedent demonstrated throughout this writing doesn't guarantee anyone protection from continued discrimination. It is always a profound act of courage to come out to yourself and to your community. Similarly, for the friends and family of transgender and non-binary people, to publicly express your love and support in many contexts can be an act of critical solidarity.

In the midst of fear, stress or confusion, it's important to remember that we are invited to pause, breathe and simply observe the work God is already doing. The experiences of gender diversity can be found in nearly every culture throughout recorded human history. Traditionally gender non-conforming people were given communal roles as spiritual leaders, healers, conflict mediators and cultural conduits.

While not all of these experiences map perfectly on to contemporary trans experiences, what we do see similarly today are countless examples of transgender and non-binary people across denominations operating in specialized roles within the church whether formally recognized or not. Transgender and non-binary people are actively preaching, teaching, leading, pastoring and offering their time, energy and various gifts for ministry and service. What this tells us is that the real issue here is not whether a person can be transgender and Christian, but whether the church will acknowledge and empower those whom God is already working through to enrich the whole life of the body of Christ. As we all approach this topic with compassion, humility and courage, we may call to mind the words of Gamaliel, a teacher who defended the persecuted apostles of the early church: “...[I]f this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!” (Acts 5:34-39, NRSV).

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Additional Resources:

- This Is My Body: Hearing the Theology of Transgender Christians by Christina Beardsley (Darton Longman & Todd Ltd, 2017)
- Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians by Austen Hartke (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018)
- Transgender Welcome by Bishop Gene Robinson - The Center for American Progress
- An Affirmation Guide to Trans and Gender-Expansive Identities by Taj Smith, edited by Q Christian Fellowship
- Nicole Garcia on Being a Trans Latina Pastor - 2020 Q Christian Fellowship Conference
- La Familia: Una Conversación Sobre Nuestras Familias, la Biblia, la Orientación Sexual y la Identidad de Género - The Institute for Welcoming Resources

Please Remember in Prayer

- The Universal Church, its members and mission,
- The nation and all in authority, the leaders of our nation - federal, state, and local.
- For democracy and our democratic institutions and norms in the United States.
- The welfare of the world and the concerns of the local community,
- The interrelationship of Gospel values and civic engagement
- Our 155th Anniversary as a community of faith of Zion Church on May 15th, 2022.
- Ministries of the United Church of Christ and of Zion Church.
- The leaders of our church: local, regional, and national, including our Living Water Association UCC, Association General Minister, The Rev. Nayiri Karjian, and Association Faith in Action Minister, The Rev. Michael Howard.
- The ministers and missionaries of the world.
- Those who are refugees and immigrants.
- For children separated from their parents at detention camps along our southern border.
- The families of Ruth Whitfield, 86; Roberta Drury, 32; Aaron Salter, 55; Heyward Patterson, 67; Pearl Young, 77; Geraldine Talley, 62; Celestine Chaney, 65; Katherine Massey, 72; Margus Morrison, 52; and Andre Mackneil, 53 killed last week in a racist-inspired mass shooting at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York.
- The family and friends of John Cheng, 52, killed in a mass shooting at a church reception in Laguna Woods, California on May 15th.
- The families and friends of the 19 children (3rd & 4th graders) and two teachers murdered in the massacre at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas: Alexandria Aniyah Rubio, 10; Alithia Ramirez, 10; Amerie Jo Garza, 10; Annabell Guadalupe Rodriguez, 10; Eliahana Cruz Torres, 10; Eliana "Ellie" Garcia, 9; Eva Mireles, 44 (fourth grade teacher); Irma Garcia (fourth grade teacher); Jackie Cazares, 10; Jailah Nicole Silguero, 10; Jayce Luevanos, 10; Jose Flores, 10; Layla Salazar, 10; Makenna Lee Elrod, 10; Maite Rodriguez; Miranda Mathis, 11; Nevaeh Bravo; Rojelio Torres, 10; Tess Marie Mata; Uziyah Garcia, 10; and Xavier Lopez, 10.
- The families and friends of the those killed in the mass shooting at a medical center in Tulsa, Oklahoma on June 1st: two doctors, Preston Phillips, 59 and Stephanie Husen, 48; a receptionist, Amanda Glenn, 40; and a visitor/patient, William Love, 73.

