

First United Methodist Church Order of Worship
Third Sunday after the Epiphany
January 24, 2021

Prelude *Lord, Be Glorified*

Judy Monson

Announcements & Welcome

Jes Houk

Let us seek to simplify this moment, slow down for a time. Let us worship, leaning on prayer, reflection and sharing with one another.

“My one and only!” So many songs have utilized this phrase to express devoted love. This week we see that this tradition goes back all the way to the poets of the psalm tradition. This is a love psalm of trust in the “Holy One and Only” who is the rock and refuge in the midst of life that sometimes feels as fleeting as breath. We put our trust in the One who, indeed, is holding our lives.

**Turn now your gaze upon the earth
Where is the One who never sleeps?
We call the One who guards you now,
Your spirit safe in holy keep.**

One: God is holding your life
All: God is holding your life
God is holding your life
God is holding your life
God is holding your life, we believe
God is holding your life

Opening Prayer

Rob Lauder

Dear and Near God,
you never leave our side.
Open us this day to feeling and knowing your presence deep in our hearts
so that we might show forth love with the same confidence,
offering your reign of right relationship on earth as it is in heaven.
**People: We praise you for your close attention,
holding our lives together in care. Amen.**

Hymn *When Love is Found* UM Hymnal 643

Jes Houk & Judy Monson

Scripture Reading *Psalms 62: 5-12, Lukan Psalter Translation*

Rob Lauder

Written in a time when the Hebrew faith claimed one God while other faiths around them claimed many, the point of this Psalm seems to be making the case for the Holy “One and Only.” But it also names riches as a “god” that we sometimes “set our heart upon” as the confidence-setting end-goal. This speaks to us now as much as it did then. In our lifetime we have witnessed that as fleeting as breath is the notion of economic security. Whether we are

feeling low or high of “estate” makes no difference. We can count on the steadfast presence of God.

In God alone my soul finds rest,
for my deliverance comes from God,
who alone is my rock, my salvation,
my fortress:
I will never be shaken.

Only in God—my deliverance, my glory—
my refuge is God.
Trust in God always, my people;
pour out your hearts before God our refuge.

Humankind is but a breath,
mortals are just an illusion.
Put them on the scales and the balance
is thrown off:
they weigh less than a breath.

Do not trust in extortion,
or put false hopes in stolen goods;
do not set your heart on riches
even when they increase.

For God has said only one thing,
Twice have I heard it:
that power belongs to God:
Steadfast love is yours, ADONAI –
you repay all people according
to their deeds.

Congregation Member Share Video

Lisbet Sherwood

This is an opportunity to let people share how they have felt the love and support of others, of God, and their experiences in this time of pandemic.

Passing of the Peace Video Day by Day

Katie Cardoza

Scripture Genesis 2:18; Song of Songs 2:10-13 (The Message)

Rob Lauder

Both Scripture passages demonstrate that God’s intention for us is to have love, companionship, sex, friendship, and relationship as a part of our lives. These all are good gifts from God meant to be lived out as blessing to each other.

Genesis 2:18 The Inclusive Bible

Then Yahweh said, “It is not good for the earth creature to be alone. I will make a fitting companion for it.”

Song of Songs 2:10-13 The Message Bible

Get up, my dear friend,
fair and beautiful lover—come to me!
Look around you: Winter is over;
the winter rains are over, gone!
Spring flowers are in blossom all over.
The whole world's a choir—and singing!
Spring warblers are filling the forest
with sweet arpeggios.
Lilacs are exuberantly purple and perfumed,
and cherry trees fragrant with blossoms.
Oh, get up, dear friend,
my fair and beautiful lover—come to me!
Come, my shy and modest dove—
leave your seclusion, come out in the open.

Children's Time

Rev. Maggie

Special Music *Rain Down*

Marcy & Dave Troesher, Nanci Campbell

Witness to the Word: *Love and Relationships: More Than a Piece of Paper*

Rev. Maggie

Today we begin a new series of sermons based on a book that I've read entitled, *Love to Stay* by Adam Hamilton. We are going to spend the next few weeks digging into relationships and looking at what we can do together to support one another in our love relationships. Although much is directed toward those who are in committed relationships, I will work hard to keep the series friendly to the single folks among us as well as I also stress the importance of having friendship in our lives.

