



The Gift of Being Present

An Advent/Christmas Worship Series
December 10, 2023
8 and 10:30am
Advent Two: Being Present with Peace



GUESTS, Welcome to our faith community. To learn more about us please visit our website at www.unionucc.org or like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/unioneffs. Let us know you're here by completing the Welcome Card in the racks in front of you and hand it to a pastor or drop it in the offering plate. Feel free to call or email a pastor.

Vision Statement

UNION UCC: RELEVANT, ENGAGED, and GROWING

Mission Statement

Our church is a diverse family of believers, spiritually united in Christ, rooted in a rich heritage and growing with vitality into the future. We proclaim God's word, nurturing and inspiring dedicated Christian discipleship through worship, education, pastoral care, fellowship, and outreach within our community and the world.

***No matter who you are or where you on life's journey,
you are welcome here.***

Lay Readers: 8:00 Ron Pope, 10:30 Lucille Kuhns
Ushers: 8:00 Kerry Snyder, Tom Anderson, Larry Todd
10:30 Ruth Ruch, Janice Metzger, Julie Johnson, Laura Kohler, Ralph Gioielli, Connie Gioielli
Greeters: Bruce & Chris Roth, Jim & Edie Fella
Sound: Mike Baer

Like a shepherd you feed your flock, gathering the lambs and holding them close, and leading mother ewes with gentleness.” — Isaiah 40:11, The Inclusive Bible

Advent can be filled with worry about finding the perfect Christmas gifts. Deep down we want people in our lives to know they are special and that we love them. But sometimes we overlook the greatest gift of all... our very presence. Our spiritual ancestors were also worried — often about survival in the midst of political occupation. And the response of the scriptures is “the Holy Living One is with you.” Like a shepherd who never leaves the flock, we are held close. This season, we are invited to be the gift of presence for our loved ones, for our communities, for those who need it most.

***Please stand in body or spirit.**

Prelude Music

Drummer Boy Katherine K. Davis

Blake Hoppes

Welcome

Becoming Present — an Advent Ritual

What Can I Give Him Arr. Mark Hayes

READER NAMES: 8:00 Ron and Carol Pope

10:30 Hannah Minnich, Ryleigh Minnich, Kate Solt, Miranda Brown, Payge Haydt

Leader: In our Advent series, we are celebrating the gift of being truly present — to each other and to the call of God to make this world a better place. We can be the gift of presence with those who are experiencing life as less-than-peaceful. But this might also be true of how we are personally feeling in this moment. Our lives can feel a bit chaotic or in need of a makeover. The Good News is that God is continually making a way for do-overs. In this we can find peace, even when life doesn't feel so peaceful. This week we focus on what it means to be a gift of non-anxious presence for those who need it most.

Solo/Choir:

What can I give Him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;

If I were a Wise [One], I would do my part;

Yet what can I give Him: I will give my heart.

Reader: We unwrap a present on this second Sunday of

Advent with great anticipation for the gift that God
will reveal.

People: We open our hearts as we open the gift!

Reader: The promise of Peace is the Divine Gift we receive.

People: And what will we do with it?

Reader: The gift of Christ's peace reminds us that we can
have serenity even in the midst of non-peaceful situations.

Peace is not simply the absence of conflict.

Peace is an ever-present gift that we can open at any time
when we stop, breathe, and trust that we are never alone.

And the gift of peace we can give is to be present for those
who feel alone.

**People: We light this Candle of Peace as a sign that we will
be**

Present with Peace in the world.

ALL sing:

What can I give Him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;

If I were a Wise [One], I would do my part;

Yet what can I give Him: I will give my heart.

Prayer of Presence

Let us pray:

Holy Living Light of God,

you are our Hopeful Presence.

**Let this hope grow in our lives each day,
so we can be a Present of Hope to others.**

Unwrap and open our hearts.

May it be so.

Amen.

**Being Presence/Present with Each Other – Passing God's
Peace**

Please stand in body or spirit.

***Opening Hymn**

**#190 Angels from the Realms of Glory
Gold Hymnal/Hymns for the Family of God**

**Angels from the realms of glory,
wing your flight o'er all the earth;
ye who sang creation's story
now proclaim Messiah's birth:**

Refrain:

**Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.**

**Shepherds, in the field abiding,
watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with [us] is now residing;
yonder shines the infant light:
[Refrain]**

**[Sages], leave your contemplations,
brighter visions beam afar;
seek the great Desire of nations;
ye have seen his natal star:
[Refrain]**

Please be seated.

10:30 Christmas Song Blake Hoppes

10:30 Worship Children's Time

Children's Church – during 10:30am Worship for ages 3-

grade 5. Kids start in worship with their family and are invited forward for a children's time, They then leave with Ms. Tiffany and return before worship is over.

Also kids are invited to the Education Hour and Faith Formation for All Ages – 9:15-10:15am on Sundays, ages 3 to grade 7.

Children will be in Room 100 on the first floor and will return before worship is over. If worship ends early, parents are welcome to meet their children in Room 100.

