



Eastertide Service 2020

*A worship service created by the Council of Conference Ministers
of the United Church of Christ*

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Words of Welcome

Written by Kent Siladi

Welcome! On behalf of the Council of Conference Ministers we welcome you to worship this day. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey you are welcome here.

In this season of Eastertide, in the midst of this global pandemic we are grieving. We are anxious. We experience highs and lows as we try to stay home and stay safe. We do not grieve as those without hope however.

We have Hope that the resurrected Christ will accompany us today and always. We hope in the goodness of human community to work for the common good. So welcome today to this time of worship. May it be a blessing to you and all of us. Welcome.

Mental Health Sunday

Written by Brigit Stevens

The timing of this worship video is in the month of May 2020. And during the month of May in the United Church of Christ, we honor Mental Health Sunday. This year it is marked as May 17th. Regardless of the date, we honor and celebrate our siblings in Christ who struggle with mental illness.

Individuals caught in the grip of mental illness are all around us. They are our friends, our coworkers, our family members, our parishioners. They are us. They, we, are beautiful in our gifts—our love, our talents, our wisdom, our play. And then they, we, are not so lovely. We are needy or angry, withdrawn or unreliable, demanding, ungrateful, or unendingly sad. And they, we, are beloved children of God, just the way we are.

In the United Church of Christ we embrace three core values: God's continuing testament, extending extravagant welcome, and changing lives. All three of these values are lived out well as we affirm that mental health and wellness are components of human health and wellness. And then, we create practices, advocate for policies, and seek out leadership, not just inclusion, that ends stigma around mental illness and supports holistic approaches to health and wellness.

Welcome to worship. May you be blessed in your whole being by the gifts and graces of God offered here.

Call to Worship

Written by Lynn Bujnak

(scripture references: John 14:18a, II Cor. 5:7, Isaiah 43:5 NRSV)

One: When we feel isolated and alone, O God, your word comes to us:

Many: I will not leave you orphaned.

One: When we face an uncertain future, the Bible reminds us:

Many: We walk by faith, not by sight.

One: When we are scared and anxious, we hear your whisper,

Many: Be not afraid, for I am with you.

One: We come to this time of worship remembering the promises of our God, strengthened in hope and saturated with holy Love.

All: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Special Music: "Glorious"

Composed by MaMuse, www.mamuse.org

Performed by Laura Keating, a "Member in Discernment" with the MT-NW Association and Conference, and M.Div student at Pacific School of Religion.

Oh what a day! Glorious! Gather 'round, there's nothing better than a friend. Oh what a day! Glorious! The smell of rain has hitched a ride upon the wind. I've got good friends to the left of me and good friends to my right. Got the open sky above me and the earth beneath my feet. Got a feeling in my heart that's singin' all in life is sweet. Oh what a day!

Oh, what a day! Glorious! All the clouds have gathered round the tops of trees. Oh what a day! Glorious! Pitter patter, fallin' rain. I can't believe all that's green lifts up its leaves. Singin' water come on in we've been waiting all these days. Prayin' you would come to quench every yearnin' in our bones. Water, life with you begins. Oh what a day!

Home is believing. Home has wings of faith. Home is a clear river of perceiving all is well. This is a friendly mystery.

Oh, what a day! Glorious! Baby blue jay squawkin' in the cherry tree. Oh, what a day! Glorious! Deep in the night we had a raccoon robbery. Pitter patter little paws have left their footprints all around. Pitter patter evidence some fruit has fallen to the ground. Pitter patter sings my heart at the thought of what's to come. Oh, what a day!

Home is believing. Home has wings of faith. Home is a clear river of perceiving all is well. This is a friendly mystery.

Oh, what a day! Glorious! Under the sky we slept last night just you and me. Oh, what a day! Glorious! The waning moon our cycle is almost complete. We've got good friends to the left of us and good friends to our right. Got the open sky above us and the earth beneath our feet. Never fear the birds are singin' even endings can be sweet. Oh, what a day! Never fear the birds are singin' even endings can be sweet. Oh, what a day!

