

**Lakewood Congregational Church  
Breathing in an Undivided Heart**

**June 21, 2020**



*Teach me your way, O LORD,  
that I may walk in your truth;  
give me an undivided heart  
to revere your name.*

Psalm 86:11

*Teach me your way, O Lord*

Pause and reflect. Where you are on your faith journey? What would you, specifically, like to learn? Tell someone what you need for your next step. Consider inviting someone to join you in your faith journey.

*That I may walk in your truth*

How do you describe God's truth? Which visual images help you remember God's truth?

*Give me an undivided heart*

Stop. Take a few deep breaths. Ponder "undivided heart." Imagine yourself having an undivided heart. A heart that beats to God's rhythm in your life. A heart that answers your soul's yearning.

*To revere your name*

Say aloud the people and things that are your focus. Where is God or Jesus in your list? Many of his students and those who knew him can paraphrase my father: "If you can't proclaim your love of God, then pause to consider how you love another person or your career. When your foundation slips, then you are sinking. You'll figure that out sooner or later. Would you like some help with the sooner option?"



Matthew 10 24-39

'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; <sup>25</sup>it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

<sup>26</sup> 'So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become

known. <sup>27</sup>What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. <sup>28</sup>Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup>Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. <sup>30</sup>And even the hairs of your head are all counted. <sup>31</sup>So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.



- **Verses 24-25:** Jesus is speaking to the disciples. These verses are a reality check. If the disciples thought following Jesus would make them comfortable or popular, then Jesus reminds them of how he is being treated. How people treat the leader is how people will treat those following the leader. Discipleship is a life-long journey, not a scenic day-trip. Be prepared, know that there will be difficult periods, keep praying, keep listening to our still-speaking God, work in community, and act as Christ's disciples.

- ♥ When you tell people that you are a Christian, how do you expect to be treated?
- ♥ When being a disciple is challenging, how do you respond?

- **Verses: 26-28:** Here's a soft landing. Yes, discipleship is hard, but do not be afraid. Sinful behavior may seem to be the norm, but sins will not remain a secret forever. Protect your soul, stay the course and be bold witnesses.

- ♥ What have you covered up in your personal life?
- ♥ What have we covered up as a culture or as a nation?

- **Verses 29-30:** Here is a hug from God. We teach these words from Jesus to preschool and early elementary children and we say them to each other when life is hard. These words reinforce that we are not alone, that Jesus loves us, and that God notices all of God's creation. Do not be afraid. God's arms are already wrapped around you. As the refrain in an African-American spiritual says, "And his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me."

- ♥ When have these verses provided solace for you?

♥ Who do you know who may need to hear these verses? Please share them.

*32 'Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; <sup>33</sup>but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.*

*34 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.*

*<sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;*

*<sup>36</sup> and one's foes will be members of one's own household.*

*<sup>37</sup>Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; <sup>38</sup>and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup>Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

♥ **Verses 32-39:** Oh, my. We move from a hug to these verses. I know that had I been an ancient Gospel editor, I would have rewritten or even deleted these lines. They don't fit my perceptions of Jesus or the tone of his ministry. And, these words feel as if the discipleship bar is set impossibly high.

What we need for these verses is context, the words and ideas wrapping themselves around Jesus and around us. We need to hear and ponder the psalmist's plea for an undivided heart. We need to repeat, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." We need Jesus commanding us to "love your neighbor, as yourself." We need to hear Paul preaching about dying to sin and living into the new life of Christ, a life filled with abundant grace. We need to remember that God heard the desperate pleas of Hagar and Ismael in the wilderness and deeply breath in God's equality and compassion as God promises to make great nations from all of Abraham's descendants. We need to envision the overlapping middle section of Pastor Joanna's Venn diagram as it becomes larger when we act justly and bring more of the new heaven and new earth to our time and place.

In this context, Jesus is saying what we've been hearing since the creation story. God is either our primary relationship or God is not. The miracle is that when God is our primary relationship, we love more fully and authentically in our other relationships, whether with people or with creation. When God is our primary relationship, then the "things" that may be our focus have a different perspective.

And, I like that the discipleship bar is impossibly high. If it was lower, I could be tempted to think that I could succeed on my own, without a faith community, without prayer, without new learning, without listening, without gratitude, and without God.

- ♥ What is your response to these verses from your life experience?
- ♥ Do you have an undivided heart? Why? Why not?



Thank you to all the dads!

In January 2020, John Kasper and his son, Michael Kasper visited the Holy Lands. John is a LCC member and Michael is a part of the praise band at Rocky River United Methodist Church. They joined sojourners from the Catholic faith and other Protestant denominations on this trip. Open your heart to receive the blessing of their father-son video, *Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus: A Holy Land Journey*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2r2kAob9UJI&feature=youtu.be>

On May 10, our reflections included a letter-writing reflection for mothers. Consider doing this activity for your father or for someone who has been like a father to you. The summary: write a letter to father, whether alive or deceased, and tell him what he means to you. Offer forgiveness and admit when you were wrong. Share any hopes for the future or events that have happened since he died and you thought of him. Thank him for his role in your life.



