

# 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](http://www.facebook.com/FirstCongregationalUCCWaterlooIowa)

August 12, 2020



## Power Outage? Internet Outage? Cable TV Outage? Phone Outage? Why I Hardly Noticed, Right?

Sure, we can do without our internet, our cable TV stations, and our cell phone text service anytime we want. We're not tied to our devices, right? ... until we lose them, then it's another story. I understand how much I use the internet to get everything done every day, but until I lost it, I really didn't know how much I use the internet to get everything done every day. Wow! I can't have zoom meetings. I can't email or text people to tell them we aren't having zoom meetings. I can't turn the TV on to any network news station to find what's happened to the internet. I can't send this article to Michelle when I'm done writing it. She can't send it to you via email. LIFE IS OVER!!! :) ... okay, a little dramatic.

On the other hand, it's kind of nice to actually talk to people on the phone instead of emailing and texting. It's kind of nice to be holding a Tidings in your hands to read it instead of on a screen. It's kind of nice to realize that everything did not need to get done today ... it's okay. It's kind of nice to know there's another way, without the technology we usually rely so heavily on ... life goes on. So, what we have here is a gift ... an opportunity ... a reminder to take a deep breath and remember what's really important. Ahhhhhhh! That's better ... thanks for listening! :)



### 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 Dave Panicucci's family at the passing of his mother Vivian Mae Panicucci. May they find comfort and peace in their faith of life everlasting.

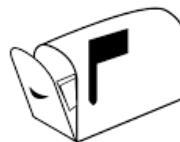
Prayers for Father Ken and all of our Brothers & Sisters at neighboring Sacred Heart Church.

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

### Nicaragua Shoeboxes

Our shoppers are out shopping for box items but there is still time to do a shoebox yourself for boys and girls ages 4 to 18. Contact Steve or Liz Thorpe today if interested: (319) 984-9139.

### New Contact Information:



Donald Damon  
1410 W. Dunkerton Rd. Room #347  
Waterloo, IA 50703  
(319) 291-2509 - Ext: Unit 4

*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](mailto: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 16, 2020.*

*Blessings,  
Bret*

### **Matthew 15.1-28**

<sup>1</sup>Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, <sup>2</sup>"Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands before they eat." <sup>3</sup>He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? <sup>4</sup>For God said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' <sup>5</sup>But you say that whoever tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is given to God,' then that person need not honor the father. <sup>6</sup>So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God. <sup>7</sup>You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: <sup>8</sup>'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; <sup>9</sup>in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'"

<sup>10</sup>Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: <sup>11</sup>it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." <sup>12</sup>Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" <sup>13</sup>He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. <sup>14</sup>Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." <sup>15</sup>But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." <sup>16</sup>Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? <sup>17</sup>Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? <sup>18</sup>But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. <sup>19</sup>For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup>These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

<sup>21</sup>Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup>Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." <sup>23</sup>But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." <sup>24</sup>He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." <sup>25</sup>But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." <sup>26</sup>He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." <sup>27</sup>She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup>Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

## **POINTS TO PONDER**

*Points to Ponder - (Page 1)*

"Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 'Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands before they eat.' He answered them, 'And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?'"

— Matthew 15.1-3

"Where did we get the idea that Jesus was 'nice' to everyone? He was nice to the poor, the outcast, the persecuted, and oppressed; but to those who had means and refused to share or even care, he was anything but nice. He has a scornful wit, and here is but one instance of his use of it. Jesus, by this time in Matthew's gospel, has already built a reputation of caring for the least of these and criticizing and resisting those who benefit from them being made systemically the least.

As in every age, those in power and privilege make the rules, and expect everyone to conform to those rules. The Judaism of Jesus' day had two sources to draw upon to guide their daily living and interactions: The Law, and the Tradition of the Elders. The Law was contained in the scriptures, but the Tradition of Elders was another set of rules and writings that the Priestly Elders created where they thought the Law was lacking.

Jesus' disciples apparently did not wash their hands to eat, which while not a violation of the Law was a violation of the Tradition of the Elders. Honestly, it was not simply a rule of etiquette and good manners, but also had hygienic and health benefits. So it may seem odd that Jesus gets testy with the religious authorities over something that made some common sense. Unless, of course, we put these words in context of all that has gone before – where Matthew has laid out Jesus' mission as pro-poor and anti-rich, pro-powerless and anti-powerful, in a society that is systemically unjust, intellectually credulous, and ethically insensitive.

Corruption is rampant not only within the Roman Empire, but all the Jewish authorities who are complicit with that Empire – especially when it contradicts God's Community. As Jesus sees it, their Tradition of the Elders is too often a means for their own self-gain and comfort in sidling up with Rome, and too infrequently a means of proclaiming and implementing God's vision and mission of egalitarian justice and compassion for those who are most in need. Jesus is to the point, perhaps even 'in their face' about their honoring of traditions that they have created while neglecting the commandments (i.e., principles based on sacred values and divine virtues) which God created.