Time Especially for Children

Written by Diane Weible

Have you ever woken up in the middle of the night in a dark room and been a little confused, maybe not sure where you were? And then you get up out of your bed and you bump into your toys or your night stand as you try to walk around the room?



It's happened to me and I know it feels weird to bumble around in the middle of the night, right?

That's why I love nightlights. Not only are they fun, but they serve an important purpose. They offer us light on the path. Light to move around in the dark and not feel so alone, so lost.

When we have a nightlight on, we can see enough to know the right place to step so as not to hurt ourselves by tripping on something or bumping against something. Wouldn't it be nice to have a nightlight that chases away our worries in the bright light of day too?

Perhaps we are worried that our best friends may have forgotten us because we have not been able to play together for so many weeks; maybe we worry about how to get our school work done while far away from our classroom and our teacher; maybe we are tired of being stuck at home so much or fighting with our siblings.



There are all kinds of worries and concerns we are dealing with in this time that can make us feel like groping in the dark.

Paul, a faithful follower of Christ, reminds us that we do have such a nightlight—it is Jesus. Jesus is a nightlight for us and promises to never be far from us. Paul says in verse 27 that we “grope for him and find him though he is not far from each one of us.” Knowing God and

Jesus are right there with us, providing light when we are confused and scared—

whether it is in the dark of night or the middle of the day—Jesus is helping us. This brings me great comfort and, I hope, it does you too.

Let us pray. God when we are scared—in the middle of the night or in the bright light of day—thank you for being right there with us. May the nightlights that chase away our fears remind us of all the ways you are holding us close. Amen.

UCC Statement of Faith - in the form of a doxology

Español:

Creemos en Dios, el Espíritu Eterno,
Padre de nuestro Señor Jesucristo
y nuestro Creador;
y de sus obras testificamos:

Dios llama los mundos para que existan,
creó al ser humano a su imagen y semejanza,
y puso ante la humanidad
los caminos de la vida y la muerte.

Busca en su santo amor
salvar a todas las personas
de su desorientación y pecado.

Dios juzga al ser humano y a las naciones
por medio de su justa voluntad
declarada a través de los profetas y los apóstoles.

En Jesucristo, el hombre de Nazaret,
nuestro Señor crucificado y resucitado,
Dios ha venido
y ha compartido nuestra suerte,
venció el pecado y la muerte
y reconcilió al mundo para sí mismo.

Dios nos concedió el Espíritu Santo,
que crea y renueva la iglesia de Jesucristo
y une en un pacto de fidelidad
a personas de todas las edades,
idiomas y razas.

Dios nos llama como iglesia
para que aceptemos el costo y la alegría
del discipulado,
para que seamos sus servidores

English:

We believe in God the eternal Spirit
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
and our Creator
and to our deeds we testify

God calls the worlds into being
create humans in his image and likeness
and sets before humans
the ways of life and death.

You seek in holy love
to save all people
From aimlessness and sin.

God judges all humanity and nations
by your just will
declared by the prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth
our Lord crucified and risen,
God has come to us
and shared our common lot
conquering sin and death
and reconciling the world to himself.

God gives us the Holy Spirit creating
and renewing the church of Jesus Christ
and binds in faithful covenant
people of all ages,
languages, and races.

God calls into the church
to accept the cost and the joy
of discipleship
to be his servants

al servicio del ser humano,
 para proclamar el evangelio
 a todo el mundo
 y resistir los poderes del maligno,
 para compartir el bautismo de Cristo,
 comer en su mesa,
 y unirnos a Jesús en su pasión
 y victoria.
 Dios promete a toda persona que confía en Jesús
 el perdón de los pecados
 y la plenitud de su gracia,
 valor en la lucha por la justicia y la paz,
 su presencia en las tristezas
 y en las alegrías, y vida eterna
 en su reino que no tiene fin.

