

Congregational Tidings



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

A weekly newsletter



www.facebook.com/FirstCongregationalUCCWaterlooIowa

August 5, 2020



Remembering Scott Bessman ...

Scott Bessman was laid to rest in a spot very close to his father at Garden of Memories last Wednesday. It was a beautiful morning. Scott was much too young to be taken from us, but he was at peace with his situation ... he was comfortable with where he was going. We should learn from him. Remember Scott when you hear about or watch the St Louis Cardinals ... he loved his Cardinals. Remember Scott when you watch an old western movie or TV show or read a western novel ... he loved the Old Westerns. Remember Scott when someone visits you or sends you a card ... he loved and appreciated visits and cards from everyone. Remember Scott when you drink a Dr Pepper, or better yet, drink one for him today ... Scott loved Dr Pepper. And remember Scott when you have your next gathering with extended family ... Scott loved getting together with his many cousins. Remember Scott ... we will miss him!

laughs ... smiles ... share joys ... smiling faces ... virtual hugs
... just chat ... catch up ... see old friends ... laugh some more
... smile some more ... share more ... **JOIN US ON ZOOM**

**EVERY WEDNESDAY
EVENING
6:30 - 7:30 PM**



**WE WANT
TO SEE
YOU!!**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89698477798?pwd=K25ERitRYmk3MFZnMHZCYVNSNGY2Zz09>

Meeting ID: 896 9847 7798

Or Dial: 312 626 6799

Password: 554196

Questions? Call Paul Greene: 319-404-4940



In Our Hearts and Minds and Prayers ...

Please let us know of those we should be keeping close

Blessings and peace for all struggling with health and loss.

Prayers for Peter Steva's mother battling cancer. May she find peace and strength.

Prayers for Donna Sheridan's son's (David's) in-laws Rex & Helen facing esophageal malfunction and ovarian cancer. May they find peace and strength.

Prayers for Dick Grimm who was found to have an infection in the site of his recent hip surgery and second surgery. He will have antibiotic treatments every day over the next six weeks.

Prayers for Beth Lauterbach who is having surgery on August 7th in Iowa City.

Prayers for our church family and for Pastor Bret as we begin an exciting journey together.

Nicaragua Shoeboxes

******Boxes are available for boys and girls ages 4 to 18. If you would like to fill a box or two, please contact Steve or Liz Thorpe and they will get you the boxes.****** Monetary donations for BOTH shoeboxes and layettes are still being accepted in the church office if you would like to mail a check or donate online through our website, www.firstcongucc.org. Thank you in advance!

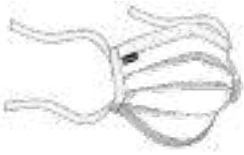
Sunday Morning Discussion Group

We gather at 9:30 via Zoom to check in with each other and discuss interesting and sometimes challenging parts of the book. If interested in joining our group or have questions, contact Evie Waack at 277-0163. You can order your copy of "A Bigger Table" at christianbook.com, Amazon, Barnes & Nobles, or other places you get your books.

JOY Abounds!!!

joy

JOY is everywhere! Where have you seen JOY this week? ... in the first giggles of a newborn? ... in the very young man holding the door for his grandma? ... in the kindly check-out clerk who understands your anxiety? ... in the rose bloom with glistening drops of dew? ... in the smell of freshness on a cooler-than-usual morning? ... in your family?



We're All Here for Each Other, Right?