Robert Fulgrum, the guy who wrote everything I really needed to know I learned in kindergarten once wrote:

“We’re all a little weird. And life is a little weird. And when we find someone whose weirdness is compatible with ours, we join up with them and fall into mutually satisfying weirdness—and call it love—true love.”

Within each of us there is a deep seeded desire or longing for close companionship with another person. Even the most introverted person seeks to connect with another human being. Social scientists tell us we are happier and enjoy a more fulfilling life when connected to others.

Remember what it was like when you were young to fall in love? In Song of Songs, it is described this way:

**Look! Listen! There's my lover!
Do you see him coming?
Vaulting the mountains,
leaping the hills.**

**My lover is like a gazelle, graceful;
like a young stag, virile.
Look at him there, on tiptoe at the gate,
all ears, all eyes—ready!
My lover has arrived
and he's speaking to me!**

**¹⁰⁻¹⁴ Get up, my dear friend,
fair and beautiful lover—come to me!
Look around you: Winter is over;
the winter rains are over, gone!
Spring flowers are in blossom all over.
The whole world's a choir—and singing!
Spring warblers are filling the forest
with sweet arpeggios.
Lilacs are exuberantly purple and perfumed,
and cherry trees fragrant with blossoms.
Oh, get up, dear friend,
my fair and beautiful lover—come to me!
Come, my shy and modest dove—
leave your seclusion, come out in the open.
Let me see your face,
let me hear your voice.
For your voice is soothing
and your face is ravishing.**

Do you remember the first crush you had? My first crush came in the 5th grade....Michael Bridges. He was my square dance partner and we played basketball during recess in Virginia. One day after school he kissed me and ran off down the street. I saw stars and we were crushes for 3 months until my dad was transferred to a base in Rhode Island. If I close my eyes, I can still see that gangly kid with the goofy smile on his face, holding my hand as if it were the most precious moment in our lives.

And there were other relationships including a marriage that ended in divorce but eventually Cliff and I found our way to each other and he is the love of my life.

Staying married or in a committed relationship or friendship requires perseverance, hard work and from time to time it requires a bit of help. In this series we'll focus on what it means to live as committed partners in a relationship, whether that is marriage or friendship. These lessons will apply to any committed relationship and it's my goal to help support each of us in achieving a loving relationship that will last a lifetime.

So, how do we define marriage? How do we define a committed relationship? I don't know if there is much difference in the actual work involved.

Those of you who have been together more than 30 years may agree with me when I say that a relationship of that many years takes hard work.

It is no cake walk. That's not to say that if you have had to endure a divorce that you didn't work hard. Having been divorced I would say that divorce doesn't generally happen until the hard work just stops working. I'll save the topic of divorce for another day but I don't want to slight anyone who has been divorced – particularly I don't want to imply that you just didn't work hard enough. Fair enough?

Maybe those who stay in relationship are just a little more stubborn, or maybe just a little sick and twisted, I don't know. What I do know is that as relationships last and grow they have the capability of becoming not only lasting but deeper and more enriching in the process.

I heard about an "elderly couple who lay down to bed one night. Sam said to Chris, "When we were younger you used to lie close to me." Chris sighed and moved closer.

Sam said, "I remember when you used to hold my hand." Chris signed again, a little frustrated, but reached out and took Sam's hand. Then Sam said, "I remember when you used to nibble my ear." This time Chris angrily threw back the covers and got up to leave. Shocked, Sam asked, "Where are you going?" Chris replied, "To get my teeth!"

What a great story of sacrificial love. The fact that Chris would think to get out of a nice warm bed to find the teeth in a cup of Efferdent so that Sam would feel loved and blessed is unbelievable. This is a love that lasts a lifetime!

Let's admit it that relationships have changed over the past few decades. The need for human companionship and romantic partnership hasn't changed, but how relationships play out certainly has. Divorce rates peaked out in the 1980's, although it is generally accepted that between 40 and 50 percent of couples marrying today will end in divorce.

Many young people have seen the consequences of divorce in their families of origin and are less likely to step into marriage themselves. And of course, they are waiting until they are older to get married.

I find it interesting that to build a building we have to have a permit—to prove we can do the work. To drive a car we have to have a license to prove we can operate heavy machinery. To become an ordained minister I endured years of studying and testing; but to be married it requires nothing but the \$60.00 fee and a little time to stop by the county clerk's office. There is no training, no preparation, no certification for how to work successfully in a marriage. Some churches, including ours, require premarital counseling.