Bendición y honor, gloria y poder
 sean dados a Dios. Amén.

in service to all humanity
 to proclaim the gospel
 to all the world
 and resist the powers of evil,
 to share in Christ's baptism,
 eat at his table,
 and unite with Jesus in his passion
 and victory.
 God promises to all who trust in Jesus
 pardon for sins
 and fullness of grace
 strength in the struggle for justice and peace,
 his presence in sadness
 and in rejoicing, and eternal life
 In his kingdom that has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power
 be given to God. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Written by David Long-Higgins

“An Easter Prayer for When the Flower Fades”



Holy Love,
 Like the beautiful blossom
 Of the lily,
 The joy of Easter
 Seems to fade
 So quickly.

Its brilliance buried
By the withering words
Of a daily digest of
News and noise
That seems
Not to care
That you have
Reordered the world.

The wonder of
A world made new
Seems crushed by
The urgency which
Viruses and vitriol
Would voice as
The daily ritual
Of remembrance.

How easy, O Holy One,
To re-enter the tombs
Of our own making
And those rooms
Fashioned by our fear
And our fatigue.

So grant us the gift
Of noticing
That which lies
Just beyond
The fading flower
Of every yesterday.

Refashion our focus
On Your surging strength,
Your promised power,
Yearning to take
Center stage
In our lives.

Like the unopened bud
That awaits the beckoning
Power of the sun,
Open our hearts
To your Holy Spirit
Already around
And within us,

That we may be
 Readied, renewed and
 Blossomed into the beauty
 For which you have created us
 In Christ, all along.

Yes, Holy One,
 Renew us
 And your whole creation.
 That we may be signs
 Of your resurrection love
 In word and work
 Throughout the world.

Let it be so,
 Let it be so.
 Amen.

Scripture Reading in Spanish and English - Acts 17:22-31

Hechos 17:22-31 (Dios Habla Hoy)

22 Pablo se levantó en medio de ellos en el Areópago, y dijo: Atenienses, por todo lo que veo, ustedes son gente muy religiosa. **23** Pues al mirar los lugares donde ustedes celebran sus cultos, he encontrado un altar que tiene escritas estas palabras: “A un Dios no conocido”. Pues bien, lo que ustedes adoran sin conocer, es lo que yo vengo a anunciarles. **24** El Dios que hizo el mundo y todas las cosas que hay en él, es Señor del cielo y de la tierra. No vive en templos hechos por los hombres, **25** ni necesita que nadie haga nada por él, pues él es quien nos da a todos la vida, el aire y las demás cosas. **26** De un solo hombre hizo él todas las naciones, para que vivan en toda la tierra; y les ha señalado el tiempo y el lugar en que deben vivir, **27** para que busquen a Dios, y quizá, como a tientas, puedan encontrarlo, aunque en verdad Dios no está lejos de cada uno de nosotros. **28** Porque en Dios vivimos, nos movemos y existimos; como también algunos de los poetas de ustedes dijeron: “Somos descendientes de Dios.” **29** Siendo, pues, descendientes de Dios, no debemos pensar que Dios sea como las imágenes de oro, plata o piedra que los hombres hacen según su propia imaginación. **30** Dios pasó por alto en otros tiempos la ignorancia de la gente, pero ahora ordena a todos, en todas partes, que se vuelvan a él. **31** Porque Dios ha fijado un día en el cual juzgará al mundo con justicia, por medio de un hombre que él ha escogido; y de ello dio pruebas a todos cuando lo resucitó.

Acts 17:22-31 in English (NRSV)

22 Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. **23** For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. **24** The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by

human hands, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. 26 From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, 27 so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. 28 For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’ 29 Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. 30 While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

The Message : « Things change. God doesn’t »

Written by Marilyn Kendrix

God has indeed reordered our world. The way we were before seems so long ago and we find ourselves living in a new reality. We have discontinued practices that we thought were unchangeable. It turns out that *the God who made the world and everything in it does not live in shrines made by human hands.*

I can remember a Sunday practice from my childhood. Many Sundays after church, my mom and dad would load us kids up in the family car and we would go for a Sunday ride. No destination in mind, Daddy would just drive. Invariably he would get lost somewhere on Long Island. In my younger years I would cry because I was afraid that we were lost. But my dad would say, “You are not lost. As long as you are with Mommy and me, you can’t get lost.” As I grew, I came to understand that and find comfort that no matter where I was, if I were with my parents, I could never get lost.

