

Unrecognizable: Our World in Christ**Sunday, May 2nd, 2021 || 5th Sunday of Easter - Communion || Pastor Christy Wright*****Yes, we are meeting outdoors at 9:30 AM, this Sunday in front of the Church!******For full details, please read below in the Community Announcements Section.***

If you are unable to join us in person, we invite you to light a candle at 9:30 AM and join us in prayer online or over the phone for a pre-recorded service. Audio worship, including the prelude and postlude, prayers, and the sermon is available at <https://georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services> or over the phone at (978) 990-5000, access code 719365#. Just dial in, enter the access code on your keypad, and you will hear the service begin with music.

Note that we may not be able to include the hymns in pre-recorded services - thank you for your understanding.

Announcements**Opening Hymn****Scripture Reading - 1 John 4:7-21**

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent Jesus into the world so that we might live through Christ. In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent Jesus Christ to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in God and God in us, because God has given us the Holy Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that God has sent Jesus as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as God is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because God first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their siblings are liars; for those who do not love a sibling whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from God is this: those who love God must love their siblings also.

Sermon

Several years ago, I attended an enormous conference called the Parliament of World Religions. It was an incredible experience where I encountered people of all different faiths from all over the globe. One of my favorite parts of the conference were the meals. In the Sikh faith community, offering free, hot meals to all who wanted them is a regular part of their faith practice - and they brought this to the conference. As we entered the space, we were invited to remove our shoes and don a headscarf as a sign of respect. We were then led into a large hall lined with long, narrow rugs with aisles in between. We were seated on the rugs next to strangers who quickly became wonderful conversation partners, and we were given trays as the food began to pass by us. The food was traditional Indian food, and vegetarian, so that all could partake in the meal. And we could feast and get seconds and thirds until we had had our fill. I experienced so much love and grace from folks that I didn't even know, and I was filled to the brim with gratitude. This meal was completely free, and was offered every single day of the conference. Any extra at the end of the day was transported to local shelters and food pantries, so there was no waste.

What love is this, that I was fed, without cost, by complete strangers with no strings attached?

As I reflect on this memory, I'm thinking a lot about what love does in the world. Love does incredible things: love is generous and kind. Love listens. And because love's origin is Divine, because love's source is from God, we know that love is eternal. It reminds of how our founder, John Wesley, described grace: because God loved us first, we are always found in love. We are always bathed in grace. This grace has been present from the beginning of time; we can't earn it, and we can't lose it. It is ours, always, because God loved us first.

So what is our response? On a personal level, we are often led toward loving God. We build a relationship with Jesus, and we come to know the Divine in deeper and more powerful ways, each and every day. John Wesley knew this type of faith to be personal piety - a seeking for personal holiness that bolstered our own relationship with God. But Wesley also knew that focusing on personal piety and nothing else would lead to a faith that was one-sided, a faith that, in some ways, was

self-centered and self-serving. So Wesley proposed a balance between personal piety and what he called social holiness. This is the understanding that we are called to transform the world through God's love. It means that we take seriously the line in the Lord's Prayer, *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*. As Christians, we have a vision of what heaven will be like: where all tears will be wiped away, where there is no one in need, where we will all feast at the banquet together. Our call is to bring forth the kingdom of God, here on earth as it is in heaven. This means we love: love deeply and love thoroughly.

As we close this morning, I would invite you to reflect on how we can love in these two ways: love God, and love neighbor. What does that look like? How does this manifest in our world?

And so, may we experience God's great love all our days, taking heart in knowing that God loved us first. May we follow in Jesus' example of love, who spread a feast for all who hunger and thirst. And may we heed the Holy Spirit, who guides us and reminds us of the love we have and the love we can give, with each and every breath we take. Amen.

In Our Prayers. Thanksgiving for: the gifts that make ministry possible, medical professionals and researchers. Holding in our hearts: those experiencing unemployment, those facing racial injustice and violence, for our world as we continue to combat gun violence, for our congregation as we grieve the loss of loved ones, those experiencing illness or health issues - especially those who are ill with Covid-19 - for Mary Jane, and (for Al (and family as they care for him), Dan D. (Vicki's husband), Kelly R., Lindsey S., Richie B.), those in nursing homes or extended care facilities (Betty, Claire), those caring for others (Carrie G., Crystal, Rachel), the United Methodist Church. *Note that this list will renew each month.*

Communion

Hymn of Meditation - God Be With You Till We Meet Again

Benediction

And now, may the peace of the Lord Christ go with you wherever God may send you; may God guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm; may God bring you home rejoicing at the wonders God has shown you; may God bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors.