I require all folks who come to be married, to meet with me to talk about what the couple's strengths are and where they might need additional help. We talk about communication and the major challenges couples face: children, family of origin issues and money. I also encourage couples to seek help if and when they need it. I think the stigma of going to a marriage counselor is getting better but I know there are many folks who don't think they need it because to them, going to a therapist is a sign of weakness or failure.

It's like having a car that you love and deciding it's not important enough to take it to a mechanic if it overheats. You can keep on driving it, but eventually you'll ruin the engine. In relationships, it's helpful and sometimes essential to consult an objective third party who is trained in helping couples work through common, and sometimes not so common, issues. I

have sought professional help from a therapist a number of times over the years. The last time it was more like a tune up than a full overhaul but it was time well spent.

So why do we get married? What is it about marriage that is so important? Is it just a piece of paper? Is it just the financial benefits that we receive or the health benefits that motivate us to “tie the knot?” Marriage is more than a piece of paper.

God created the marriage union as a way to address a human need for companionship and to provide for us the partner we need to walk the journey that is our lives. Marriage is really more like a call to do mission work. God calls us to care for, bless and serve one another. I believe the same can be said about long term committed relationships and friendships.

God calls us to channel God’s love and kindness to all, but long term committed relationships call us to do it in a special, intentional way toward someone whom we will partner in life. God knew that it wasn’t good for either Adam or Eve to be alone. “This speaks of the hunger each of us is born with, for intimacy with others. And so God says, “I will make each of them a partner to the other.”

“The mission for marriage and those in long term relationships like friendships is for both to be helpers, partners, and companions for one another. Being a helper does not imply a subservient role for either...the word for “helper” in Genesis 2 is the Hebrew word *ezer*, always used in the Bible to mean one who is strong coming to help one who is weaker or facing more difficulties or challenges. In fact, this word is often applied to God in relation to humanity.

The idea is not that a weaker person is brought in to serve the stronger, but that two people bring their mutual strengths to the relationships in order to bless one another.

“Both parties in a committed relationship are intended to be each other’s helper and companion. They are meant to be counterparts, to complement each other the way the left shoe complements the right shoe in a long journey on a rocky road. Ideally, an equality between the partners is born from complementary strengths working in union.

To be a helper is to seek the best for the person you’re helping – in the way they can best receive it. Some of us need to be reminded that our job is not to solve all the problems our partner brings to us...it is better if we come alongside them, encourage and bless them, and build them up...that’s what it means to be a helper.

I want to invite those of you who are in a married or committed relationship to think about the vows you took and remind yourself of the meaning and the commitment you made. I imagine those vows mean something a little different today than they did 10, 30 or 50 years ago. I encourage you to write new vows to one another and recommit yourself to your partner as you are today.

If you aren’t in a committed relationship and hope to be I invite you to think about what you would like in a relationship so that you are looking for what you want and not settling for what you don’t want.

The same can be said for the kinds of friends we want in any stage of our lives. We need to look for close friends who will watch over us with the kind of love, respect, care and honesty that God watches over with us. The kind of friends that have our backs, want the very best for us and encourage us to make our own dreams come true. No room for jealousy here.

These relationships are more than a piece of paper. In fact, the paper part is easy. Creating the spiritual art forms designed to help us love one another in relationships, well that's the part we continually have to practice and keep learning. In all of our relationships, God calls us as followers in the way of Jesus to bring love, respect, care and honesty especially to the other. Amen.

Hymn / Love You, Lord Faith We Sing 2068

Jes Houk & Judy Monson

"Selah" Moment

Jes Houk

Let us center our hearts. We will hear the Singing Bowl and then have some silence. Feel free to close your eyes if you like. Imagine yourself held in safety and love and care. When you hear the Singing Bowl again, open your eyes.

Silence

Let us take a moment to write prayer concerns on small pieces of paper. Then place your prayers into a container like Maggie's box here--a symbolic action of placing them in God's hands, God's care. Let the people say, "Selah" **Selah!**

Praises and Prayers

Rev. Maggie

Pastoral Prayer/Lord's Prayer

Hymn Jesus, Joy of Our Desiring

UM Hymnal 644

Jes Houk & Judy Monson

Blessing

Rev. Maggie

Now go in the knowledge that
God is holding your life
even as we hold each other.
You are not alone.
You are loved.
Amen.