In these long weeks, when we’ve been cloistered in our houses even though we’ve been right at home, many of us have been feeling lost. We went into this time of Stay Safe, Stay Home fearing deep in our hearts that being physically separated from our faith communities would cause us to be separated from God. Fearing that if we were not in our familiar pews, that we would not be able to find God. We thought we needed our church buildings, our beautiful sanctuaries to feel God’s warmth enveloping us in love. But It turns out that *the God who made the world and everything in it does not live in shrines made by human hands.*

Friends, it’s not only the separation from our buildings that has us feeling off kilter. We’ve all been living through a nightmare, an international nightmare. Some of us have lost loved ones. Some of us live in fear of losing loved ones. Some of us are suffering from the virus. Some of us are suffering from lost income because of the virus. Some of us are bored from too many days looking at the same walls. Some of us are forced to work at home. Some of us wished we could stay home and not work, endangering ourselves and our loved ones to keep essential

businesses open for the rest of us. Some of us, the heroes among us, are working in hospitals, and nursing homes, working as EMTs and police officers and firemen and orderlies, many of whom are overwhelmed and over worked trying hard to keep people alive. Some of us don't know if we can continue to watch as more and more people get sick and die. This is indeed a long, national nightmare.

Those people whom Paul encountered in Athens, they had some inkling that there was a God whom they did not know. Paul had observed as he walked around their city that they had objects of worship in their shrines, and that among them was an altar to an "unknown god." He understood that these were people hungering for an experience of the holy. And so he told them about the one true God. He let them in on the secret that the one true God could not be confined to their temples. No, he shared with them that the one true God was not far from each of them, not far from each one of us. He let them know that *"in God, we live and move and have our being."*

And Paul told them about Jesus - how he'd lived and how he'd died. But most importantly, he told them about how he had been resurrected. He shared with them the saving balm of the Good News that we are a resurrection people. He told them and he is telling us still, that death does not have the final word.

We are living in a time when we need to remember every day, that we are a resurrection people. These are indeed hard times that we are going through. These are times when it seems as if we have been abandoned by God. But Paul is right here, speaking to us from 2,000 years ago. The Apostle Paul is reminding us that no matter how bleak the time, God is still Emmanuel, God with Us. He is reminding us that we are God's people and that no amount of sheltering-in-place can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. No tiny microbe can take away from us the truth that we are a resurrection people.

You know, when I grew up and had children of my own, we would sometimes take those Sunday rides after church. And we would purposely turn down streets that we'd never been on. We would jump off of the interstate at an exit that we'd never taken before. This was before GPS and we would always lose our way. We grown-ups had to look to the sun for direction and keep turning until we found a familiar street or a business that let us know what town we were in. But in the back seat, our children just looked out the windows, not worried about a thing because they knew that they could never get lost while they were with their parents.

We are in a difficult time right now. We feel lost and afraid that nothing will ever be the same. Nothing will ever be like it was before. But we've also learned so many things in this time. The most important thing we've learned is that *the God who made the world and everything in it does not live in shrines made by human hands*. We've learned that no matter what, *in God, we live and move and have our being*.

Things may change, God doesn't.

We can never get lost. We have Jesus as our Guide and God as the foundation of our lives. We have the Holy Spirit filling us with such love that it just has to spill over onto others.

Things change. God doesn't.
Things change. God doesn't.
Amen.

Invitation to Generosity

Written by Ginny Brown Daniel

Like God's love, our generosity cannot be contained by the Coronavirus. Instead our generosity is abundant during this pandemic because of who and whose we are. As the United Church of Christ, we have always advocated with the most vulnerable to ensure they are supported, nourished, and empowered to live into God's creation. When you give during the pandemic, your Church, Conference, and broader UCC are able to advocate for the health and equity of the most vulnerable affected by COVID-19. We invite you to give generously by writing a check, using auto billpay, or online giving. We invite you to give to your Church, Our Church's Wider Mission, and a person or business serving others during this pandemic. When you give, post why you give to your Church during this pandemic at #WhyIGiveUCC so that we can share with each other!

