

"Stand Firm On the Rock of Faith"
C Pentecost 24, II Thessalonians 2:13-17
November 6, 2016
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev Rebecca K. Poos

I. HERE WE ARE

Well, here we are! November 6th. The Day After. And A Couple of Days Before!

The election is almost over! Hang in there. We **will** survive this.

The 90th Annual CUCC Bazaar is in the rearview mirror and was fabulous once again. Every year we think we can't do this again, and every year, it comes together, everyone pitches in and works hard and creation and creativity come together –with some sweat and tears, and it happens! (Okay, maybe a LOT of sweat and tears.)

II. TOUGH TIMES = VALUES CLARIFICATION

And speaking of sweat and tears, the Election has made for a rough year, no matter how you slice it. If there's ONE thing people have said recently—besides what an amazing and awesome Bazaar that was—is "Oh, how glad we will be when this &#*(\\$)&#(*\$ election is over!"

(You fill in the "blankety-blank!" Bowie told me yesterday that my humor from the pulpit was one of the few things keeping the sanity around here, so I'll try my best to keep that up. Even if I'M not feeling very humorous ☺

On a serious note, though, is this: part of what has been so unsettling in our world this past year plus, and especially in this election season, is the uprooting of what we thought were our values—as human beings on this earth; as a nation.

Core beliefs we have held dear as fellow citizens all seem to have been thrown up in the air; even tossed out. *Aren't* we about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and justice for all? United we stand?

Every *piece* of our collective identity has been "up for review," questioned. I daresay even threatened in what comes out of the mouths of the media and our fellow citizens. And that, I must say (and I know to be true for many), keeps us up at night!

Several of you have talked—even as recent as yesterday—about how unnerved you feel. How disbelieving; anxious; fearful.

When everything is "up for grabs" and our foundation feels shaken, it's more crucial than ever to **clarify**. Clarify our Values. Capital V. To explore, discuss, **confirm** what we know to be true—about ourselves, about our faith, about the core of our very souls.

The Apostle Paul URGES us, as he does the church in Thessalonica:

15-17 So, friends, take a firm stand, feet on the ground and head high. Keep a *tight* grip on what you were taught, whether in personal conversation or by our letter. May Jesus himself and God our Father, who reached out in love and surprised you with gifts of unending help and confidence, put a fresh heart in you, invigorate your work, enliven your speech.

Stand firm. Keep the faith. Hold onto the Rock of our Salvation.

III. OUR VALUES

So, what ARE our values? As a church? As a faith body? As Christians? What Would Jesus Value?

A. UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

To start with, we are a congregation that is part of a wider church. We are a congregation *of* the United Church of Christ. The UCC stands for many things, in its understanding of what

Christ's church is to be. These three tenets are core:

Continuing Testament

Our faith is 2000 years old. Our thinking is not. God is still speaking,

Extravagant Welcome

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

Changing Lives

Never place a period where God has placed a comma

B. ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE

The Rocky Mountain Conference, as we went through our own visioning process these past few years, adapted and expanded the values of the national UCC, and these are ours—as a family of churches:

- 1 Covenant – While honoring autonomy, we engage in covenantal relationship with the Holy, our neighbors, creation, and ourselves
- 2 Enduring Faith – We express enduring faith in the transformational work of the Spirit
- 3 Continuing Testament
- 4 Extravagant Welcome
- 5 Changing Lives

C. CUCC

And coming on downstream, what are our values as a congregation, right here in River City?

I've been watching, listening and dialoguing with you all, and I've created a list of values that we seem to hold dear as a beloved community. On these truths we stand firm, keep the faith, keep together. I would like to know your thoughts. What would you add to this list? What doesn't ring true for you? An area that maybe we need to work on? Or change?

Why are we doing this? Today, of all days? Well, you know what? Once Wednesday morning rolls around and this election

is over, it's time for us to set about "being church"—in even *better*, more cohesive, more enlightened and visionary ways. I don't know about you, but I'm SO ready for this year to be past and for us all to step out into the light of a new day, with a new spirit of togetherness in community!

So, here's my list. CUCC's Values:

- 1) The Bazaar! Yes, it's a Value. I don't mean "of value," though it's that too!. Creating beauty of all kinds—even the edible kind; planning and crafting all year long; inviting the community with open arms to come in, gather round the tables, nourish heart, soul and tummy. And then, to take the talents collected and multiply them in to mission-giving. It's nothing short of a miracle!
- 2) The Backpack Program and other mission projects--- feeding the kids. Feeding, clothing, sheltering Christ's sheep. Even when we get resistance—voices saying we are enabling a "culture of dependency." We respond with: "Jesus said, 'Feed My Lambs'—he didn't say, find out if the parents are worthy to receive help, or if they're truly hungry!"
- 3) Coming together—we are all over the place on the political, social and economic spectrum as a church, and thanks be to God for that!
- 4) We place a high value on being together in our diversity—sitting down to listen, talk, seek to understand one another in our diversity and when we have conflicts.
- 5) Opening our eyes, minds and hearts to stretch out to connect. To stretch our ideas of how "church ought to look" in order to draw the circle wider, embrace all ages and experiences—of God, of worship, of life.
- 6) The church is not a building. The Church is a building, *and* a worshiping and service community and is IN the community. One that is reaching out constantly, both in service of presence but also *being* a presence that is open to the community with our building and facilities.