10:30 Christmas Song Blake Hoppes

8:00 Music Offering

Christmas is a Feeling Natalie Sleeth

Heritage Choir

Scripture Gospel Reading

Mark 1: 1-8

Reader: The second Gospel reading of Advent from the Gospel according to Mark is the very beginning of the book, setting up the idea that this story of Jesus will be a transformative experience. Drawing on the prophet Isaiah, Mark tells his readers that God is making a way in the most difficult places, clearing open paths in the desert places. John the Baptist shows up in Advent, as he typically does, a sign that the time has come when the Messiah, born of the Spirit, will be present among us.

Here begins the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God: as it was written in Isaiah the prophet: 'I send my messenger before you to prepare your way, a herald's voice in the desert, crying, 'Make ready the way of our God. Clear a straight path.' " And so John the Baptizer appeared in the desert, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of

sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to John and were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins. John was clothed in camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and he ate nothing but grasshoppers and wild honey. In the course of his preaching, John said, "One more powerful than I is to come after me. I am not fit to stoop and untie his sandal straps. I have baptized you in water, but the One to come will baptize you in the Holy Spirit."

Video: The Gift of Being Present

The Message Waiting on Peace Pastor Kris

Book suggestion for the season:

Right Here Right Now: The Practice of Christian Mindfulness
Amy G Oden

Our adult classes are reading the book now. Extra copies are available in the lobby.

How can you be more present, offer more presence, to those around you this season?

Oden invites us to practice mindfulness and Christian prayer practices to help anchor our hearts, minds, spirits and bodies this season.

Prayer

Song: Right Here, Right Now Chuck Bell, Marcia McFee

*Solo/Choir: Right here and right now we open our senses
to see and perceive the gifts we've been given,
to know and believe that what we must do
is open our hearts to let all gifts flow through.*

Leader: We too often find ourselves multitasking or obsessing about something that isn't quite right or settled or the particular way we like it. We are very accustomed to a preoccu-

pied mind that often has little peace. In this season, we will give ourselves a respite from this pace as we slow down in this prayer time, taking on a more peaceful rhythm.

We will begin our prayers with three questions, each followed by a short silence. Focusing intentionally on thoughts and memories can be a kind of prayer, bringing our lives into a conversation with the Holy. I invite you to take a deep breath and close your eyes if you are comfortable doing that.

The first question is this: Who was a gift of presence to you this week? Did you experience their attention in a way that felt like a special connection? Take a moment to recall this in your mind's eye, seeing it emerge like opening a gift. If you cannot recall such a moment, it is OK... this week you will notice these moments more deeply.

The second question is this: How did you offer yourself as a gift of presence? What did it feel like to extend your attentiveness and availability beyond yourself? Did you notice how it made a difference to someone else for you to be truly present to them?

The third question is this: Is it possible that God's presence is felt more acutely in these moments when we truly tend to one another? What could you do this coming week that would allow God's gift of Peace to flow through you to someone else? It may be as simple as finding opportunities to speak an encouraging word. Or as complex as actually lifting up someone's circumstances through volunteering or donating.

***ALL SING: Right here and right now we open our senses
to see and perceive the gifts we've been given,
to know and believe that what we must do
is open our hearts to let all gifts flow through.***

In this prayerful, present moment, we train our attention on
those who are in distress.
We pray this week for...

In this prayerful, present moment, we train our attention on
thanksgiving and joy.
We give thanks this week for...

In this prayerful, present moment we ask you, Christ Jesus,
the Greatest Gift of All, to help us savor our journey toward
the celebration of Christmas.

Help us recognize and create moments of sweet presence
rather than filling the voids with the things that do not last.
Help us to stop, notice what we are experiencing,
and accept it with open hearts and minds.
In doing this, we allow you to meet us
in the right here, right now, right where we are.

The Lord's Prayer

**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, and the power, and the glory, for-
ever. Amen.**

***ALL SING: Right here and right now we open our senses
to see and perceive the gifts we've been given,
to know and believe that what we must do
is open our hearts to let all gifts flow through.***

**Thank you for the many ways in which you support God's
work and God's people here in Neffs and in the community**

and world.

NEWS ABOUT THE MINISTRY AND MISSION OF GOD'S CHURCH



OFFERING

Christmas Mission Offering

Please share your financial support by using the Christmas Mission Offering envelope in your envelope packet, or blank envelope marked - Christmas Mission, or donate online at <http://www.unionucc.org/resources/giving-and-sponsorship/ways-to-give/ChristmasMission>.

Sixth Street Shelter - Located in Center City Allentown, Sixth Street Shelter provides safe, short-term housing for families who are experiencing homelessness of any configuration and size, this includes mothers, fathers, girls, boys, multi-generational families, or those from the LGBTQ+ community. They help guests grow as an individual and a family unit, increase academic progress, find work, find affordable housing, so they can be successful when they leave. The property has 25 private apartments, a family resource center, playground, and full-choice food pantry for residents.

