

Central United Methodist Church

3700 Pacific Avenue, Stockton, CA 95204

ORDER OF WORSHIP
8TH Sunday After Pentecost
Sunday, July 23, 2023



GATHERING

PRELUDE

Monica Adams

GATHERING MOMENT

Alexis Easton (8:30am), Joe Krider (11:00am)

***SUNG CALL TO WORSHIP**

Invocation
By Alexis Easton

Alexis Easton (8:30am)
Joe Krider (11:00am)

Vocals

We come to-gether ground-ed in the love of God, We come to-gether to
claim the Spir - it's power.. May we see Christ's face in one an - oth - er,
May we be strength - ened for God's pur - pose in this hour.

CHILDREN'S MOMENT

Rev. Sungho Lee

***OPENING HYMN**

Hymn of Promise

UMH #707

MISSION & MINISTRIES MOMENT

Alexis Easton (8:30am), Joe Krider (11:00am)

PRAYER CARDS COLLECTED

RITE OF FRIENDSHIP AND A SPECIAL WELCOME TO OUR VISITORS Joe Krider (11:00am)

***PASSING THE PEACE** Alexis Easton (8:30am), Joe Krider (11:00am)

(Stand, bow or wave, with the word "Peace be with You!")

All Sing: *And God will raise you up on eagle's wings, bear you on the breath of dawn, make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of God's hand.*

PROCLAMATION AND RESPONSE

SCRIPTURE Genesis 28:10-19a (Pew Bible NRSV, page 25) Alexis Easton (8:30am)

Leader: This is the word of God for the people of God. Joe Krider (11:00am)

All: Thanks be to God.

***HYMN** *O God Beyond All Praising* TFWS #2009

SCRIPTURE Matthew 13:24-30 (Pew Bible NRSV, page 14) Alexis Easton (8:30am)

Leader: This is the word of God for the people of God. Joe Krider (11:00am)

All: Thanks be to God.

SERMON "God Leads Us" Rev. Sungho Lee

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE Alexis Easton (8:30am), Joe Krider (11:00am)

After a concern, the worship leader will say "Let us pray to the Lord," and the congregation will reply, "**Lord, hear our prayer!**"

After a joy, the worship leader will say "Let us pray to the Lord," and the congregation will reply, "**Lord, we give thanks!**"

PASTORAL PRAYER & LORD'S PRAYER Rev. Sungho Lee

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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

THANKSGIVING

WORSHIP WITH OUR TITHES & OFFERINGS Alexis Easton (8:30am), Joe Krider (11:00am)

OFFERTORY Monica Adams

***DOXOLOGY** *Praise God, From Whom all Blessings Flow* UMH #94

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below: Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise God, the source of all our gifts!
Praise Jesus Christ, whose power up lifts!
Praise the Spirit, Holy Spirit!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!***

PRAYER OF DEDICATION Alexis Easton (8:30am), Joe Krider (11:00am)

SENDING FORTH

*BENEDICTION

Rev. Sungho Lee

*RESPONSE

Shalom to You

UMH #666

*Shalom to you now, shalom, my friends.
May God's full mercies bless you, my friends.
In all your living and through your loving,
Christ be your shalom, Christ be your shalom.*

*POSTLUDE

Monica Adams

* Indicates please stand as you are able.

SERVING YOU TODAY

Rev. Dr. Sungho Lee
Alexis Easton, 8:30am Worship Leader
Joe Krider, 11:00am Worship Leader
Ric Campero, Choir Director
Cathy Ratto, Hymn Leader
Monica Adams, Organist/Pianist
David Campero, Livestream
Mark Wharff & Steven Adams, Media
Cherie Hudson, Facilities Coordinator
Rupert Cooper, Audio

SERMON IN A NUTSHELL: "GOD LEADS US!"

Do not be afraid of challenges in life.

