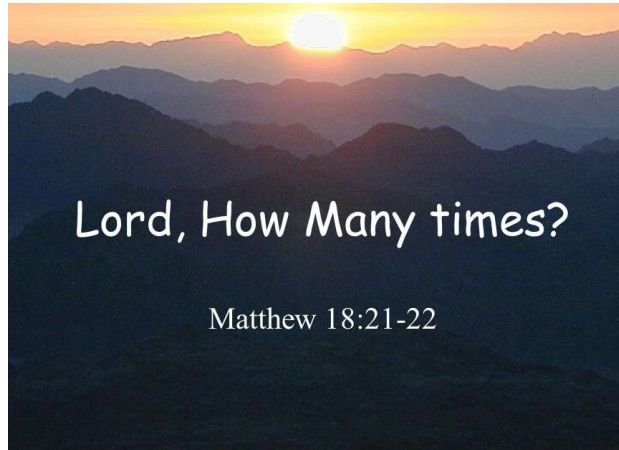


Central United Methodist Church

3700 Pacific Avenue, Stockton, CA 95204

ORDER OF WORSHIP

16 Sunday After Pentecost
Sunday, September 17, 2023



GATHERING

PRELUDE

We Gather Together
(arr. Howard Helvey)

Monica Adams

GATHERING MOMENT

Susan Perez (8:30am), Jennifer Alcover (11:00am)

*CALL TO WORSHIP

Susan Perez (8:30am), Jennifer Alcover (11:00am)

Leader: Divine wisdom, we pray, bestow, to let forgiveness bloom and grow.

All: Through this worship, may we unchain the bonds of anger, hate, and disdain.

Leader: Lead us, O Lord, on this blessed way, where forgiveness reigns, both night and day.

All: In this sacred space, hearts set free, to love and forgive, eternally. Amen.

*HYMN OF PRAISE

A King Once Told His Servants
(Carolyn Gillette)

(Hymn tune: LLANGLOFFAN)

*A king once told his servants, "Now pay me what is mine!"
One came to him and begged him, "I'll pay! Just give me time!"
And so the king forgave him, though that man's debt was great.
What joy to be unburdened! What cause to celebrate!*

*Though he had been forgiven, that man was not so kind.
He threatened one who owed him, "Now pay me what is mine!"
He would not show compassion toward one whose debt was small.
What judgment came upon him! How bitter was his fall!*

*O God, in Christ you freed us; now may we not forget.
Our sin was overwhelming but you once paid the debt.
May we live lives of mercy, forgiving, blessing, too;
And may our grace toward others reflect our thanks to you.*

CHILDREN'S MOMENT Rev. Sungho Lee

LAY LEADER MOMENT John Bradbury

MISSION & MINISTRIES MOMENT Susan Perez (8:30am), Jennifer Alcover (11:00am)

PRAYER CARDS COLLECTED

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

*PASSING THE PEACE Susan Perez (8:30am), Jennifer Alcover (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.*

ANTHEM *I Then Shall Live* Chancel Choir
(arr. Lloyd zlarso)

PROCLAMATION AND RESPONSE

SCRIPTURE Exodus 14:19-31 (Pew Bible NRSV, page 61) Susan Perez (8:30am)

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

All: **Thanks be to God.**

*HYMN *Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee* UMH #89

SCRIPTURE Matthew 18:21-35 (Pew Bible NRSV, page 20) Susan Perez (8:30am)

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

All: **Thanks be to God.**

SERMON "God Saves Us!" Rev. Sungho Lee

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE Susan Perez (8:30am), Jennifer Alcover (11:00am)

PASTOR'S 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 Susan Perez (8:30am), Jennifer Alcover (11:00am)

OFFERTORY *What Gift Can We Bring* 87 (Verse ONE) Monica Adams

*DOXOLOGY *What Gift Can We Bring*
***This gift we now bring, this present, this token,
What words can convey it, the joy of this day?
When grateful we come, remembering, rejoicing,***

This song we now offer in honor and praise.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Susan Perez (8:30am), Jennifer Alcover (11:00am)

SENDING FORTH

*BENEDICTION

*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

Musique Royal
(Delalande, arr. Drummond Wolff)

Monica Adams

The flowers on the altar are given by Linda Luck in memory of her mother Jenniene Helen Luck.