World Central Kitchen - World Central Kitchen is a not-for-profit non-governmental organization devoted to providing meals in the wake of natural disasters. They have organized meals in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Zambia, Peru, Cuba, Uganda, The Bahamas, Cambodia, Ukraine, Puerto Rico, the United States, and most recently Morocco, Turkey, Syria, and Hawaii. In August 2023, World

Central Kitchen set up kitchens in Maui and provided over 6000 meals per day with the help of volunteers.

**Donate to God's Mission and Ministry at UNION UCC
Because of YOU our church changes lives....**

Here are some of the ways you can share your financial generosity at Union.

• **ELECTRONIC GIVING** <https://secure.myvanco.com/L-Z51X/home> or use the QR code with your cell phone. Choose an ongoing regular donation or a single donation with your credit or debit card. (Help us with fees if you can.)



Vanco

• **FREE Vanco Mobile Faith Engagement app** Look for our church Union United Church of Christ, Neffs, PA and register your information to contribute.



Venmo

• **Venmo @unionuccneffs** Make a donation or pay for a fundraiser or event. Complete "What's this for?" See QR code.

• **Cash or checks (to "Union UCC")** Place in the offering plate with a member offering envelope or guest envelope (in the seat racks) or drop in the mail if you're not in person. Contact John Harting (610-799-2508) or Don Penrod (610-972-8719) or Pastor Kris if you have questions or if you'd like to learn more about other giving options or legacy gifts to Union.

Musical Offering

Go Tell It on the Mountain Spiritual
Blake Hoppes

Please stand in body or spirit.

#128 In the Bleak Midwinter
Black Hymnal/New Century Hymnal

ALL Sing:

**What can I offer, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise one, I would do my part;
But what can I offer:
all my heart.**

Please be seated.

***Benediction**

[adapted from Amy Oden, Right Here, Right Now]

“As we strip away the cluttered surface of our lives
and become more present in the moment,
we may be disturbed by what we can now see in the open
vista,

especially the suffering of “the least of these.”

We are no longer numb to the cries of those hurting.
We ache for the violence humans do to one another and to
the earth.

We see all people and all creation held within God’s love
and life.

Our comfortable lives are disrupted as we ask new, hard
questions.

But being more mindfully present will also bring greater
awareness
of God’s presence, peace, and clarity in the midst of it all.”

So now go and be truly present
so you may be a gift of presence for others.

That’s all that is expected —
that the gift that is YOU
is the best gift you can give.

In the name of the Holy Presence,
the Divine Gift,
and the Spirit of Hope that is just waiting for us
to unwrap abundant life.
Amen.

***Closing Carol**

Leader: We close our service with a Christmas carol. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow knew the chaos and sorrow of life, sinking into a depression after his wife died and his son was badly injured in the Civil War. When Longfellow heard the bells on Christmas Day, he was encouraged that peace could come again one day to a troubled nation. And we carry that same hope for peace this day.

* **Carol** I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

**I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play;
In music sweet the tones repeat,
“There’s peace on earth, good will to [all].”**

**I thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along th’ unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to [all].**

**And in despair I bowed my head:
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,
“For hate is strong, and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to [all].”**

**Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
“God is not dead, nor does [God] sleep,
For Christ is here; His Spirit near**

Brings peace on earth, good will to [all].”

**When [we] repent and turn from sin
The Prince of Peace then enters in,
And grace imparts within their hearts
His peace on earth, good will to [all].**

**O souls amid earth’s busy strife,
The Word of God is light and life;
Oh, hear His voice, make Him your choice,
Hail peace on earth, good will to [all].**

**Then happy, singing on your way,
Your world will change from night to day;
Your heart will feel the message real,
Of peace on earth, good will to [all].**

Postlude Music

God Rest Ye Merry, Gentleman Traditional
Blake Hoppes

Holy Grounds Coffee Hour on Sundays

Enjoy some coffee, tea, juice, hot chocolate, and snacks on Sundays in Memorial Hall after both worship services.

Upcoming hosts include:

Dec 10 and 17 – Everyone please bring cookies to share!

EVIDENCE OF STEWARDSHIP LAST SUNDAY

Offering (e-giving, envelopes, and plate)		Attendance Last Week	
Last Week	\$9,785.00	8:00 am	48
Calendar Year 2023 (Jan.-Oct.)	\$ 308,275.00	10:30 am	163
Calendar Year 2022 (Jan.-Oct.)	\$ 309,414.00	Education Hour	
Change from Last Year	-0.4%	Online Views	330
Budget FY 2023-24 (July-Oct.)	\$ 128,120.00	Breathe	
Actual Fiscal Year-to- Date (July-Oct.)	\$ 11,2,231.00	2023 Donations to the Northern Lehigh Food Bank:	
Difference in Giving vs. Budget	-12.4%	Last Week:	\$, lbs
<i>Additional financial information available in Consistory Minutes</i>		Total YTD:	6,9707lbs, \$1310
Christmas Mission Donations		\$250.00	

Presentations to the Glory of God

In memory of Walt Disney

Be a sponsor for \$20, send to Union UCC through your offering envelope or online marked Spread the Good News or \$8 for Children's Bulletin. Contact Marissa to sign up for a certain date or to sponsor in honor or memory of someone.

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