Life is full of challenges. Some feel that they alone have challenges in life. However, this is the truth: Everybody has challenges in his or her life. Nobody is immune from those challenges. Some face them with courage and overcome them. Some give up in front of challenges. How can we overcome them?

Consider challenges as a normal part of faith journey.

The Bible first tells us that challenges in life is normal. Do not think that just because we are Christians and children of God, we are free from challenges. Some people cry out to God, "Why me?" and God answers to them, "Why not you?" Everybody has his or her share of challenges in life and why do you expect that you should be treated differently? You are one of us, human beings.

A parable of weeds: The coexistence of "good and evil" in the world.

In one of his teachings, Jesus relayed a parable to his disciples, illustrating the concept of the kingdom of heaven. He compared it to a scenario where a person sowed good seed in his field. However, during the night, an adversary stealthily infiltrated the field and sowed weeds among the wheat, before making a swift departure. As time passed, the wheat sprouted and produced grain, and alongside them, the weeds also became visible.

Recognizing the situation, the landowner's servants approached him with their perplexity, questioning the presence of weeds amidst the initially sown good seed. In response, the landowner attributed the presence

of the weeds to the malicious actions of an enemy. The servants then proposed the idea of removing the weeds from the field, to which the landowner dissuaded them, explaining that uprooting the weeds prematurely would risk damaging the wheat as well. He advised them to allow both the wheat and weeds to grow side by side until the time of harvest.

At that moment, he would instruct the harvesters to first gather the weeds and bind them together for burning, while the wheat would be safely brought into his barn.

We do not know for sure what is good and what is evil! I may be wrong!

This parable conveys a profound message regarding the coexistence of "good and evil" in the world. It highlights the notion that while the kingdom of heaven represents purity and righteousness, there will always be influences of malevolence and corruption present. Just as the weeds were deliberately sown among the wheat, evil forces can infiltrate the lives of individuals, communities, and society at large. The landowner's decision to permit the simultaneous growth of wheat and weeds until the harvest demonstrates his wisdom in recognizing the potential harm that could be caused by prematurely eradicating the evil. We also admit that our notion of "evil" can be changed later as time passes, and we do not know exactly what is good and what is evil. One century ago, homosexuality was considered as a form of "mental illness" and now no psychological textbook would categorize homosexuality as "mental illness." Christianity committed many crimes based on the notion of "witch hunt" and burnt many innocent women when they demonstrated special talents. Premature decisions would be regretted later by the decision makers.

Let us trust God who will make the final judgement!

Furthermore, this parable also implies that there will come a time of judgment and separation. At the harvest, the harvesters will carefully distinguish between the wheat, symbolizing the virtuous and faithful, and the weeds, representing the unrighteous and wicked. The weeds, destined to be gathered and burned, serve as a metaphorical representation of the ultimate consequences that await those who choose to perpetuate evil. Conversely, the wheat, brought into the landowner's barn, signifies the reward and salvation reserved for the righteous.

Jesus urges individuals to recognize the existence of both good and evil in the world, encouraging patience and discernment in the face of adversity. It teaches that while evil may persist alongside righteousness for a time, a day of judgment will arrive, ensuring the ultimate triumph of goodness and the just punishment of wickedness. By reflecting on this parable, one can gain insight into the complex nature of the human experience and find solace in the assurance that righteousness will prevail in the kingdom of heaven.

Let us not think that we are the ones who will survive the final judgement. That is hubris. Other parties may be the ones who will be recognized as the righteous parties! We try our best but let us keep humble attitude and trust God!

Jacob's Case

When he was born, he was named as Jacob, "Heel Grabber."

Jacob was a cheater and a con man. During his life journey we can see that weeds grew together with good crops. His story is characterized by struggles, personal growth, and profound encounters with God.

He tried to be born first and grab the heels of Esau in Rebecca's womb. That is the meaning of his name. In Hebrew, the name Jacob is transliterated as "Ya'akov" (יַעֲקֹב). It is derived from the Hebrew verb "akav" (אָכַב), which means "to supplant" or "to follow." Following Esau, Jacob tried to be born first and grab the heel of Esau. When he was born, he was named as Jacob, "Heel Grabber."