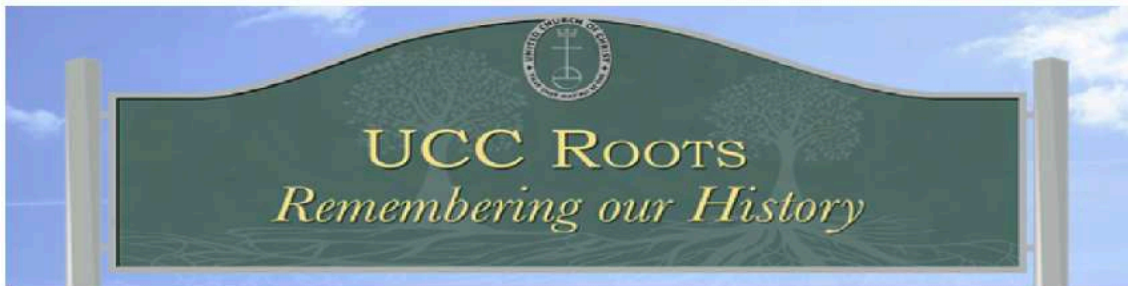
- Wear your face mask, not just for yourself, but to protect everyone around you.
- Stay at least 6'0" from everyone WITH your face mask on
- Stay away from all places where you cannot maintain a safe distance from others
- Remind others to follow the same guidelines ... it's a group effort ... a family effort



Did You Ever Notice?

Did you ever notice those small containers of ice cream in the frozen food section at the grocery store? You know, the ones that look like they're probably for a couple of servings, but they always end up being one serving. Did you ever notice that they're hard as a brick when you first take them out of the freezer at the store? Do you know why? That's so by the time you drop the ice cream off at your friend's house it's just right to eat. Make someone's day!! :)

From the UCC Historical Council



“Living the Gospel of Justice”

From the beginning, those who formed the United Church of Christ were committed to a gospel of justice that brought racial, social, and political change. As the denomination evolved, distinct social justice organizations were established such as the “Council for Christian Social Action” (CCSA), the “Commission for Racial Justice” (CRJ), the “Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries” (CORUM), and the “Office for Church in Society” (OCIS).

Valerie E. Russell (1941-1997) an African American lay woman, had been involved with the YWCA from 1968 to 1973. She was influenced by Dorothy Height who fought institutional racism as the “first imperative” of the YWCA. She was also energized by congresswoman Shirley Chisholm who, “pushed us to organize our communities and make us a viable political presence in this country.”

Russell did graduate work at Columbia University and later received an Honorary degree from Lafayette College. From 1973-1979, she was the Assistant to the President of the UCC and coordinated the work of the “Advisory Commission on Women in Church and Society.” Their resources expanded the role of women in the UCC. In 1979, she directed a NYC Conference at Riverside Church and then was President of the City Mission of Boston for ten years (the first woman and layperson in that role).

From 1991-1997 Russell served as Executive Director of the UCC “Office of Church in Society” (OCIS). She advocated transformative change through direct and sustained engagement between church and society. She said, “I believe that ministry is the work of the whole people of God and faith is only real when it's shaped out of every generation's struggle to redefine the moral imperative of the gospel.”

~ **Contributor: Julia M. Speller**

Hello friends and family of First Congregational UCC!

Every week, I like to give people scriptures and commentary on them in order to get our hearts and minds centered on the theme of the week. This I call "Points to Ponder." I read recently some numbers on the illiteracy of the American people, and it was rather scary. Hopefully, this encouragement to read and reflect every week will help alleviate that for the family and friends of our church. As always, I also invite you all to correspond with me on your own thoughts, questions, and reflections on these "Points to Ponder." I can be reached by email at revbmyers@yahoo.com. I hope to meet some of you by zoom this Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. so that we can get to know each other better, and perhaps enter into discussions that will be a blessing to our spiritual journeys. Here are the gospel lesson and the "Points to Ponder" for this coming Sunday, August 9, 2020.

*Blessings,
Bret*

Matthew 14.22-36

²²Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." ²⁸Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." ³⁴When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. ³⁵After the people of that place recognized him, they sent word throughout the region and brought all who were sick to him, ³⁶and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

