

# Community United Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Affiliated with the United Church of Christ & the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



May 21, 2023

Ascension Sunday

11:00 AM

Pastoral Team:

Rev. Dr. Rich McCarty & Pastor Joy Johnson

*Whoever you are, and wherever you are on life's journey,  
you are welcome here!*

**Welcome, Prayer Requests, and Announcements**

**Centering Music**

“We Fall Down”

Shelly Conrad, Pat Vahey and Bob Martin

We fall down, we lay our crowns at the feet of Jesus  
The greatness of mercy and love at the feet of Jesus  
And we cry Holy, Holy, Holy  
We cry Holy, Holy, Holy  
We cry Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lamb

**Invocation:**

One: Beloved friends, today is Ascension Sunday when we celebrate  
Christ’s return to God.

**All: We look up in wonder as He is lifted from us into heaven!**

One: But this is not a time to gaze upward. There is work to be done.

**All: Jesus has entrusted the ministry of God’s love to us.**

One: Let’s get to work!

**All: Let’s make our hearts ready for the task ahead with prayer and praise! Amen!**

**\*Opening Hymn**

#317 “Crown Him with Many Crowns”

Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne.  
Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own.  
Awake my soul, and sing of him who died for thee,  
And hail him as thy matchless king through all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of life, who triumphed o’er the grave,  
And rose victorious in the strife for those he came to save;  
His glories now we sing who died and rose on high,  
Who died eternal life to bring and lives that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of years, the potentate of time,  
Creator of the rolling spheres, ineffably sublime.  
All hail, Redeemer, hail! For thou hast died for me;  
Thy praise shall never, never fail throughout eternity.

**\*Opening Prayer**

One: *What does the ascension of Christ mean to you?* This may be a question that you have never asked yourself.

**All: We study and celebrate the birth, life and resurrection of Christ, but we don't generally pay much attention to the significance of the Ascension of Christ. Yet we probably should. Many documents in the early church call attention to the Ascension, and the framers of the Apostles' Creed refer to it: "He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father."**

One: If we really pause to think about it, the Ascension reminds us as Christians that the eternal life we are promised will have a purpose, just as this life has a purpose. That purpose is union with God. In the first eleven verses of the Book of Acts, Luke tells the story of the Ascension of Christ and reveals much to us about the significance of this event as it relates to our own destiny to be one with God. Luke writes:

**1** In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach <sup>2</sup>until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by any convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup>He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

One: Think about what Luke is saying here. Jesus is leaving their earthly sight, yet "the promise of the Father" will fill the void left by Christ's human presence. Here, the Gospel provides the hope of the Holy Spirit, an advocate, who is to come upon them and will stay with them. Consider this as we reflect in silence.

*(Pause for silent reflection)*

One: What did it mean for the disciples to be witnesses? Jesus gave them instructions and knowledge of what was going to happen; He equipped them for what indeed took place. *Do you think we are witnesses too? Does anything distract us from fulfilling this crucial role? How are we also equipped to be witnesses?*

*(Pause for silent reflection)*

One: Let us open our minds to consider what the Ascension means for us today, here on earth. Jesus has told us that we are not left alone. We also know that one day, He will return. Until that day, may His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

**Responsorial Song: "I See the Lord"**

**Scripture: Psalm 93 -The Message**

**I see the Lord seated on the throne -- exalted  
and the train of His robe fills the temple with glory  
and the whole earth is filled; and the whole earth is filled;  
and the whole earth is filled with His glory.**

One: God is King, robed and ruling, God is robed and surging with strength.

**All: Yes, the world is firm, immovable, your throne ever firm – you're Eternal!**

**I see the Lord seated on the throne -- exalted  
and the train of His robe fills the temple with glory  
and the whole earth is filled; and the whole earth is filled;  
and the whole earth is filled with His glory.**

One: Sea storms are up, God, Sea storms wild and roaring, sea storms with thunderous breakers.

**All: Stronger than wild sea storms, mightier than sea-storm breakers, mighty God rules from High Heaven.**

**Holy, Holy, Holy, Holy  
Holy is the Lord**

One: (God) What you say goes – it always has.

**All: "Beauty" and "Holy" mark your palace rule, God, to the very end of time.  
Amen!** (Please stand)

**\*Holy, Holy, Holy, Holy  
Holy is the Lord  
(Repeat as guided)**

**\*Gospel Lesson:**

Luke 24:44-53

<sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah<sup>[a]</sup> is<sup>[b]</sup> to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses<sup>[c]</sup> of these things. <sup>49</sup> And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

<sup>50</sup> Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>52</sup> And they worshiped him and<sup>[e]</sup> returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup> and they were continually in the temple<sup>[f]</sup> blessing God.

One: This is the Gospel of Christ for the people of God.

**All: Come Holy Spirit! Thanks be to God!**

**Message**

*Why the Ascension of Christ Matters*

Pastor Joy

**Song of Response**

“Lord, I Lift Your Name on High” #88

Lord, I lift your name on high, Lord I love to sing your praises.  
I'm so glad you're in my life, I'm so glad you came to save us.  
You came from heaven to earth to show the way,  
From the earth to the cross our debt to pay;  
From the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky;  
Lord, I lift your name on high!



## Celebration of Communion

Pastor: People of God, in order to find meaning in the Ascension, we might need to think of it as both an ending, and a beginning. And so, each Sunday we are taken back to that upper room, where Christ promised that as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we not only remember him, but we commune with him by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

**All: Christ invites us now, as He did then, to His table of grace. There is room around it for every soul that was, and is, and is to come. We come to the table as a people who are learning the way of Christ. We confess that we are not always right. But we share this faith: that those who trust in Christ Jesus will grow in the assurance of God's eternal love.**

Pastor: And so, in the words later used by Jesus upon greeting His disciples: "Peace be with you."

