

Welcome to First Congregational Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

January 10, 2021

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

First Peoples Land Acknowledgement

We want to acknowledge that we gather as First Congregational Church on the traditional land of the Wabanaki Confederacy, the Abenaki people and the Pennacook people, past and present, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout a thousand generations. This calls us to commit to continuing to learn how to be better stewards of this land we inhabit as well.

PRELUDE

Dance in F major

(Adele)

Lighting the Trinity Candles (by J. Philip Newell in "Celtic Treasure")

We light a Light:

**In the name of the Creator who creates life,
In the name of the Christ who loves life,
In the name of the Spirit who is the fire of life.**

Setting Our Intentions for Worship

*Call to Worship: [written by the Iona Community]

We are called from the ends of the earth.

We are called from the center of our lives.

Men and women, young and old,

Rich and poor, strong and weak,

We are all called into God's love,

To yearn for justice and to pray for peace.

Bringing Ourselves into God's Presence: [by J. Philip Newell, in "Celtic Treasure"]

You have shown us, O God, that grace changes life, that grace can turn the ordinary into the festive and emptiness into fullness. When we find ourselves in you, O Christ, we find that we too are bearers of grace and that we too can be part of changing the world. Amen.

*Opening Hymn: #120

There's a Voice in the Wilderness

There's a voice in the wilderness crying, a call from the ways untrod:

Prepare in the desert a highway, a highway for our God!

The valleys shall be exalted, the lofty hills brought low;

make straight all the crooked places where Emmanuel may go!

But the word of our God is forever, Our Defender's will is strong;

God stands in the midst of nations, to render right the wrong.

Then God shall be as a shepherd, the lambs gathered to God's breast;

and pastures of peace will greet them, to give to the weary rest.

Agape Feast

Gospel Lesson

Luke 3:1-22 (The Message)

3 ¹⁻⁶ In the fifteenth year of the rule of Caesar Tiberius—it was while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea; Herod, ruler of Galilee; his brother Philip, ruler of Iturea and Trachonitis; Lysanias, ruler of Abilene; during the Chief-Priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas—John, Zachariah’s son, out in the desert at the time, received a message from God. He went all through the country around the Jordan River preaching a baptism of life-change leading to forgiveness of sins, as described in the words of Isaiah the prophet:

Thunder in the desert!
“Prepare God’s arrival!
Make the road smooth and straight!
Every ditch will be filled in,
Every bump smoothed out,
The detours straightened out,
All the ruts paved over.
Everyone will be there to see
The parade of God’s salvation.”

⁷⁻⁹ When crowds of people came out for baptism because it was the popular thing to do, John exploded: “Brood of snakes! What do you think you’re doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snakeskins is going to deflect God’s judgment? It’s your *life* that must change, not your skin. And don’t think you can pull rank by claiming Abraham as ‘father.’ Being a child of Abraham is neither here nor there—children of Abraham are a dime a dozen. God can make children from stones if he wants. What counts is your life. Is it green and blossoming? Because if it’s deadwood, it goes on the fire.”

¹⁰ The crowd asked him, “Then what are we supposed to do?”

¹¹ “If you have two coats, give one away,” he said. “Do the same with your food.”

¹² Tax men also came to be baptized and said, “Teacher, what should we do?”

¹³ He told them, “No more extortion—collect only what is required by law.”

¹⁴ Soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?”

He told them, “No shakedowns, no blackmail—and be content with your rations.”

¹⁵ The interest of the people by now was building. They were all beginning to wonder, “Could this John be the Messiah?”

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ But John intervened: “I’m baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I’m a mere stagehand, will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He’s going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He’ll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he’ll put out with the trash to be burned.”

¹⁸⁻²⁰ There was a lot more of this—words that gave strength to the people, words that put heart in them. The Message! But Herod, the ruler, stung by John’s rebuke in the matter of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, capped his long string of evil deeds with this outrage: He put John in jail.