He comes to the defense of his disciples for the attack the authorities made on them, even though it may have only been a slight, and comes down hard and accusatory against the authorities – who apparently are more concerned about ridiculing the poor and keeping them their place with insults than they are in lifting them up and advocating for their liberation from oppression.

Jesus is calling out the privileged of his society for their insensitivity – even when their concerns seem to make some sense. For by focusing on the inconsequential, they are ignoring the weightier matters of justice.

Might those who ridicule protesters of injustice in today's society for indiscretions and malfeasance be the ones that Jesus would similarly criticize today for focusing on this miniscule matters while Blacks are being murdered in the streets, families are being separated at the border, older adults and children are seen as acceptable sacrifices in the midst of a pandemic to keep the economy going, and other such violations of human dignity?"

— Bret S. Myers, 8/10/2020

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."

— Desmond Tutu

"We have a right to protest for what is right. That's all we can do.

There are people hurting, there are people suffering,  
so we have an obligation, a mandate, to do something."

— Rep. John Lewis

"So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God. You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'"

— Matthew 15.6-9

"Jesus shows some moral disdain, if not derision, for those who try to pretend they are pious religiously when their conduct is anything but ethical. It is not just that he calls them 'hypocrites.' He makes it clear in no uncertain terms that their ways are far from God's ways, as much as they pretend that they are following God. He quotes from the prophet Isaiah, one of his favorites, about the heinousness of saying one thing with words, and acting in a way that is the exact opposite.

Do we not see the same methods being used today by politicians and religious leaders who try to frame things in a way that makes their deceptions sound good and even from God, but whose policies and practices hurt the poor while enriching themselves?

Jesus distinguishes between human precepts which sound good (sort of like 'right to work' and other policies that enact the opposite of what is being said), but which are not divine doctrines that help out the worst off – like mothers whose husbands have died, and their sons don't take care of them in their time of need. Given that males were the only bread-earners of that day, this was an abominable practice that was legitimized by the elders if they gave a token offering to charity.

Is this not like the rich and powerful giving token gifts to charity while retaining their millions while people are malnourished, without healthcare, and overworked and underpaid?"

— Bret S. Myers, 8/10/2020

"It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power,  
is the most ferocious enemy justice can have."

— James Baldwin

"Then the disciples approached and said to him,  
'Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?'"

— Matthew 15.12

"Apparently, the disciples were themselves astounded at Jesus' scathing indictment against the authorities. They had bought into the system that oppressed them because they didn't see that the ones they revered were actually instigators of their oppression. Has anything really changed since Jesus' time in this regard? It is as though they are asking Jesus to be civil when Jesus is tired of the falsity of playing nice when the few are robbing the masses. When elected officials try to steal from social security and other funds that people have worked their entire lives paying into, and then they try to make it seem as if it is a good thing, should we not protest and condemn as Jesus did? Jesus is less concerned about offending the offenders than aiding and protecting those who are being cheated by those who use and abuse them."

— Bret S. Myers, 8/10/2020

"White feelings should never be held in higher regard than Black lives."

— Rachel Cargle

"Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, 'Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.' Then the disciples approached and said to him, 'Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?' He answered, 'Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.' But Peter said to him, 'Explain this parable to us.' Then he said, 'Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.'"

— Matthew 15.10-20

"Jesus reveals that he is not only exasperated with the corruption of the officials, but that he is also exasperated with those who blindly follow them and don't get what they are doing. This includes his own self-chosen disciples who Jesus thinks should understand by now what he has been preaching all along. 'Listen and understand' is pretty clear that he wants to set some points straight which people keep on misinterpreting. Have we not been there ourselves? The authorities are criticizing the disciples for trivialities, and the disciples seem more offended that Jesus is criticizing them than that they criticized the disciples themselves. It's as if Jesus is saying, 'Are you serious? Don't you get what they are doing?' Jesus has been laser-focused on character and social justice all this time, and even the ones who have listened to him the most are still blinded by the authorities smoke and mirror strategies. Clean hands, he says, are not as important as a clean mouth and heart. Those who focus on what doesn't really matter will fall into their own self-made pits, and all who follow them. What defiles us is not matters of etiquette and hygiene, but how we injure others with actions that show we neither respect or care for them. Jesus provides us a short list, but it is a list that could easily be expanded for our own time. What would you add to the list?"

— Bret S. Myers, 8/10/2020

"A riot is the language of the unheard."

— Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 20th century

"Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.'" Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly."

— Matthew 15.21-28

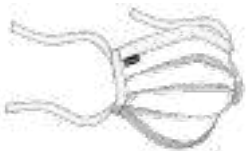
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# Congregational Tidings

Place  
Stamp  
Here

*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



## **CARE FOR EACH OTHER, *it's our job ... ..***

- 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

## **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?