

**Here I Am**  
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**The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC**  
**November 13, 2016**

*Isaiah 6:1-8; Luke 21:5-19*

When I was a little girl, one of my favorite things to do was to drag out my big bag of wooden blocks to our freshly vacuumed living room floor. All that empty space, just waiting for the next grand metropolis to be constructed.

I would begin to build, using the largest and longest blocks first, setting up foundations and imagining the city's design. The school, would be placed here. And the neighborhood, there. Don't forget Main Street, with its candy shop and library. After what seemed like hours, I would have an architectural masterpiece for everyone to adore.

My city would be perfect, that is, until the German Shepherd came in and knocked down the hospital with his strongly wagging tail. Sometimes I knocked down the whole thing down by myself, just because I had a better plan and needed to start over. The city never stayed perfect for long.

The same thing happened when I built roads and houses in the sandbox at the local park. They might stay for a while, but sooner or later the big kids would 'go Godzilla' and stomp them away.

And at the beach in the summer, when I molded grand sand castles, I learned that if the tide did not wash away my masterpiece, surely some adult would come walking through and upset the delicate balance of the tower where the mermaids slept.

I remember being discouraged when I was told to put my toys away. Not because it was time to clean up, but because no one seemed to see the city's brilliance the way I did. And I probably still have some resentment remembering the girls on the playground who teased me for playing in the dirt, because, don't you know? Girls only play House or maybe, (if you were really imaginative), Store.

Never once did those emotions stop me from building the next new thing. This week, I'm struggling. Maybe you are too.

With Isaiah's call still ringing in our ears, I'd like to share with you a second text. Don't bother looking in the bulletin for the page number, I'm not going to tell you where it is because I don't want you to divide your energy between hearing and reading! Just listen to these words from Luke:

*When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down."*

*They asked him, "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?" And he said, "Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is near!'"*

*Do not go after them. "When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately... This will give you an opportunity to testify.*

*So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.*

*You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.*

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Perhaps you saw the photo of the church sign, "*Jesus is coming. Hopefully before the election.*"

We could laugh about that joke last Sunday. This week, it's a little harder to find the humor.

Because there is much that appears apocalyptic in the eyes of many. We live in unsettled and unsettling times. Things are changing, sure – that's a constant in our world. But so many feel left behind. Lost. Unheard. Many are afraid of what the future holds for them. Many live in despair. In fear. In rage. In confusion.

We also live in a time when so many unclean lips go unchecked, and the words they speak do real harm. We are surrounded by the walking wounded.

In such a time, may we be people with clean lips. God needs us to speak words of hope, comfort, and healing to our neighbors. To use our words to build others up, not tear them down. Following Jesus still means standing up for one another, trusting in God to keep us grounded in the midst of all

circumstances that test our confidence and hope. We are still here. God is still here. LOVE is still here.

We don't preach hate here. We don't teach or tolerate hate here. Those who follow Jesus Christ are called to witness to LOVE.

We can't mend arguments and anxieties, tensions and traumas in one week. Oh, how I wish that we could! Next week, the world will still be broken, probably the week after that too. So we will keep going, keep witnessing to the power of LOVE while still naming the brokenness.

If we ever wonder if we should just keep our mouths shut, Isaiah sets the example with an enthusiastic *"Here I Am, Send Me!"*

And when we question what to say in the face of hatred and bigotry, Jesus reminds us, *"I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict."*

This week, I, along with others, are planning a Reconciliation Rally, to take place at the Gazebo. People from Monroe and neighboring towns, from churches and mosques and synagogues (and from no faith community at all) will be gathering to share ideas that can help mend the breach in our community. We will be speaking to one another about the destructive behaviors we've witnessed, and how to address them so that we can all move ahead – united, not divided.

We are called to testify to the hope we have in LOVE, and in our common humanity. We are called to perceive the activity of God when it looks as if fear has the upper hand. We are called to see the least and the lost and the broken – and love them, no matter what.

We have a moral and theological imperative to be fully engaged in the healing, restorative work our nation now so desperately needs. As a prophetic church, we must be willing to name and confront the social sins that this campaign season has so harshly laid bare. But at the same time, we as Church have to find a way to make grace, forgiveness, and redemption real.

We need to be willing to see the sacred and inherently good image of God in every single person we encounter, especially when the person in front of us is the one with whom we have adamant disagreement. We need to live into that extravagant love we proudly professed and begin stitching the wounds of our nation back together.

The time for this sacred work is now. Whatever else may have seemed to radically shift, this much remains...Our God is a God whose love excludes no one, whose power and possibility are timeless, whose care endures.

Our God is a God who sees each and every one of us – immigrant, LGBTQ & straight, black and white and brown, differently-abled, male and female, rich and poor, conservative and liberal – each one is precious and beyond measure.

Our faith is a Resurrection Faith that proclaims stubborn hope amid despair, resilient enough to navigate the peaks and valleys of our lives.

And our beloved United Church of Christ is a multi-racial, multi-cultural, open and affirming, accessible to all, justice-loving, peace-making, extravagantly loving kind of Church. That is exactly the kind of Church we must fully and passionately be about now.

So this is my prayer for us all on this day:

Let us not be weary.

Let us not allow our anger, despair, or fear squelch our passions or to dim the light we must dare to shine on injustice.

Let us work daily to embody the kind of vision for our world and for our neighbor that our scriptures call us to boldly build.

Let us be the Church that Christ implores us to be— yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

And let us overwhelm the light of day with unquenchable love, undaunted purpose, and unbounded grace.

To do all of this, we need to come together. Let's join in an act of musical solidarity. First, let's rise and make one big circle...either get on your feet or shuffle over to the edge of your pew. If you are so moved, take someone's hand. A circle has no beginning and no end, it represents that there is no end to what God's LOVE can do. We're going to sing the most popular song in Christendom...listen deeply and sing boldly with us, the PF song.