



CRIBBS NOTES

It is our great joy to have with us Pastor Bonnie Radden and the Refiners Fire Fellowship United Church of Christ of Long Beach!

As we worship together, we focus our attention on the Creator who gives life and sustains us with love and mercy. Our time in sacred space has greater meaning when brothers and sisters in Christ praise God in unity. Today, we join in a single purpose of celebration and worship. In this way, we seek to strengthen the Church and build a strong foundation of friendship, support and partnership in covenant with each other.

We welcome Pastor Bonnie and all who have come with her. We extend an extravagant and sincere greeting that is bolstered by our love, warmth, and hospitality. This is a 'family reunion' as we blend traditions from our Pentecostal and Congregational heritages. The sounds and rhythms of our separate religious legacies bind us closer to God and give us a special moment to experience the Sacred without shame or apology. We stand humbly and faithfully before God in shared worship that symbolizes the wonderful diversity of our beloved United Church of Christ.

It is quite appropriate for us to be together during this Season of Lent. The Holy Spirit lives within us and is more clearly realized as we listen carefully to the Breath of God flowing among us.

We are in the midst of transformation born of challenge. Profound and significant shifts bind us closer together as we carefully attend to the needs of those most directly and adversely affected by disasters and life changes. This is a special period that requires unusual courage and a depth of faith to address the conditions so many people are facing. We are not exempted from the impact of policies and practices that have turned the world upside down.

"We've come this far by faith" is more than a song or slogan. It is a statement of fact that prods us forward in the face of contradictory evidence that would suggest failure or disappointment. We are 'leaning on the everlasting arms' of God to usher us through these days that try our souls. So, it is good and pleasant to have this joint worship service in which we sing, pray, and share our stories.

"What a fellowship, what a joy divine; what a blessedness, what a peace is mine, leaning on the everlasting arms." That is our song today. We have come together as witnesses of God's grace, love, and mercy. We lean on God as we depend on each other. We bring our concerns and burdens to the altar and place ourselves at the foot of the Cross.

Truly, we have come into this place of worship because we trust God with our lives. We are reminded of Jesus' sacrifice to inspire us to live fully, cheerfully, and faithfully. Jesus is our Savior. We are encouraged to stand together in solidarity with the poor, vulnerable, and those who suffer. We are here because God has called us to be together as a shield against despair, hopelessness, and temptations to give up.

We find solace and strength when we blend our voices and offer ourselves as people of God to a world that reels from violence, brokenness, and drunkenness. We provide an alternative perspective on life that is committed to making the world safe for children, elders, and all living things. So, let us double our resolve to be a living testament of peace through the exemplary personification of the Good News in our time. Let us worship God together in Spirit, Truth, song and praise.

-Pastor Art Cribbs