7) About *living* out our faith, “where faith meets life” more than reciting creeds or signing statements of belief.

8) We are about Relationship far more than Rules.

When someone wants to join the church—either as a participant or a member, we don’t quiz them on what they believe or how much they can contribute. We say, “Come! Join us! Delve into the life and love of this Body of Christ. BE with us. Be part of us. Bring your gifts—whatever they are and find a place to belong.

9) Creation is an offering to God. We value creation Not just as a nice playground for us to get out and enjoy, but as where God lives and moves and breathes and co-creates with us.

10) We are about Offerings. We honor, respect and appreciate the offerings each soul brings to this place—to us as the Body of Christ. Whether musical gifts, creative writing abilities, organizational skills, financial savvy, a knack for sensitive and dedicated leadership, cooking and baking (wow!), compassionate care, prayer support, or a commitment to challenging and tedious tasks. ALL offerings are welcome here.

IV. STAND FIRM AT STANDING ROCK

Stand firm. Keep the faith. Hold onto what you know to be true—about you. About one another. About the Holy.

Standing firm on values and sacred foundations has been happening in a big way in recent days—in a place, called none other than Standing Rock.

The situation there in North Dakota is a classic example of a Values clash. And varying perspectives.

A. Rev. Mark Narum

Serving as Bishop of the Western ND Synod – ELCA

Has studied the situation at length, from all angles, and makes this observation about the clash in values:

“What I notice is that where one sees peaceful protest, prayer circles, clearly defined rules of conduct; another sees lawlessness and the destruction of private property. Where *I* see law enforcement acting to protect private property while protecting themselves – announcing that people must leave private property or be arrested, *others* see law enforcement marching on prayer circles.

I could continue with a list of polar opposite reactions to such things as judges’ rulings, political leaders’ statements and more – suffice it to say these oppositional views may lead an independent third party observer to conclude we were not witness to the same event. (!)

B. Reverends from Rocky Mtn Conf:

In the United Church of Christ, four conference ministers and countless clergy from all over the nation journeyed to Standing Rock this week to be an actual, physical presence. They gathered—a total of 500!—with ministers from numerous faith traditions standing in solidarity with the Lakota people. Four of our RMC clergy went as part of that and shared their experiences and pictures.

C. Rev. Jean Morrow

One UCC pastor, decided to put feet to her faith for a birthday celebration! Rev. Jean Morrow of SD celebrated her 60th birthday last week with several friends by standing with the water protectors at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. And they brought gifts. Kind of a “reverse Birthday party!”

Rev. Morrow was inspired by her own Native American clergy colleagues making an impassioned plea for to come and bear witness. And, she was inspired by her values and what she believes being “Christian” is all about.

“We take seriously our role as a voice for the voiceless when

we see injustice. We are responding to the cries of our neighbors.

"When one learns about what Jesus really did in life, he stood up for social justice and he stood with the marginalized. He stood up for what he believed in regardless of whatever possible harm could come his way. I believe Jesus would stand with Standing Rock. I believe he would stand up for respecting someone's sacred sites. I believe he would stand up for the environment. I believe he would stand up for honoring treaties that our government has broken over and over again. I believe he would ask that all parties come together in a peaceful way and find a solution."

Morrow urges her sister churches and pastors to passionately pursue love for neighbor—in whatever way you can find.

"Push your churches to engage in charitable acts but to also step into the void that cries for justice. Educate, educate, educate on the issues. Take some risks in preaching. And respond to your neighbors' cries.

Bishop Narum says that out of a values clash in North Dakota and elsewhere can come a spurring on toward better sharing the earth with one another. He offers:

"Might one legacy of this historic event be that we, as church folks, become a people where conversation is more about listening, learning and understanding – not a verbal sparring match where my winning means your losing?"

"I invite you all to be people of prayer," he urges. Prayer for native people's across our land, for protestors and protectors, for farmers and ranchers, for pipeline construction workers, for law enforcement officers, for those who are trying to find a peaceful way through a jungle of posturing-positioning and pontificating, for political leaders, for our children, for God's good creation and more.

At the same time let your prayer move you to action. I want you

to take a stand – or maybe a seat, with a coffee cup and an open posture of humility to sit with someone different than yourself and just talk, honestly and openly about the state of life around us. If you can find a person whose skin color is different than your own, see if they might become a conversation partner. Learn who they are, listen for their story, wonder aloud with them what life is like—being a minority – what are the joys and what are the sorrows.

Let prayer move you to deeper relationships across economic or social divides, be a listener who works to build a community of understanding. Maybe, just maybe, we would get a glimpse of the Kingdom of God."

V. PRAYER AND TABLE

Tonight we have the opportunity to stand firm on the rock by gathering in prayer for one another, our nation and our world, and to gather around the Table.

Come, with your prayers for yourself for healing and reconciliation. Bring your fears, your worries, your broken places. Let's bring them together to God's heart. A storm is raging around us, but we are not powerless to face it. And, we are not alone. We have each other and we have our God, who never leaves us or forsakes us—in the eye of the storm.

Sing with me again:

In the eye of the storm, You remain in control

In the middle of the war, You guard my soul

You alone are the anchor, when my sails are torn

Your love surrounds me, in the eye of the storm.

Let us gather now—around the Table. Putting our values into sacred acts of gathering and sharing bread and cup together. This IS the joyful feast of the people of God. Thanks be to God! Amen.