**All: And also with you.**

Pastor: Before we come to the table, let us share with one another a sign of peace.

*(All are welcome to show a sign of Christian love to one another, in their own way)*

Pastor: Having signaled our love for one another, and for God, let us center our hearts on the sacrament itself. Together, let us bless the elements. Here at this table we take bread and cup and ask the Holy Spirit to make it for us: communion with Christ, who gave his life as the bread of heaven and as the cup of eternal life.

**All: Here at this table we remember that Christ gave his entire life as an outpouring of God's love—a love that will, one day, renew all things. Amen.**

Pastor: People of God, come to the table!

## Communion Music

"Amazing Love"

Shelly, Bob, Cheryl

## Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer ("Debts and Debtors")

One: The Lord be with you.

All: ***And also with you.***

One: *Let us pray:* For the prayer requests that have come to us today, whether joys or sorrows.... [prayer requests are presented] .... Holy and Loving God, in your wisdom, meet all of these needs in the perfect way of your grace.

**All: God hear our prayer!**

One: For all that we hold in the silence of our hearts, we come to you in the confidence of quiet, O God, and lift our petitions privately to you. (*Silent prayer*)... Almighty God, Sovereign of Heaven, shower your blessings upon all people! Move the mountains in our lives or help to move us so that we might be fully at peace. This we pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray...

**All:** “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors—and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory forever.” Amen.

### **Offering**

*Our offerings are first and foremost what we give to the world through justice, kindness, and mercy—and these we can do every day. Our offerings can also take the form of financial contributions to the church to support our ministries.*

**If you are not in the sanctuary, online donations can be made at:  
[www.communityunited.church](http://www.communityunited.church)**

*Or, if you prefer to mail in a check, which can be addressed to the church at:  
1011 West 38<sup>th</sup> Street – Erie, PA 16508*

### **Ministry of Music**

“I Will Rise”

Dina Johnson

*Your offerings make this inclusive ministry possible. Thank you! Because of you, our church reaches through and beyond Erie: providing worship, community, and service. As you can give generously, it is well received.*

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

#### **\*Congregational Response #43**

Majesty, worship His majesty; unto Jesus be all glory, honor and praise.  
Majesty, kingdom authority, flow from His throne unto his own, His kingdom  
reigns.

#### **\*Departing Prayer**

One: Holy and loving God, You have given us the gift of Christ, risen and ascended for the life of the world.

**All:** As we continue to search and to find new meaning in Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension, may we sense Your Spirit poured out upon us, making our hearts strong with love and bold with praise, that we may proclaim God’s son to the earth. Amen.

#### **\*Blessing**

**\*Closing Hymn**

“Alleluia, Sing to Jesus!” #320

Alleluia! Sing to Jesus!  
His the scepter, his the throne;  
Alleluia! His the triumph,  
His the victory alone.  
Hark! The songs of peaceful Zion  
Thunder like a mighty flood.  
Jesus, out of every nation,  
Has redeemed us by his blood.

Alleluia! Not as orphans  
Are we left in sorrow now;  
Alleluia! He is near us;  
Faith believes nor questions how.  
Though the cloud from sight received him  
When the forty days were o'er,  
Shall our hearts forget his promise,  
"I am with you evermore"?

Alleluia! King eternal,  
You the Lord of lords we own:  
Alleluia! born of Mary,  
Earth your footstool, heaven your throne:  
You within the veil, have entered,  
Robed in flesh, our great High Priest:  
By your Spirit, left us heavenward,  
In the Eucharistic feast!



# Community United Church

**The altar flowers this morning are given to the glory of God and in Honor of  
Patti Rogers' Mom & Dad**

**This week:**

- **Sunday, May 21:** Service Sunday
- **Tuesday, May 23:** Ladies Lunch 12 PM

**Special Announcements:**

The Pride parade and festival is Saturday, June 24th. We will be decorating and readying our float in advance, so we need people to help with that, as well as to march in the parade Saturday morning and staff the table in Perry Square. Please call the church office to volunteer, and/or see Pastor Joy or Pastor Rich to let us know we can count you in.

*Need hearing assistance? We have four available units. Please talk to our tech crew in the back of the sanctuary.*



**WE REMEMBER THOSE IN OUR ARMED FORCES:**

Jacob Snyder (Army), Nick Duncan (Army), Samantha McHenry (Army), Brittany Duncan (Army)  
Chris Duncan (Marines), Matt Duncan (Army), Tyler Anderson (Army National Guard), Shelby Wescott (Army),  
Mathew Anderson (Army)  
and DJ Miaczynski (Marines)

**PRAYERS FOR:**

Dorothy Moyer, Kathy Koziol, Anna Silvia, Kevin Bennett and family and friends, Rod and Dew Johnson, Harry Lamb, Sue Scheiwer, Diane Walker, George Churley,  
Robin Adams, Ralph Kester, John M., Todd Carrier, Teddy Long, Jimmyo, Sandy Gool, Tammy McIntyre, Laura Stone, Jared and Priscilla Hall, Ron Celeski,  
Sally Cubetus, Jan and Tim Crowe and Family, and Annette Minich.

**Council Members:**

*Debbie Anderson (President), Bob Martin (VP), Dina Johnson (Secretary), Janice Skelly, Mike Pruzinsky, April Knapp, Patti Rogers, Carol Rodgers, and Angel Hall*