Dear Members and Friends of Congregational United Church of Christ, Neenah/Menasha,

Fall is rolling in; this harrowing year is waning and will soon, we trust, slide into 2021. Rarely will a new year be as welcome!

I wish I could tell you, sincerely, that all will be well "if we make it through December." I would if I could. Let us hope and pray to God that 2021 will be better, at least, and that we will find the energy and resolve to work in the various ways we are able to realize that beautiful vision.

As 2020 falls into history, I find myself thinking—and returning to—two related thoughts: First, we are utterly dependent upon God. Second, God is good.

In normal years and eras, we tend to ride our own talents, connections, learning, achievements, security, wealth, and other intangible assets (good fortune, luck, personal charisma) higher and higher. We become more accomplished, successful, comfortable. We feel in control of our lives and destinies. We believe we have each earned and are entitled to protect the (mostly) good lives we enjoy. We praise God and drop $400/seat to see Van Morrison play a small theater in Chicago. 2020 declares this worldview an illusion.

Normally, we tend to focus on our own families, careers, health, pleasures, and so on, but the world I see at the end of 2020 is inextricably interrelated. We cannot separate ourselves from God's creation and the billions of other human beings who live within it and share it with us. We are more susceptible to disease, hate, increasing temperature, and scapegoating authoritarianism than we prefer to imagine. I regularly hear the refrain of a spiritual song in my head: "If we ever needed the Lord before, we sure do need him now."

A holy imagination is what we need right now, and it is a primary gift God gives us in the singing, praying, loving, caring, serving life of the Church. God reaches to us through the activities of our life together, even when they are virtual, and says, "I am your Creator, and my creativity knows no bounds. I am your deliverer, the source and destination of your hope. I am your friend, I love you and your enemy, too."

We learn in the Church that everything depends on the true love, loyalty, and blessing of God. Those qualities are infinite and inexhaustible in God, unfathomable, simultaneously fierce and kindly, precise, filling, accessible in particular acts of grace and mercy, distributed without prejudice or price. You and I may positively vibrate with the abundant life and generous Spirit of the Living God. It is possible! And we can inspire holy shaking in others. We know this is true because we have heard the witness of our ancestors in the faith, and occasionally we ourselves have felt the Spirit moving within and between us. To paraphrase and repurpose a country song, "We like it, we love it, we want more of it."
Friends, life always presents challenges, doesn’t it? Some years (stand up, 2020!) seem way too challenging, but, in fact, life in every year and at every moment is precarious. And precious. Life is a miracle, and the God of Life is eternally revealing dimensions of holy goodness in the sadness and glory of the lives we receive and make and share.

I am writing you today to offer a word of hope at the end of a hard year: God lives. God lives here. In our hearts and homes, our congregation and community. God lives to give. God gives the world and all who live in it God’s own generous blessing. We ourselves are recipients. Thanks, and praise, be to God.

For the next month, we at CUCCNM will endeavor to tell stories about how we in this worshipping community have discovered faith and life by embracing the goodness of God. We’ll reflect upon God’s saving persistence by exploring three great loves—love of children, neighbor, and creation. We’ll ask God’s Spirit to help us imagine our whole planet thriving with God’s goodness. We anticipate God moving us each and all to give rich gifts of blessing from the miracle of our lives; we expect God to challenge us to commit to specific acts of service. By the grace of God, we pray our small stories of laughter and tears will fill a holy and welcoming library here in our own beloved corner of God’s Country.

in time with hope,
Pastor Dave

Rev. David W. Frey, Pastor
Congregational United Church of Christ, Neenah/Menasha
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