



The Thankful Poor

by Henry Ossawa Tanner, 1894,
oil on canvas, with drawn overlay
Art Bridges program

February 11, 2024

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Question for reflection for Sunday, February 11th: *Are you willing to stand on the bridge with people who are different from you for the sake of unity?*

SOUPer Bowl! Today we will collect a special offering for the Friendly Kitchen to support their mission: "to provide a meal for the hungry in a warm and caring non-discriminating environment through the coordination of community volunteer resources."



Lenten Offering: One Great Hour of Sharing® is one of five special mission offerings of the United Church of Christ. This Lenten Offering supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the UCC in the United States and around the globe.

Emergency Clean-Up Buckets CHALLENGE! FEBRUARY's items: **Five scouring pads (No stainless steel or pads with soap in them.); Six small sponges; One large sponge.** Please put the items in the 5-gallon bucket at the altar in the Chapel by February 29th! The next quest item will be unlocked on March 1st!

Save the date! **Dreaming Forward: Building a Budget for Who We Are Today**, all members of First Church are invited to join the Council on Saturday, March 9th from 10am-Noon (concluding with a potluck lunch) for a creative workshop to redesign our budget for who we are today.

Covenantal Restoration 12-session Video Series and Discussion on Faith & Justice, continues through March 24th after worship (including Jazz Sanctuary).

Page Turners for February: We are reading the second half (chapters 60-106) of *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson, and all are invited to join us for the discussion on February 26th from 2-3pm in the Chapel at Wesley UMC or on Zoom.

[Psst... Pastor Emilia will be appearing in the Concord Community Players production of *Witness for the Prosecution* at the Audi February 16, 17, 18th. Tickets are available at: <https://communityplayersofconcord.org/tickets/>]

Welcome to First Congregational Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

February 11, 2024

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRELUDE Expressions op. 8, no. 2 (Moderato) by Dianne Goolkasian Rahbee Annie

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (created by Emilia Halstead)

Strangest of all is the ease with which the vision is lost, consciousness contracts, we forget over and over again, until recollection is stirred by some icon of that beauty.

Then we remember and wonder why we ever forgot. (Kathleen Raine, 1985)

I feel more and more every day, as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds.

(John Keats, 1818)

COMING INTO THE INVISIBLE EMBRACE OF BEAUTY: ("Swanlight" by I.M. Tony O'Malley)

If it could say itself January

Might brighten its syllables on the frost

Of these first New Year days whose cold is blue.

Meanwhile in this corner of its silence

A weak winter sun lowers down behind

The moor that rises away from the lake.

Beyond reach of light, the shadowed water

Succumbs to this darkening of spirit

That would deny the bog today's twilight.

All of a sudden something else breaks through

To appear at the far end of the lake

In two diagrams of white, uneven light.

I have never seen white so absolute

And alone, glistening in awkward form

Dreaming across the water a bright path.

As it stirs and changes I see what it is:

Two swans have found the mirror in the lake

Where a V of horizon lets light through

To make them light-source and light-shape in one.

Now they swim and fade through windows of reed

And disrobe the lake of apparition.

I look and look into their vanishing

See nothing. Departing that perfect ground

I knew I had been hungry for blessing.

OFFERING OUR MOMENTS OF BEAUTY

SONG: I Have a Right to the Tree of Life (African American Spiritual)

[See back of bulletin for musical notation]

Way in heaven I'll take my seat,

I have a right to the tree of life

And cast my crown at Jesus feet,

I have a right to the tree of life

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The Hebrew Children got a right,
You got a right to the tree of life.
Paul and Silas you got a right,
You got a right to the tree of life.

I come to tell you, you got a right,
You got a right to the tree of life.
I come to tell you, you got a right,
You got a right to the tree of life.

Hear now Psalm 98 from the Rev. Benjamin Chavis psalter...
Psalter Lesson Psalm 98
Here ends the Psalter Lesson.
Amen.

Let us share now together from the Hebrew Scriptures...
Hebrew Scriptures Psalm 34:1-18 (The Voice) Phil Kimball
I will praise the Eternal in every moment through every situation.