POINTS TO PONDER

"Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone"
— *Matthew 14.22-23*

"This text occurs right after the feeding of the 5000, which occurred right after Jesus receiving news of John's beheading. Jesus had tried to get some space to rejuvenate after hearing the horrific news, but the people followed him, and Jesus attended to them even as they may have been attending to him in an momentous event of reciprocal compassion. But now he is in desperate need of alone time, and so he orders his disciples to take the boat to the other side of the inland sea. He then disperses the crowds, and when all are gone, he goes up the mountain, as he so often does, to find some time to speak and listen to God in prayer. We can only imagine the things running through his mind: his heartache and anger at John's murder by Herod, his wonderment on what this means for his own mission and ministry, his desire to get clarification and renewed resolve in the face of obstacles and dangers, and yet his reflection on the recent serendipitous event where the people came looking for him, perhaps to ease his spirit, and the ensuing feast for the thousands where the Community of God was on display in this act of everyone caring for one another despite their differences. Jesus needed this time alone to commune with the Holy Spirit with no distractions from others. He not only took the time, but demanded it. He set boundaries with his disciples and his followers, letting them all know that as wonderful as it was to be with them, he also needed time alone. Do we set these times for alone time for ourselves? Is it not a healthy thing for us to do, even as Jesus did? Can you think of a time when you needed rejuvenation, took some time to be alone, and were refreshed by the experience?"

— *Bret S. Myers, 8/4/2020*

"We must always change, renew, rejuvenate ourselves; otherwise we harden."
— *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

"But by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea.

But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!"

And they cried out in fear."

— *Matthew 14.24-25*

"The way the gospel writer weaves these multiple realities of the perspectives of Jesus, his disciples, and his followers is quite elucidating. Jesus needed time to get some peace for himself; and he sent the disciples off to go do the same; and also the crowds.

But here we see that instead of peace, the disciples encounter a storm. Whether there was an actual storm or not is less important to my mind than the metaphorical or mytho-poetical storm in which was threatening their sense of identity and mission. They had left their families and occupations to follow Jesus, for they saw him as the Messiah who would bring peace and justice to their entire people. It was a cause that was dire for them, which explains why they left what was really important to them to help create that which was ultimately important for them, their families, their people, and their world. The Messiah was to bring about a never-ending reign of peace with justice, and what could be more important than that to a people oppressed by rampant injustices by an empire that saw them as fodder for their own ends?

But with John's beheading, one of the prophets who spoke of the need for a transformation of the world's values to conform with the values of God, the disciples had to be wondering whether Jesus would quit his mission out of fear of the consequences. If he quit, then they would have their hopes and dreams dashed. However, on the other hand, if he didn't quit and continued to rile up the authorities as John had done, then perhaps he and they would be crushed under foot by those in power. It was spiritually speaking, a 'perfect storm' for them in their lives. There was no foreseeable easy way out, and whatever might happen seemed ominous and threatening.

Have you ever felt that way? Where your whole life seemed like a raging storm in which you could not escape? Where any decision you might make might lead to your doom? What goes on in the psyches of those who feel this endangered and threatened – not simply by the forces of nature, but especially by the deliberate and intentional forces that blow the winds of injustice in their face, that crash the waves of inequity on their bodies, and that threaten to capsize their very souls because of the assail of unending apathy and evil? Would they drown in their sorrow, their fright, and despair?

Is this how Black people feel in our society now? How LGBTQIA+ people feel? How immigrants, refugees, and other foreign-born people feel? How Muslims feel? How all who believe that our very democracy is being threatened feel?

When life gets so exasperating that we can't see a hopeful way out, how does that make us see reality? If we continue with this metaphor, it may make more sense to us than if we take the passage literally. For when the disciples see their companion and inspiration, Jesus, coming towards them, they do not see him for who he is, but rather they think they see a ghost. When every force of nature and human society seem to be conspiring against one, is it not understandable that even the things we trust we come to doubt and second-guess?

When the storms of life beat against our very spirits, we come to interpret all reality as negative. We come to respond not with faith, but with fear. We come to think that what is unreal is real, and what is fake news is truth.

Are we not in the disciples boat in our own day? And how are we responding: with fear like them, or with faith that following God's ways, no matter how scary that may be, is the peace that will calm our inner storms?"

— *Bret S. Myers, 8/4/2020*

"Whoever said anybody has a right to give up?"

— *Marian Wright Edelman, 21st century*

"Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus."