Prayer of Dedication

Creator God,
In you we live and move and have our being. So, take our monetary gifts and bless each Church to serve the most vulnerable during the Coronavirus pandemic that we may truly become a Just World for All.

Special Music

Composed by Jerome Hugs Sr. and performed by Josiah Hugs

A note from Josiah Hugs about the piece:

The origin of the song comes from a time in my dad's life, Jerome Hugs, sr., he was at his lowest of lows and in the midst of his addiction. He cried out to God and he heard these words spoken to him in our language, the Crow language: "There is a higher road, This where I want you to come by my child, Tell the people my child, there is a higher road above, this is where I want you to come by my child, Some day you will come by this road to me."

Sacrament of Holy Communion

Written by Gordon Rankin

Introduction

Friends,

wherever you are right now, whenever you are drawing yourself closer to the Divine through use of this worship service, whatever the challenges and joys of life's journey may be for you in this moment, may the peace of Christ be known to you in transformative ways.

We come now to the thanksgiving and remembrance of Holy Communion. As we do, we pause for a moment to allow you, and those who are with you, to gather the elements you would like to use for communion. What those specific elements are need not be of great concern. They are but symbols of how our God feeds us. Among our United Church of Christ global partners, we experience a variety of elements used in celebrating communion. No matter how non-traditional or culturally different an item may be, all that is served from Christ's table provides a taste of the sacred. So take a moment to gather what you will to eat and drink as we prepare ourselves for this Holy Meal.

Invitation

"Where two or three are gathered, there am I". We hold these words from scripture as a truth of our experience of this Holy Meal. We know the real presence of Christ is among us as we share with our siblings in faith the gifts of love that are found at this table. Now, it is true that those who originally heard Jesus say these words probably couldn't have imagined the type of technology we use to gather ourselves into one another's presence today. But our God is not limited by our understandings or imaginings.

On World Communion Sunday, we gather ourselves with those across the globe who share the Christian faith. We are not physically present with one another, but we believe we are gathered at the same table, with Christ present among us, regardless of our physical distance from each other.

At other times, we recall how gathered at this table among us are the saints of the ages. Those who have nurtured us, those who have inspired us, those who helped birth faith in our hearts, eat with us at this table of grace. Even those who now rest in God's eternal care. For not even temporal continuity defines the gathering at Christ's table.

Gathered here at this table today are not two or three, but an uncountable number of the faithful. We are here to feed each other and to be fed by each other, not with gifts of our own hand, but with gifts of Divine grace that we are called to share.

Gathered with us is the Risen Christ, who is the host and author of this meal. Christ is present. Christ is among us. Let us celebrate!

Prayer

May we pray together,

O Holy One, You have been among us from the dawning of your beloved Creation, to the journey with your Covenant People, through the witness of peasants and prophets, and in midwifing your church into existence. Through incarnation, Divine Love became embodied in the person of Jesus. You experienced firsthand both the deep aches of our hearts and the shallow nature of our faithfulness, and You remained among us anyway. In the resurrection, You proved to us once for all that nothing, not even death itself, can separate us from your love. On the Pentecost Day, You bestowed your Spirit to be our eternal companion. You have been faithful. You have been ever present to us.

We come to this table this day as those who are feeling more of a sense of distance than presence. The realities of our pandemic-ravaged world are harsh right now. Through tear-filled eyes and with broken hearts, we grieve the many deaths and losses we have known. Fear and uncertainty grip our communities even as we celebrate those places where courage breaks through. And in this time, when we need each other the most, our care for each other means keeping some physical distance from each other.

Feed us with your spiritual truths this day. Remind us that it has always been true that we can be present to one another even while at a distance. Ground us in the assurance of your presence in our times of grief and challenge as well as during our celebration of your grace. Raise us again to be Your Easter People, for it is during uncertain times when resurrection's promise is always fulfilled.