Postlude Where He Leads Me

Katie Lauder

Zoom Fellowship:

Join us after service on Zoom! Whether you stay for just a few minutes or the full 30, or longer, we'd love to hear your voice and see your face!

Zoom link will be posted in the chat, but it is also
here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87985579318>

or by phone:

call: 1 669-900-9128 enter passcode: 879 8557 9318

Today's discussion questions are:

1. What is one thing you did as a child that you no longer do as an adult?
2. What is one thing you never get bored of?
3. When is the last time you felt truly, deeply happy?

When Love Is Found

643

1. When love is found and hope comes home,
 2. When love has flowered in trust and care,
 3. When love is tried as loved ones change,
 4. When love is torn and trust be-trayed,
 5. Praise God for love, praise God for life,

sing and be glad that two are one.
 build both each day, that love may dare
 hold still to hope though all seems strange,
 pray strength to love till tor-ments fade,
 in age or youth, in hus-band, wife.

When love ex- plodes and fills the sky,
 to reach be- yond home's warmth and light,
 till ease re- turns, and love grows wise
 till lov- ers keep no score of wrong,
 Lift up your hearts, let love be fed

praise God and share our Mak- er's joy.
 to serve and strive for truth and right.
 through lis- tening ears and o- pened eyes.
 but hear through pain love's Eas- ter song.
 through death and life in bro- ken bread.

WORDS: Brian Wren, 1978
 MUSIC: Trad. English melody; adapt. by Hal Hopson, 1972
 Words © 1983 Hope Publishing Co.; music © 1972 Hope Publishing Co.

GIFT OF LOVE
LM

2068

I Love You, Lord

I love you, Lord, — and I lift my voice — to
 wor- ship you, O my soul re- joice. Take
 joy, my King, — in what you hear, — may it be a
 sweet, sweet sound in your ear.

WORDS: Laurie Klein (Ps. 35:9)

MUSIC: Laurie Klein

I LOVE YOU, LORD
Irregular

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THE SACRAMENTS AND RITES OF THE CHURCH

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Jesus, Joy of Our Desiring

1. Je- sus, joy of our de- sir-ing, ho- ly wis- dom,
 2. Through the way where hope is guid-ing, hark, what peace- ful

love most bright; drawn by thee, our souls as- pir-ing soar to
 mu- sic rings; where the flock, in thee con- fid-ing, drink of

un- cre- at- ed light. Word of God, our flesh that fash-ioned,
 joy from death- less springs. Theirs is beau- ty's fair- est plea- sure;

with the fire of life im- pas- sioned, striv- ing still to
 theirs is wis- dom's ho- liest trea- sure. Thou dost ev- er

truth un- known, soar- ing, dy- ing round thy throne.
 lead thine own in the love of joys un- known.

WORDS: Martin Janus, 1661; trans. anon.
 MUSIC: Johann Schop, arr. by J. S. Bach, 1723

JESU, JOY OF MAN'S DESIRING
87.87.88.77

Questions for Reflection
Alone, with a Friend, or in a Small Group
January 24, 2021

- 1. Share an example of a long term committed relationship that you would describe as the most loving, caring relationship you have witnessed.**
 - a. What did that look like?**
 - b. What adjectives would you use to describe the relationship?**
- 2. Read Song of Songs 2:10-13 (in the Message translation)**
 - a. What does this passage say to us about human love?**
- 3. Read Genesis 2:18**
 - a. Based on this passage, what do you think God's vision is for relationships?**
 - b. What is one thought or idea from these scriptures especially intrigued, provoked, disturbed, challenge, encouraged, warmed, warned, helped or surprised you?**
- 4. Think of a long term relationship that you have been in or are currently in.**
 - a. What kinds of issues were difficult to resolve in the beginning?**
 - b. What kind of issues are you dealing with now or dealt with later in the relationship (It's okay not to go into detail)**
- 5. What are the kinds of skills partners need to develop for the long haul in a committed relationship?**
- 6. Whether we are in a committed relationship or not, how can we as a community support long term relationships? Please be specific.**
- 7. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, believed that we could follow all of Jesus' teachings if we remembered these three simple rules:**
 - a. Do No Harm**
 - b. Do all the good you can**
 - c. Stay in love with God**
 - i. How have you practiced living by these rules in the last week?**