Community Announcements

- **SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT.** Dear Beloved Community, Our Staff-Parish Relationship Committee would like to share some news. Following consultation with our District Superintendent, we are happy to announce that Sandy Dam will be our lay minister. She comes to us from the Charlton City United Methodist Church. She will be responsible for all the duties of an appointed pastor except for the sacraments and to bring in new members because she is a lay person. Therefore, Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar intends to appoint Rev. John Lucy as the Coordinating Pastor of the George Whitefield United Methodist Church effective July 1, 2021 subject to fulfilling all the requirements needed for a successful transition by the pastor and the respective churches affected by the appointment. The appointment will be finalized at the 2021 Annual Conference Session of the New England Conference. More information will follow, but if you have any questions in the meantime, please reach out to any member of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
- **IN-PERSON OUTDOOR WORSHIP RESUMES! Update from the Reopening Advisory Board.** We are meeting **weekly** at 9:30 AM **in front of the church**, weather permitting. Regardless of vaccination status, **masks and social distancing are required** in order to limit our risk factors. Remember to bring your lawn chair, wear your mask, and be sure to set yourself up at least six feet from folks who are not part of your household. Should weather become a concern, Pastor Christy will begin a phone chain by Saturday at 4 PM prior to the service. Indoor worship possibilities are still being explored. As always, if you have any questions, suggestions, or concerns about in-person worship, feel free to reach out to anyone on the Reopening Advisory Board: Jane Dolan, Tom McKeon, Diane Mundell, Melissa Quilitzsch, or Pastor Christy.
- **Upcoming Meetings. SPECIAL ALL-CHURCH MEETING TODAY** after church to answer any questions folks might have about the new appointment and discuss plans for the parsonage, as well as sharing information about our insurance policy.
- **Pastor Christy Vacation.** Pastor Christy will be away from May 10th to May 17th, and will be unable to respond to phone calls or emails. Pastoral Coverage will be provided by Rev. Amie McCarthy of the Spencer UCC, who can be reached at (508) 272-6437. There will be no in-person worship service on Sunday, May 16th; a special at-home worship service will be mailed out that week, and the audio service will be available on our website at georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services or over the phone at (978) 990-5000, access code 719365#. Regular outdoor in-person worship services will resume on Sunday, May 23rd.

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- **UPDATE ON MAILINGS.** Beginning **today**, in order to save on postage, mailings will now be available on Sunday mornings for pickup at our outdoor services. Mailings will no longer automatically be sent out; if you are unable to join us in person, mailings will be dropped in the mail on Monday mornings so all folks can continue to be part of our connection.
- **Pastor Christy's Office Hours: MAY.** Pastor Christy's office hours have shifted to **Mondays** and **Tuesdays** from 8 AM to 4 PM and **Fridays** from 8 AM to 12 noon. If you have an emergency outside of office hours, please call her cell phone, leave a message, and she will get back to you as soon as possible.
- **Prayer Chain.** As a church, we are a wonderful community of prayer. When a need arises, we send it through the prayer chain so we can all meditate together. If you would like to be a part of this prayer chain, reach out to Jane Dolan, who will put you on the list.
- **THANK YOU for your continued generous donations to the work of the church!** We are so grateful for your gifts, for they make an impact near and far. As a reminder, you can mail your offerings to PO Box 576, West Brookfield, MA 01585. Thank you!

Sonshine Phone Calls and Cards List

If you know of anyone who could be added to our Sonshine list, let Pastor Christy know.

Betty Hubbard
47 E Main St.
West Brookfield, MA 01585

Kelly Rice
98 Lake Shore Drive
West Brookfield, MA 01585

Claire Wirf
(508) 791-8131 (mornings)
838 Mill Street
Worcester, MA 01602

Richie Buzzell
16 Ragged Hill Rd.
W Brookfield, MA 1585

Daily Devotionals:

A Community Of Prayer from Around the Connection

The Upper Room Daily Devotionals official magazines are still being distributed.

If you would like a copy, please let Pastor Christy know.

Monday, May 3rd through Saturday, May 8th || Written by Various Authors in the Conference

We invite you to light a candle at 9:30 AM daily, meditate on our given scripture, and join us in prayer

Monday, May 3rd, 2021

Rev. We Hyun Chang, Commonwealth East District Superintendent

Read 1 John 4:7-12

"No one has ever seen God ... those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen." If only we could see you, O God, if only ... Then we would believe in and love you with no doubt or fear ... But you never show us your face ... If only we could love first those whom we see, O God, if only ... Then there would be no more judgment, no more fear, no more discrimination, no more oppression, and no more killings ... But we see others only to measure, judge, fear, and control first ... The only image you have shown, O God, is the image with which you have shaped each and every person with all their perfect uniqueness and holy differences. Grant us the eyes of grace to see your sacred and beloved image in all whom we encounter. Then we will be delighted to see and love you in each person we meet. The only way for you to love, O God, is to love first. You loved and came down to dwell in and among us first so that love can be the first and only thing we need to know you and all. Restore in and among us the power of your first love so that the only power your people and this world need will be nothing but love. Then your love will indeed become perfect in us in spite of all our imperfections and your justice will prevail in every corner of your world in spite of all the wrongs in the world. Turn all our "if onlys" into humble faith and honest commitment to put love first in all our doings and dealings. Amen.