— *Matthew 14.27-29*

"Jesus comes to encourage the disciples, just as he has been encouraged up on the mountain, but they are wary of him in the midst of their fears. Have you ever been wary of those you trust because of the ordeals that you are going through in your life? Does your mistrust of life in general ever tempt you to mistrust those who have proven themselves to you again and again?

Jesus tells them not to be afraid. He sees that the issue is less about them recognizing him, and more about their own fears that have taken over their sensibilities.

Peter wants yet another a sign that he can trust Jesus, though Jesus has never given him a reason not to trust him. Interestingly, the sign Peter asks for is not that Jesus will do something himself, but that he will empower Peter to do something seemingly miraculous.

Is this ego speaking, or should we assume that Peter truly wanted to do miraculous things for the benefit of others that Jesus did? I love it that Jesus simply says, 'Come.' Jesus has already taught Peter and the others, through word and

deed, what his values were and how he wanted them to follow him in those values; so he effectively says, 'Ok, come and show me what you've got. You have within you what it takes, so let's see how you live by it.'

What may seem surprising to those who think that only Jesus, not ordinary humans, can do miracles is that Peter actually gets out of the boat and walks on the water. He 'came toward Jesus' – which, mytho-poetically speaking is to say, he tried following Jesus' example. With encouragement, he was able to have the confidence to give it a try; and, wonderfully, he did it!

It is a reminder, the gospel writer seems to be saying, that we can all do miracles if we have faith and confidence that God is with us. Jesus isn't the only one; but we all can follow in his ways if we simply commit ourselves to doing so."
— *Bret S. Myers, 8/4/2020*

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves: Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

— *Marianne Williamson, A Return to Love*

"But when Peter noticed the strong wind, he became frightened,
and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'"

— *Matthew 14.30*

"Peter is said to walk on the water, as was Jesus. Again, this is less important for us to take as literal, and more important for us to see as relating to his life and our own. Peter is able to go and do as Jesus did. He is able to follow in the same values, which metaphorically make it seem as if he is walking on the waters of fear and danger rather than being drowned in them.

But as the notices the winds of discontent and the waves of risk, he lets fear take hold of him once again. Peter is a novice at following Jesus. He is fine as long as people don't start criticizing him, and as long as his life or livelihood is not imperiled by his standing up for what is right. But whenever that starts, he succumbs to his old ways due to his fears.

It is not insignificant, I think, that at the beginning of the very next chapter the scribes and Pharisees start criticizing Jesus' disciples. They ask Jesus: 'Why do your disciples break the traditions of the elders' (Mt. 15.1)? Peter's fear in walking on water foreshadows his and the other disciples in their cautiousness in following Christ. As long as they are not confronted or imperiled, they have no hesitancy in claiming Christ and Christ's ways; but we will see throughout the gospel that their verve is diminished again and again when they have something to lose.

Peter cries out, like so many Christians do, for Jesus to save him. And perhaps it is not merely the fear that he had in following Christ's ways that caused him to sink, but also the idea that he needs Jesus, in person, to literally save him from life's troubles. We recall later where Jesus tells his disciples, before he rises to be with God, that they have within them, what they need. He tells them that they have the Holy Spirit and that they no longer need his physical presence with them. Jesus tried to tell them this while he was with them, but they seemed to always want Jesus to do it for them rather than to take the initiative and rouse the courage to act on their own in following his ways."

— *Bret S. Myers, 8/4/2020*

"If we do not transform our pain, we will transmit it."

— *Richard Rohr, 20th century*

"Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him,

'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased."

— *Matthew 14.31-32*

"Does Jesus reach out to you and catch you when you are sinking in fear? If so, how does that happen for you? If not, can you think of ways in which you have overcome your fears?"

If we understand faith here to mean, as the ancients did, more than mere belief, then this passage may make more sense to us. It was not Peter's 'beliefs' that Jesus was referring to that Peter doubted. Peter often spoke up as to the things he believed about Jesus. Rather, it was Peter's lack of faith in Jesus' ways that Jesus was referring to.