The rosebud on the altar is in honor of Jameson Hogarth Shuemade, born 9/12/2023 to Elizabeth Jimenez and Anthony Shuemade. Grandma ("Manna") Martha Shuemade and Great-Grandma Carol Troutner.

* Indicates please stand as you are able.

SERVING YOU TODAY

Rev. Dr. Sungho Lee
Susan Perez, 8:30am Worship Leader
Jennifer Alcover, 11:00am Worship Leader
John Bradbury, Lay Leader
Rev. Dr. Sungho Lee, Children's Moment
Ric Campero, Choir Director
Monica Adams, Organist/Pianist
David Campero, Livestream
Mark Wharff & Steven Adams, Media
Cherie Hudson, Facilities Coordinator
Rupert Cooper, Audio

SERMON IN A NUTSHELL: "GOD SAVES US!"

We need to forgive others!

In Matthew 18: 21 Peter asked a question to Jesus. "Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times." This means we must forgive others indefinitely, unconditionally, and repeatedly.

The Power of Forgiveness: A Reflection on Divine Command and Compassion

In our tumultuous journey through life, the concept of forgiveness emerges as a powerful and complex force, one that has deep roots in both divine teachings and our human struggle to uphold them. While

God's command to forgive may seem straightforward, the intricate nuances of human emotion often lead us astray from this path of clemency, causing us to grapple with the desire for revenge and reparation.

When we find ourselves wronged, society has devised criminal and civil procedures to address our emotional and practical sufferings, offering a semblance of justice and compensation. Yet, often these punitive measures and remedies fall short of satiating our need for something more profound - a forgiveness that transcends mere obligation.

Perhaps the key lies in acknowledging and reflecting on the very essence of forgiveness itself - that **we, too, have been forgiven by God**. A poignant reminder of this truth can be found in the teachings of Jesus, who shared a parable of the unforgiving servant. In this tale, a king sought to settle accounts with his slaves, one of whom owed an exorbitant sum. Unable to repay, the slave pleaded for patience, and moved by compassion, the king forgave the entire debt. However, the forgiven slave, in turn, displayed a lack of mercy when confronted with someone who owed him a significantly smaller amount. This lack of compassion led to dire consequences, reminding us of the magnitude of divine forgiveness.

The parable's essence serves as a poignant reminder that we are not alone in our desire for absolution. Just as we yearn for forgiveness when we stumble, so too are we called upon to extend that same grace to others. Compassion, as exemplified in this story, becomes the conduit through which forgiveness flourishes, binding us together in the shared journey of humanity.

As we navigate the intricate landscape of forgiveness, let us heed the lesson from the parable and embrace the notion that divine mercy and clemency are not merely abstract concepts, but tangible forces that can transform lives and heal wounds. Only by embracing forgiveness with open hearts can we hope to break the chains of resentment and anger, paving the way for a more compassionate and understanding society.

In the end, forgiveness is not solely God's command, but a profound act of love and empathy, echoing through the ages and across faiths. It is a testament to our shared vulnerability, resilience, and the capacity for redemption that resides within us all. Let us embark on this journey of forgiveness together, for it is in this unity that we shall find true solace and healing for our souls.

The Unfolding of Conflict: A Journey from Resolution to Destruction

Conflict, that perennial facet of human interaction, manifests itself in distinct phases, each marked by a shifting focus and intensity of emotions. Understanding these stages is crucial in our journey towards forgiveness.

1st phase of conflict.

In the beginning phase of conflict, the spotlight rests on issues and the pursuit of solutions. Emotions run high, but individuals strive to maintain a semblance of control, keeping their true needs and intentions guarded. This stage lays the foundation for constructive dialogue, as parties grapple with their differences while still preserving some level of openness to resolution.

2nd phase of conflict

However, as the conflict progresses into the second phase, a shift occurs. **Self-preservation becomes paramount, leading to the dangerous territory of generalizations and character assassinations.** Communication suffers as personal attacks take precedence over the initial issues. The focus on winning the power struggle intensifies, giving rise to a toxic atmosphere where parties believe they can discern the motives and thoughts of their adversaries.

While the second phase seems dire, it is during this time that serious negotiation becomes most feasible. With issues and emotions laid bare, there remains a degree of care for both the matters at hand and the relationships involved.