♥ Thursday, June 25 is the 63<sup>rd</sup> birthday of the United Church of Christ (UCC). We are the "united and uniting" denomination. Often, when other denominations draw a line, the UCC widens the circle. In the UCC, we believe that every person can have an undivided heart and that their relationship with God is their primary relationship.

**An Evening of Music: Restoring Beauty.** Celebrate the UCC's birthday and honor the Ministry for Racial Justice, while reflecting on the recent events in our nation on Thursday, June 25, 6:00 – 7:30 pm. Demand justice. Restore peace. Restore God's beauty on earth. Members of The Cleveland Orchestra are among the performers in this live event. Copy the link to register for the free concert.

[https://www.ucc.org/an\\_evening\\_of\\_music\\_restoring\\_beauty](https://www.ucc.org/an_evening_of_music_restoring_beauty).



♥ Before reading what the UCC believes, find an index card or piece of notepaper. Add five headings: God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Church, My Faith. Then, add one or two

phrases that describe what you believe or value for each. Once you have done your own thinking, read and reflect on what the UCC believes.

### **UCC: What We Believe**

**We believe in the triune God:** Creator, resurrected Christ, the sole Head of the church, and the Holy Spirit, who guides and brings about the creative and redemptive work of God in the world.

**We believe that each person is unique and valuable.** It is the will of God that every person belongs to a family of faith where they have a strong sense of being valued and loved.

**We believe that each person is on a spiritual journey** and that each of us is at a different stage of that journey.

**We believe that the persistent search for God produces an authentic relationship with God,** engendering love, strengthening faith, dissolving guilt, and giving life purpose and direction.

**We believe that all of the baptized 'belong body and soul to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.'** No matter who – no matter what – no matter where we are on life's journey – notwithstanding race, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, class or creed – we all belong to God and to one worldwide community of faith. All persons baptized – past, present and future – are connected to each other and to God through the sacrament of baptism. We baptize during worship when the community is present because baptism includes the community's promise of 'love, support and care' for the baptized – and we promise that we won't take it back – no matter where your journey leads you.

**We believe that all people of faith are invited to join Christ at Christ's table for the sacrament of Communion.** Just as many grains of wheat are gathered to make one loaf of bread and many grapes are gathered to make one cup of wine, we, the many people of God, are made one in the body of Christ, the church. The breaking of bread and the pouring of wine reminds us of the costliness of Christ's sacrifice and the discipleship to which we are all called. In the breaking of bread, we remember and celebrate Christ's presence among us along with a 'cloud of witnesses' – our ancestors, family and friends who have gone before us. It is a great mystery; we claim it by faith.

**We believe the UCC is called to be a united and uniting church.** *"That they may all be one."* (John 17:21) *"In essentials–unity, in nonessentials–diversity, in all things–charity,"* These UCC mottos survive because they touch core values deep within us. The UCC has no rigid formulation of doctrine or attachment to creeds or structures. Its overarching creed is love. UCC pastors and teachers are known for their commitment to excellence in theological preparation, interpretation of the scripture and justice advocacy. Even so, love and unity in the midst of our diversity are our greatest assets.

**We believe that God calls us to be servants in the service of others** and to be good stewards of the earth's resources. 'To believe is to care; to care is to do.'

**We believe that the UCC is called to be a prophetic church.** As in the tradition of the prophets and apostles, God calls the church to speak truth to power, liberate the oppressed, care for the poor and comfort the afflicted.

**We believe in the power of peace**, and work for nonviolent solutions to local, national, and international problems.

**We are a people of possibility.** In the UCC, members, congregations and structures have the breathing room to explore and to hear ... for after all, God is still speaking, ...

### **References and Images**

**Heart:** <https://solumevangelium.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/undividedheartgillross1.jpg>

**God First:** <https://godsmotivations.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/photo-1521020781921-ce0d582b7665.jpg?w=750>

**Cartoon:** [https://www.agnusday.org/strips/Matthew10v24to36\\_2014.jpg](https://www.agnusday.org/strips/Matthew10v24to36_2014.jpg)

**Father's Day:** <https://gmgc.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Happy-Fathers-Day-Colorful-Text-Image.jpg>

**UCC logos:** [https://www.ucc.org/about-us\\_ucc-logo](https://www.ucc.org/about-us_ucc-logo)

**UCC, What We Believe:** [https://www.ucc.org/about-us\\_what-we-believe](https://www.ucc.org/about-us_what-we-believe)