So many people say they believe in 'love,' for instance; but isn't it sad how unloving they can become when things do not go their way? People say they believe in 'peace,' but likewise when they are confronted with threats, they too often respond with violence rather than peace. It is so much easier to simply believe in high-sounding values than to actually have faith in them and apply them to all we think, say, and do.

Peter's faith in this story, like the stories of so many, is shallow. When the waters of resistance get deep, they sink rather than swim. When the storms of life come blowing, they will often go where the winds of culture go rather than take a stand against them. When the waves of persecution pound on them for living by ethics that effectively reveal that others are not living rightly, they will too often capitulate rather than be a prophet against the powers that be. Faith requires that we live by our values, not simply attest to them. That is why faith is not easy.

And yet, Jesus (and all who truly live by their faith) makes it look easy. When he pulls Peter up and they both get into the same boat [notice that he doesn't get into a different boat; he still believes in community and being in the same boat even when others fail to live up to their best selves], it is said that the wind ceased. Again, if we don't see the power of this as metaphor for our lives, we miss the point. Jesus walking on water and stilling a storm in a single historical incident has little meaning to our lives; but if instead it symbolizes the life struggles that we go through and how we can rise above them with faith and still them with compassion, then the lesson is ongoing for every generation and every person.

And is this not the gospel writer's point: that Jesus believes we can indeed be those who mytho-poetically walk on water and still the storms of life, as he himself did, because living by his values, which are God's values, empowers all who have faith in them and are willing to apply them to every circumstance of life?

When our faith is genuine, not shallow, we are able to proverbially walk over our troubled waters. We are able to not sink into despair. We are able to still the storms of life that threaten us in so many different ways. We don't live in fear; we live in trust. We may still remain out in our tiny boats amidst vast waters of mystery, but we have the confidence, the trust, the faith that our spirits will be fine no matter what may happen to us otherwise. We'll be able to say that it is well with our souls; for our peace is not simply the result of the things that happen to us, but rather how we respond to the things that happen to us. Our peace is spiritual, not merely physical.

This vignette from Jesus' life, whether it has any historical facticity or not, symbolizes how we are to respond to life with a faith that passes our understanding of how the world works. It is to be a faith in the values that epitomize the sacred and the divine, not in the way it has always been done.

That the disciples claim that Jesus is the 'Son of God' has less to do with some newly formed doctrinal formula, than with their understanding that Jesus, unlike most people, responds to life and all its toil and turmoil with faith in the values of God. He doesn't abandon them when life gets hard, frightening, or even lethal. He stands on his principles and walks with his virtues as if on water. His faith gives him an inner peace that stills the fears that make others tremble. And what is more, he has faith that we can go and do the same. Is that not inspirational?!"

— *Bret S. Myers, 8/4/2020*

"All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen."

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson, 19th century*

"When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. After the people of that place recognized him, they sent word throughout the region and brought all who were sick to him, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed."

— *Matthew 14.34-36*

"Jesus and his disciples, now hopefully full of faith, go back to their own homeland, having been in a foreign land, to face those who will come to persecute them. We'll see the beginnings of this as chapter 15 commences. But the people who have heard of Jesus' feeding and healing of the multitude are energized and in hopes he will heal them, too. It should be noted that whereas we often consider healing to be a 'physical' overcoming of sickness, in Jesus' time the physical and spiritual were considered inextricably linked. We therefore are reminded that these healings were spiritual as well as physical in nature. This may help our post-modern minds to not get hung up on events in Jesus' life that sound counter-intuitive or even in opposition to natural laws, but rather to attune our focus to how we today need to be healed holistically – not only in our individual lives, but in our society. What ailments do we have in body or spirit that need to be healed? What about those in our society who are most oppressed? How can we heal our whole society of the spiritual and ethical afflictions that seem so prominent? How does God call us, the church, to address these matters in ourselves and in our society?"

— *Bret S. Myers, 8/4/2020*

"If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other."

— *Mother Teresa of Calcutta, 20th century*



Create an endowment of love. Please consider including our church in your estate planning.

F I R S T C O N G R E G A T I O N A L U C C

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Congregational Tidings

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