3rd phase of conflict

Regrettably, as conflicts endure, a dangerous descent occurs into the third phase.

People focus on winning in power struggle. Everyone acts like experts who can read the minds of the others. People twist and manipulate words & situations. Polarization grows. People still care for issues and relationships. Best timing for serious negotiation because most of issues and emotions have been revealed.

4th phase of conflict

The fixation now centers on eliminating the other party, overshadowing any remaining concern for the original issues. The situation spirals into a dark space where problem-solving becomes inconceivable, and resolution can only be attained by removing the opposing side - akin to the biblical tale of Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery.

5th phase of conflict

The culmination of conflict unfolds in the fifth phase, where **the focus has shifted to utter destruction.** Individuals are consumed by a belief that they are divinely appointed to obliterate the other party entirely. Their own opinions and positions become unwavering articles of faith, blinding them to any alternatives or possibilities for reconciliation.

Even when the other party has physically distanced themselves, the drive for vengeance persists. The pursuit of justice, as they see it, propels them to faraway places, perpetuating suffering upon those they deem responsible for the discord.

In a world fraught with conflicts, comprehending the evolutionary nature of these disputes becomes an imperative step towards fostering understanding, empathy, and eventually, resolution. By recognizing the signs of escalation, individuals can intervene at an earlier stage, nurturing an environment where dialogue and compromise prevail over animosity and destruction.

In the pursuit of harmonious coexistence, let us strive to recognize the potential pitfalls of conflict and seek out paths of reconciliation and empathy, ultimately transcending the destructive cycle and embracing the transformative power of resolution. Let me give you an example of a destructive cycle in Exodus.

Pharaoh's Hubris and Redemption (Exodus 14:19-31)

In Exodus, we find a profound lesson that transcends time and resonates with the essence of the human experience. It is a story of stubbornness, oppression, and the tragic consequences of an inability to forgive.

The central figure in this story is Pharaoh, whose heart remained hardened despite countless opportunities presented by God. In his unyielding pursuit of power, he oppressed the Israelites, subjecting them to cruelty and suffering. However, divine retribution eventually caught up with Pharaoh, as Egypt was struck by a devastating plague, claiming the lives of every first-born in the land.

Overwhelmed by this calamity, Pharaoh finally relented and agreed to let the Israelites go free. Yet, even at this pivotal moment, the corrosive power of his resentment and inability to forgive lingered. Driven by this unrelenting grudge, he made the fateful decision to chase after the Israelites, who had embarked on their journey to freedom.

The dramatic climax unfolds at the shores of the Red Sea, where Pharaoh's pursuit reaches its fateful end. As the Israelites stood at the water's edge, their former oppressor and his mighty army closed in on them. The biblical account paints a vivid picture of the Egyptians charging into the sea, horses, chariots, and all, determined to exact revenge. But divine intervention prevailed, as Moses stretched out his hand, causing the sea to return to its depths, engulfing the Egyptian forces in a torrent of waters.

In this cautionary tale, we find a powerful reminder of the **potential self-destruction that lies in the inability to forgive**. Pharaoh's unyielding heart led not only to his own ruin but also to the demise of those who followed him. It serves as a timeless testament to the dangers of clinging to grudges and refusing to extend forgiveness.

Indeed, the story of Pharaoh's downfall serves as an allegory for our own lives. When we harbor bitterness and resentment towards others, we unwittingly tread a path toward our own demise. The pursuit of vengeance, even if it means our own undoing, becomes a consuming force, clouding our judgment and leading us away from reason and compassion.

The lesson drawn from this biblical narrative remains as relevant as ever - **the act of forgiveness is not solely an altruistic gift to others; it is a transformative act of liberation for oneself**. By releasing the shackles of grudges, we free ourselves from the burdens that weigh down our souls.

As we traverse the complexities of life, let us remember the profound wisdom contained in this biblical narrative. Embracing forgiveness not only fosters redemption and reconciliation, but it also preserves our own well-being and humanity. By forgiving others, we are saved from the bondage of sin and death! God saves us!



FRIENDS OF WADI FOQUIN

All members and friends of Central United Methodist Church are invited to come to the Fellowship Hall **TODAY** and again on September 24 to learn about the village of Wadi Foquin in the West Bank, its unique partnership with the United Methodist Church and, an interfaith, international nonprofit that was started here in the California/Nevada Conference to support Wadi Foquin partnership. A simple meal will be served both times. If you would like childcare, contact Alan Cook (alancook4138@gmail.com).