- The families and friends of those killed in the shootings at a potluck dinner on June 16th at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Vestavia Hills, Alabama: 84-year-old Walter Rainey, 75-year-old Sarah Yeager and 84-year-old Jane Pounds.
- **May God be revealed in their stories and the tears of all who mourn. May their memory be a blessing and their life in God's good care last forever.**
- For racial and religious justice and reconciliation in the United States and around the world.
- Mother Earth and the global reflection on climate disruption.
- For peace, justice, and freedom throughout the world and particularly for the peoples of Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and the United States.
- The people of Afghanistan, Venezuela, Syria, Yemen, Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Kurdish people and the Christians of northern Syria - for peace, nutrition, and justice.
- The people of Tonga affected by the eruption of an undersea volcano and tsunami flooding.
- According to data from the Gun Violence Archive, a total of 293 mass shooting incidents have occurred in the US as of June 27th, 2022. In 2021 a total of 693 mass shooting incidents occurred across the US, in 2020 a total of 611, in 2019 a total of 417, with 337 incidents in 2018. While we pray for the families and friends of those whose lives have been taken in violent acts – and we pray for those injured in body, mind, soul, and spirit – and for their neighborhoods and communities across the United States - We know that our words and prayers are not enough. We must repent for our collective inaction and commit to tirelessly working toward meaningful gun violence prevention.
- For those affected by the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic and the omicron variant surge: for all those who are infected and/or sick, and those who are grieving, for all who are affected, all around the world, for essential workers and frontline workers...we pray for comfort, for safety, for health, and for wholeness.
- The residents and management of the San Sofia Apartments who share a campus with us.
- Those anticipating surgery, recovering from surgery, or undergoing medical procedures, tests, or treatments
- Those living in assisted living or in a nursing home
- Those who are homebound and those who are caregivers
- Those who suffer or are in any trouble, and the departed.
- Those on our church prayer list:
 - Patti Augustine and family
 - Robert O. Bucklew (*Bob Bucklew's Dad*) in Alliance, Ohio
 - Betty Funk (*our Minister of Music*)
 - Marian Heffernan (*neighbor to Scott and Bob; friend of Elaine – health concerns*)
 - Ken Kauffman & friends: Nim Bryant, Isadora Almaro, Joe & Janelle Reardon, Barbara, and Michael Reed.
 - Jocelyn Paulette and her parents, Kevin & Jacqui Konet
 - Keith Konet
 - Marcia Leslie (*neighbor and friend – health concerns*)
 - Elaine Lukacs (*fell at home and injured her knee and leg, presently at O'Neill Healthcare, Room 103, 7250 Old Oak Blvd., Middleburg Heights, Ohio 44130 – 440.863.5624*)
 - Linda and James Mortach (*Elaine Lukacs' sister & brother-in-law*) & Linda's daughter
 - Patricia Matheny (prayers also for her Cousin Paul Kevin McCray)
 - Lee Matsos and family

- Barbara Rossington (*move to a new senior housing community*)
- Henry Senyak (*resident community leader – cancer*)
- The family of Michael O'Brien particularly his wife, Debbie Webb (*following Michael's death last Fall. Our love and sympathy to Debbie and Michael's family*).
- Beverly Wurm (*recuperating*)
- Kim (*friend of Bev Wurm – cancer*)



Happy Independence Day – July 4th, USA

Wishing our nation and its peoples a healthy and happy celebration of the USA's Independence Day. Our thanks to God for God's many blessings to the United States of America and its people these past 246 years.

Help for Ukraine

Gifts made to UCC **Ukraine Emergency Appeal** will provide shelter, food, and other care to war refugees and internally displaced people.

Donate online with the link below:

<https://support.ucc.org/global-h-o-p-e/ukraine-emergency-appeal>

Or designate a check for Ukraine Relief and mail to:

United Church of Christ,
P.O. Box 71957
Cleveland, OH 44194.



Gifts made to **Sharing America's Resources Abroad (S.A.R.A)** provide food, clothing, and sanitary items for refugees fleeing to Hungary.

Donate online with the link:

https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=QC5P9F6Z9LT32

Or designate a check for **S.A.R.A. - Donations for Ukraine Emergency Fund** and mail to:

SARA
c/o Heartland Conference UCC
P.O. Box 1230
Worthington, OH 43085.

Please know that your gifts of any size make a difference in this critical time.