He used the condition of Esau to get the rights of the firstborn.

Even though Jacob failed to be born first, he did not give up his ambition. One day when Esau was famished after his outside hunting Jacob made a tasty soup for him. Then he made a deal with Esau. "Sell your birthright and I will give you this red bean soup." Jacob got what he wanted!

Later Esau found out how Jacob used his weakness to get what he wanted. Esau resolved to kill Jacob and Rebecca helped Jacob to run away from the harm. Before he ran away, however, Jacob cheated his father, Isaac, and got blessings from Isaac using his weak eyesight again. Jacob knew how to use the desires of others to get what he wanted. In a sense, he was a good deal maker and a good businessman, but morally he was an evil character. In him, good and evil grew together. Do you want to call him evil or good?

God came to him before he sought for God.

Jacob embarked on a journey toward Haran, his uncle's hometown, and found himself at a particular location where he decided to spend the night. As the sun descended below the horizon, he picked up one of the stones scattered in that place and positioned it near his head before settling down to rest. In the depths of his slumber, a remarkable dream unfolded before him. He witnessed an elevated staircase, firmly rooted in the earth yet extending upwards to touch the heavens. God's messengers ascended and descended upon it in a continuous motion.

God bless Jacob, a con man and a cheater.

Suddenly, the Lord Himself appeared atop the staircase and proclaimed, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. The land upon which you lie will be granted to you and your offspring. Your descendants will proliferate like the dust of the earth, spreading out in all directions—west, east, north, and south. Through you and your lineage, every family on earth will be blessed. I am with you, offering protection wherever you may go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not abandon you until every one of my promises to you has been fulfilled."

We also experience this prevenient grace and justifying grace of God in our lives. God came to us even before we are aware of God's presence in our lives. God sent his only begotten son, Jesus, to die on the cross to redeem us and to free us from the power of sin and death. We did not know what happened in the universe until we heard the Good News. When we believed in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we still did not fully grasp the meaning of our salvation. We were like just having a dream where angels ascending and descending staircases to heaven and God proclaimed blessings for us. Is it real or a dream? We became children of God like that!

Jacob became aware of God's presence in his life.

Upon awakening from his deep slumber, Jacob contemplated the significance of the experience. He realized that the presence of the Lord had been with him all along, though he had been unaware of it. Overwhelmed by a mixture of awe and trepidation, he acknowledged the sanctity of the place he had occupied during the night. It dawned on him that this locale was none other than the abode of God—a gateway to the celestial realm.

Eager to commemorate this extraordinary encounter, Jacob arose early the next morning. He retrieved the stone he had previously used as a makeshift pillow, anointed it with oil, and erected it as a sacred pillar. In reverence to this sacred encounter, he christened the place "Bethel," meaning "House of God" in Hebrew.

God is everywhere, but we need a place to put our hearts in.

As my brother shared his faith journey last week, we met God at a certain point and time. Then we gave special meaning to the place and time when we met God. However, God is everywhere. We simply took a vow to be a member of a certain particular local church.

Some people worship God everywhere, and do not belong to a particular church. It is like using Uber or Lyft if you do not own a car. Or you can use hotels and Airbnb without owning a house. Many people still want to enjoy the benefit of having their own houses and cars. You have to pay gas price and electricity bill when you do that. Being a church member means to take the responsibility of caring for the church building, ground, ministry, mission, and administration with other members. It is up to each person's decision and style. Jacob decided to build an altar to remember God there and called it The House of God (Bethel)! Do you want to be a member of a church and pay all the dues or enjoy free gifts when others give offering to God? There is no good and evil decision here. We grow together. Only at the end, God will make a final judgement for all of us.

There will be a struggle between you and God at the end.