Our guest speaker will be Rev. Michael Yoshii a retired clergy from our conference. This event is sponsored by the Missions Committee, the Education Committee, and the Adult Studies Committee of our church. If you are thinking about attending sign up at the table in the Atrium.

CENTRAL BOOK GROUP

This month's book is *The Mistress of Bhatia House* by Sujata Massey....the latest in the Perveen Mistry series. It's just out but the library has both hardback & kindle copies. If you have trouble getting a copy, the alternate book is *The White Lady* by Jacqueline Winspear author of Maisie Dobbs.

STEWARDSHIP CLASS

Amidst the sweeping wildfires that engulfed Maui, we are compelled to witness the stark repercussions of our changing climate. In our role as faithful stewards of God's creation, we must acknowledge our shortcomings in tending to God's gifts.

As we gear up for the upcoming Fall season, the Finance Committee will be presenting a Stewardship Class that is open to EVERYONE! The class will be throughout October. This endeavor extends beyond mere pledges and offerings. It's a journey towards embracing our responsibility as custodians of God's wondrous handiwork.

If you are seeking the true essence of stewardship and yearn to learn alongside fellow congregants, we warmly encourage you to share your email address with Pastor Lee at slee@cumcstockton.org. We will meet four times: October 1, 8, 15 & 22. Our gatherings will commence right after the 11am Sunday service in the Fellowship Hall. Each session will be an hour.

2ND ANNUAL PACIFIC INTERFAITH BARBEQUE

Thursday, September 21 from 5.30pm-7.00pm Central will host Pacific interfaith students on our campus for our 2nd Annual Pacific Interfaith Barbeque. Alan Cook heard from many of last year's volunteers that we should do it again. As part of our renewing our Pacific connection this event has been scheduled for September 21. Alan is looking for 20 people to volunteer to help put this event on. If you would like to help with set-up, clean-up, serving, helping in the kitchen, barbequing, or acting as hosts contact Alan at alancook4138@gmail.com.

SAVE THE DATE

Sunday October 8, 2023 • 11:00 A.M. Service
Central United Methodist Church is celebrating 25 years as a Reconciling Congregation.

Central's Journey Toward Becoming a Reconciling Congregation

Central spent the years of the 1990s working through the process of becoming a reconciling congregation. Using the knowledge, wisdom, and skills of Bishop Mel Wheatley (Denver episcopacy and former CUMC Pastor), Rev. Dave Bennett (District Superintendent), Rev. Gary Putnam (Senior Pastor), Rev. Elbert Hoffman, and John Bradbury (church council chair): classes, discussions, and guest speakers were presented to the Central congregation. After years of extensive study, conversation, and prayers approximately 80% of the congregation voted yes and on September 28, 1998, to become a reconciling congregation.

What is a reconciling congregation? A congregation that welcomes all to participate in the church's mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. People of all nations, skin colors, economic backgrounds, and gender.

Every person has the right to be amongst us at all church activities. The reconciling movement in the United Methodist Church has been an effort to welcome the LGBTQ+ community into the United Methodist Church since 1983.

Statement of Reconciliation

As children of God, we are called to share in word and deed the divine love that casts out fear. Made in God's image, we are called to accept ourselves and our sexuality, which is a gift given by God, whatever our sexual orientation. We are called to work together through the Holy Spirit to uphold standards of human relationships grounded in mutual love, responsibility, accountability, trust, and nurture.

We are all forgiven and reconciled children of God, drawn together by our Lord's command to love one another. We invite all to proclaim God's kingdom and to share in all aspects of the life of our congregation: worship, education, stewardship, and service.

Central United Methodist Church is a Reconciling Congregation affirming all persons without regard to race, gender, ethnic background, sexual orientation, national origin, age, physical or mental ability, marital status, economic condition, or anything else that threatens to divide God's family. In our quest to follow the example of Christ, we commit ourselves to loving acts of invitation, welcome and reconciliation, providing ministry to, for, and with all persons without exception.

CENTRAL UMC ALL CHURCH CONFERENCE
Thursday, November 2, 2023, 5:00pm