Tuesday, May 4th, 2021

Rich Hughen, Interim Conference Lay Leader

Read Psalm 23

Thank You, Lord, for I have everything I need right now. Thank You for providing for all my essential needs. I am so grateful for Your presence in my life. Sometimes life gets so hectic that I do not always want to slow down but you have a way of reminding me to rest. Lord, you know it is hard for me to be silent and the quiet makes me uncomfortable. Grant me the patience to be still, catch my breath, recognize your presence, and trust in your grace for I know you will lead me in the right direction. The world around me sometimes feels like a dark valley filled with overwhelming storms, disagreements, mistrust, and uneasiness with the schemes of quick fixes and unjust actions. Grant me your peace and reassuring presence that I might allow your light to shine through me. I am comforted and free from anxiety when I sense

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your love surrounding me. You have provided for my needs even in the presence of all this darkness. Thank You for lifting my spirits when the going gets tough and the darkness is overwhelming. Thank you for placing people in my life that encourage and provide hope at the right time. I am blessed by their words and by their actions. I am grateful to be able to share Your goodness with others. I know that you will be with me throughout my life in every situation and I desire to be in your presence forever.

Wednesday, May 5th, 2021

Rev. Erica Robinson-Johnson, Director of Connectional Ministries/Assistant to the Bishop

Read 1 John 3:16-24

Creator of us all, where did we get so selfish? When did we turn our ears from you to the false prophets who would say that we do not need to take care of our neighbor? Why do we refuse to do all that we can to protect others from harm because we don't want to be inconvenienced? Jesus laid down his life. And yet when we are asked to simply wear a mask to protect another from potential harm, we challenge. When we are asked to stay home or to change our ways, we stomp our feet in frustration. Remind us in these days of sacrifice, of change, of shifting priorities and guidelines that push us out of our comfort zones ... remind us that Jesus gave his life, and asks us to have that kind of love for anyone in need. Your love abides in those who love first, without question. Help us to have that kind of love.

Thursday, May 6th, 2021

Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar

Read John 10:11-18

O God, we live in a cyber world: we ask Siri where to eat; we trust a GPS to direct our route; we communicate in texts and tweets, we post photos on Facebook and Snapchat. We are thankful for the ways these devices, connect us with friends, create bridges across continents, and expand our exploration of the world with the touch of a finger. And yet, O God, we know these are no substitute for what we need most. And so we listen. We listen hard to hear the voice that calls us from the places where we've wandered. We listen hard to hear above the chatter and the noise, the voice that we know so well, the voice of the One who watches over us and who loves us, through and through. We listen, and we hear the clear, tender, unmistakable voice of the Good Shepherd who calls us, each and every one, by name, to our true home. And we follow. O God, fill us with your love, lead us to embrace the companionship of Jesus, and mold us with the power of the Holy Spirit, that we may hear the voice of the Good Shepherd amidst the myriad of voices we hear daily. We pray in the matchless name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Friday, May 7th, 2021

Rev. Rick McKinley, Director of Congregational Development

Read Acts 4:5-12

Jesus. Savior we call you. Author of salvation. Dr. Luke tells us that salvation is found in no one else. Salvation. To be saved – healed – delivered. You saved the woman who hemorrhaged for 12 years. You saved Jairus' daughter whom everyone thought had died. You saved the disciples as they cried out in a capsizing boat. Can I be frank with you Jesus? We don't really like the notion of needing to be saved. Okay, since I'm being honest, I confess that I don't like the notion of needing to be saved. I like to think I've got it covered by my own abilities, by my false sense of security due to my privilege, my wealth, my health, all the "stuff" surrounding me. Save me from my belief that I don't need to be saved. Heal me of the ways I keep myself comfortably distant from needing you. Deliver me from the ways I am complicit in systems that perpetuate injustice. Save me. So be it.

Saturday, May 8th, 2021

Rev. Dr. Jacquelyn Brannen, Katahdin District Superintendent

Read Luke 24:36-48

Open my mind, Lord, and open my eyes so that I can see you and receive your peace. Were you in my midst this week I did not notice? Was it you I saw when I looked into the eyes of my grandchild who was having a tantrum when she did not get what she wanted at the grocery store? Perhaps, Lord, it was you in the eyes of the Asian woman who hurried down the street this week worried that the people around her might attack her or call her names. Did I catch a glimpse of you, Lord when I heard the laments of the families who had lost loved ones to Covid or violence? Surely, it was you Lord that I saw as I shared the bread and cup with my church family. Help me to see you, Lord, in all the spaces that you occupy. Help me to understand your Word so that I might not only see you but embody you in all my interactions this week and in the weeks to come. Forgive my shortsightedness, Lord. Forgive me and invite me into your peace. Amen.