Jacob's journey progressed, he received a new name, Israel, which encapsulated the essence of his spiritual transformation. The name "Israel" signifies "he who strives with God" or "God contends," highlighting Jacob's newfound identity as a person who engaged in wrestling not with mere mortals but with the divine realm to obtain his desires. This renaming symbolizes a profound shift in Jacob's character, signifying his embrace of a higher purpose and his willingness to grapple with divine forces.

Until we have this final wrestling with God, weeds and crops will grow together in us. Jacob's story illustrates the transformative power of encountering the divine and the subsequent redefining of one's purpose and identity. Through his experience at Bethel, he emerged as a man who engaged in a spiritual struggle with God, embodying a life dedicated to fulfilling God's promises rather than relying solely on human efforts.

Let us not judge ourselves or others when weakness is manifested. We are all on the way to perfection and God leads us. Trust God and follow God! We will all arrive to the river by God's grace. Until that time, let us embrace and forgive others and ourselves. We are all sinners redeemed by God's grace and still growing! Amen.



A SUMMER MISSION PROJECT

Central has been invited to participate in Pacific's Day of Service scheduled for August 26 during new student orientation. We have been asked to provide the items for care packages for the unhoused women of our community. From Sunday, July 16 through August 20 you are invited to shop for the following items:

- Wet wipes
- Toothbrushes and toothpaste
- Socks
- Single serving snacks
- Feminine hygiene products
- Bandages
- Comb/brush
- Pocket Packs facial tissues
- Lip balm
- Nail clippers
- Small bottles of Shampoo

Bring your donations on Sundays and place them in the red tubs located in the Knoles Building and in the Atrium. On August 26 a group of incoming Pacific students will put them together. Please consider inviting

your friends and co-workers to join you in donating. If you are unable to shop and would like to donate money to help cover the cost of the purchase, be sure to include the words Day of Service on the memo line of your check.

HELP US CREATE A NEW CHURCH MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY

A church directory is a foundation stone for connecting with each other and organizing our many activities and outreach efforts. It is time to create a new one that is easily accessible online, easily updated, and of course secure to maintain confidentiality.

EVERYONE needs to answer our questionnaire that is easy, takes 5 minutes to complete, and provides us with accurate and current contact information for you and your family. PLEASE ANSWER THE QUESTIONNAIRE even if you are a long-time member since we are updating our records and must verify that every record is up to date.

You can pick up a paper version of the questionnaire from the Church office or from a table set up outside the Sanctuary during Sunday services. Thank you for helping to build this important resource! Contact person: Dick Edelstein (209) 351-5857.

SUMMER BIBLE STUDY

Join Pastor Lee's Summer Bible Study Small Group during July and August on Sundays in the Fellowship Hall following the 11:00am worship service (except for the Sundays when Book Club meets, and Annual Conference happens). The study is open to everyone. Come to the Fellowship Hall and learn about the leadership of Samuel, King Saul, and King David in the Bible.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING CLASS

First Wednesday of August at 6pm via Zoom. Open to anyone that would like to attend. If you are a Committee Chair and have not attended this is your last chance. As Committee Chair you are required to attend this one-hour training.

THE OFFICE

The office area is closed on Saturdays and Sundays. If you need to make copies or need to be in the office area, please come by during the week. It is best to make an appointment as we are short-staffed and may be in a meeting, on lunch or running errands.

Also, regarding the buildings. The buildings are kept locked during the week for the safety of the staff, nursery schoolteachers and children, and groups that use the facilities during the week. The office and the buildings are closed on Saturdays. On Sunday, only buildings that are being used are unlocked – usually the Knoles Building and the Sanctuary. Again, the other buildings are kept locked for the safety of staff and others on campus. We have had several unpleasant encounters with some of the homeless on our campus and we need to be sure that everyone feels safe while on our facility. Thank you for understanding. If you have any questions, please contact Susie Wanden at swanden@cumcstockton.org.