We pray in the name of Ever-Present Love. Amen.

Words of Institution

We recall this day that on the night of betrayal, as Jesus sat at the table with his disciples and friends, how he took bread, blessed it and broke it. He gave that bread to those gathered, saying, "This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In like manner, as the meal concluded, Jesus also took a chalice and filled it with the fruit of the vine. After a blessing, he gave the cup to those gathered saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this in remembrance of me."

Sharing the Elements

Let us, wherever we may be, receive the gift of God, the Bread of Heaven.
Let us, wherever we may be, receive the gift of God, the Cup of Blessing.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Compassionate God, we needed this. We needed this moment to be with one another and to be

with you. We needed to experience again that there is always room for us at your table. We needed to taste again the sweetness of your love. Thank you. Thank you for knowing what we need, and for providing far more in abundance than we could have ever hoped. Amen.

Special Music: “I Believe”

Composed by Mark Miller and edited by Jeff Shook
Chancel Choir, Christ Church, Summit NJ
Minister of Music: Mark Miller

“I believe in the sun even when it’s not shining. I believe in love even when I don’t feel it. I believe in God even when He is silent.”

-Anonymous, found scratched into a wall at Auschwitz concentration camp

Benediction

Written by John Dorhauer

Friends, as we gather as ONE BODY to worship in diverse places and spaces, may God bless you and keep you; may God ‘s face shine upon you and be gracious to you; and give you peace.

Siblings in Christ Jesus our Lord, We are ONE BODY, united across time and space, walking in the calling, anointing and power of the Holy Spirit. We are ONE body, sharing our hopes and dreams for the kin-dom of God being salt and light in these days. And as ONE BODY we depart this virtual space united in love, united in hope and united in our commitment to serve God, to serve our communities and to serve the world.

Go, therefore, having received the blessing of the living God, the risen Christ, and the abiding, brooding Holy Spirit. Because you are blessed, become a blessing as you proclaim the love of God in word and deed to all the ends of the Earth. Amen.

Worship Leaders

Bill Lyons.....	Southwest Conference UCC
Bonnie Bates.....	Penn Northeast Conference UCC
Brigit Stevens.....	Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota Conferences UCC
Campbell Lovett.....	South Central Conference UCC
Chad Abbott.....	Indiana Kentucky Conference UCC
Char Burch.....	Southeast Conference UCC
David Ackerman.....	Penn West Conference UCC
David Gaewski.....	New York Conference UCC
David Long-Higgins.....	Heartland Conference UCC
David Popham.....	Hawaii Conference UCC
Deborah Blood.....	Maine Conference UCC
Diane Weible.....	Northern California Nevada Conference UCC
Don Remick.....	Southern New England Conference UCC
Edith Guffey.....	Kansas-Oklahoma Conference UCC
Edward Davis.....	Southern Conference UCC
Felix Villanueva.....	Southern California Nevada Conference UCC
Franz Rigert.....	Wisconsin Conference UCC
Freeman Palmer.....	Central Atlantic Conference UCC
Ginny Brown Daniel.....	Missouri Mid-South Conference UCC
Gordon Rankin.....	New Hampshire Conference UCC
John Dorhauer.....	UCC General Minister/President
John Vertigan.....	Florida Conference UCC
Justo González.....	Illinois Conference UCC
Karen Georgia Thompson.....	UCC Associate General Minister
Keith Mills.....	Northern Plains Conference UCC
Kent Siladi.....	Southern New England Conference UCC
Lynn Bujnak.....	Vermont Conference UCC
Marc Stewart.....	Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference UCC
Marilyn Kendrix.....	Southern New England Conference UCC
Mike Denton.....	Pacific Northwest Conference UCC
Shana Johnson.....	Illinois South Conference UCC
Shari Prestemon.....	Minnesota Conference UCC
Sue Artt.....	Rocky Mountain Conference UCC
Traci Blackmon.....	UCC Associate General Minister
Tyler Connoley.....	Central Pacific Conference UCC

Thank you for joining us! God bless and be well!

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