²¹⁻²² After all the people were baptized, Jesus was baptized. As he was praying, the sky opened up and the Holy Spirit, like a dove descending, came down on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: “You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life.”

Call to the Feast

Prayer of Adoration:

Living God, you are present in our midst and we praise you. You are tearing down walls of alienation and exclusion. For this, we praise you because, in Jesus, you have shown us a way of hospitality, simplicity, prayer, peacemaking, and resistance. Because your Spirit makes a new path for us, as we struggle to live in the shadow of doubt and fear. Weak as we are, you fill us with hope. Lover of our souls, you give us joy and we praise you. Amen.

Signs & Symbols

Sharing the Feast

"Wade in the Water"

(arranged and directed by Rob Dietz, sung by the A Cappella Academy)

Psalter Lesson

Psalm 51:10-12, 15-17 (NRSV)

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
¹⁶ For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering,
you would not be pleased.
¹⁷ The sacrifice acceptable to God is a
broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.

Sharing Our Sacred Stories

"The Guild Room"

Hymn: #172

Jesus, Calls Us, o'er the Tumult

Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
of our life's wild, restless sea;
day by day that voice still call us,
saying "Christian, follow me."

Jesus calls us from the worship
of the treasures we adore,
from each idol that would keep us,
saying "Christian, love me more."

Jesus calls us! By your mercies,
Savior, may we hear your call,
Give our hearts to your obedience,
serve and love you best of all.

Prayers of Intercession and Affirmation (South Africa)

It is not true that this world and its inhabitants are doomed to die and be lost;

This is true: For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him shall not die but have everlasting life.

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction;

This is true: I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.

It is not true that violence and hatred shall have the last word, and that war and destruction have come to stay forever;

This is true: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given in whom authority will rest and whose name will be Prince of Peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil that seek to rule the world;

This is true: To me is given all authority in heaven and on earth, and lo, I am with you always to the end of the earth.

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the church, before we can do anything;

This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all people, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young people shall see visions, and your old folk shall dream dreams.

It is not true that our dreams for the liberation of humankind, our dreams of justice, of human dignity, of peace, are not meant for the earth and this history;

This is true: Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

Mourning Song

“La llorona” (Dia de los muertos)”

(arr. and guitar, Simon Fransquet & singer Jocelyne Dominguez Camacho)

Pastoral Prayer (by J. Philip Newell in “Celtic Benediction”)

Lord's Prayer: (Translation by Neil Douglas-Klotz in Prayers of the Cosmos)

O Birther! Father-Mother of the Cosmos, focus your light within us - make it useful. Create your reign of unity now-through our fiery hearts and willing hands. Help us love beyond our ideals and sprout acts of compassion for all creatures. Animate the earth within us: we then feel the Wisdom underneath supporting all. Untangle the knots within so that we can mend our hearts' simple ties to each other. Don't let surface things delude us, but free us from what holds us back from our true purpose. Out of you, the astonishing fire, returning light and sound to the cosmos. Amen.

*Closing Hymn: #159

As with Gladness Those of Old

As with gladness those of old
did the guiding star behold,
as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright;
So true Morning Star, may we
evermore your splendor see.

As they offered gifts most rare
at that manger plain and bare,
so may we with holy joy,
pure and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to you, from whom they spring.

Holy Jesus, every day
keep us in the narrow way,
and, when mortal things are past,
bring our ransomed souls at last
where they need no star to guide,
where no clouds thy glory hide.

*Setting Our Intentions for the Week Ahead

*Benediction & Sending: (by J. Philip Newell in "Celtic Benediction")

In the beginning, O God, your Spirit swept over the chaotic deep like a wild wind and creation was born.

In the turbulence of our lives and the unsettled waters of the world today, let there be new birthings of your Spirit.

In the currents of our own hearts and the upheavals of the world today,

let there be birthings of your mighty Spirit as we go forth reminded of our own baptism promises. Amen.

POSTLUDE

Minuet in C major

(Adele)