Whenever I speak, my words will always praise Him.

Everything within me wants to pay tribute to Him.

Whenever the poor and humble hear of His greatness, they will celebrate too!

Come and lift up the Eternal with me;

Let's praise His name together!

When I needed the Lord, I looked for Him; I called out to Him, and He heard me and responded.

He came and rescued me from everything that made me so afraid.

Look to Him and shine, so shame will never contort your faces.

This poor soul cried, and the Eternal heard me. He rescued me from my troubles.

The messenger of the Eternal God surrounds everyone who walks with Him
and is always there to protect and rescue us.

Taste of His goodness; see how wonderful the Eternal truly is.

Anyone who puts trust in Him will be blessed and comforted.

Revere the Eternal, you His saints,

for those who worship Him will possess everything important in life.

Young lions may grow tired and hungry,

but those intent on knowing the Eternal God will have everything they need.

Gather around, children, listen to what I'm saying; I will teach you how to revere the Eternal. If you love life and want to live a good, long time, Take care with the things you say. Don't lie or spread gossip or talk about improper things. Walk away from the evil things of the world, and always seek peace and pursue it. For the Eternal watches over the righteous, and His ears are attuned to their prayers. He is always listening. But He will punish evildoers, and nothing they do will last. They will soon be forgotten.

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When the upright need help and cry to the Eternal, He hears their cries and rescues them from all of their troubles. When someone is hurting or brokenhearted, the Eternal moves in close and revives them of their pain. Here ends the Lesson.

Amen.

Hear now from the Gospel of Matthew...

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 6:25-34 (The Voice)

Phil Kimball

Here is the bottom line: do not worry about your life. Don't worry about what you will eat or what you will drink. Don't worry about how you clothe your body. Living is about more than merely eating, and the body is about more than dressing up. Look at the birds in the sky. They do not store food for winter. They don't plant gardens. They do not sow or reap—and yet, they are always fed because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are even more precious to Him than a beautiful bird. If He looks after them, of course He will look after you. Worrying does not do any good; who here can claim to add even an hour to his life by worrying?

Nor should you worry about clothes. Consider the lilies of the field and how they grow. They do not work or weave or sew, and yet their garments are stunning. Even King Solomon, dressed in his most regal garb, was not as lovely as these lilies. And think about grassy fields—the grasses are here now, but they will be dead by winter. And yet God adorns them so radiantly. How much more will He clothe you, you of little faith, you who have no trust?

So do not consume yourselves with questions: What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear? Outsiders make themselves frantic over such questions; they don't realize that your heavenly Father knows exactly what you need. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and then all these things will be given to you too. So do not worry about tomorrow. Let tomorrow worry about itself. Living faithfully is a large enough task for today.

Here ends the lesson.

Amen.

Hear now from the New Testament...

New Testament Lesson

Romans 5:1-5 (The Voice)

Phil Kimball

Since we have been acquitted and made right through faith, we are able to experience true and lasting peace with God through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, the Liberating King. Jesus leads us into a place of radical grace where we are able to celebrate the hope of experiencing God's glory. And that's not all.

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We also celebrate in seasons of suffering because we know that when we suffer we develop endurance, which shapes our characters. When our characters are refined, we learn what it means to hope and anticipate God's goodness. And hope will never fail to satisfy our deepest need because the Holy Spirit that was given to us has flooded our hearts with God's love.

Here ends the lesson.

Amen.

SERMON "The Invocation of a Whole & Holy Order of Things" Rev. Emilia Halstead

PAUSING FOR MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

SONG: Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child (Public Domain)
[See back of bulletin for musical notation]

1 Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,

a long ways from home, a long ways from home.

Then I get down on my knees and pray, get down on my knees and pray.

2 Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone.

Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone.

Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,

a long ways from home, a long ways from home.

Then I get down on my knees and pray, get down on my knees and pray.

Global Ministries Weekly Prayers: Sierra Leone

Mission Moment from Sierra Leone (*Written by Mrs. Keziah Kargbo, General Secretary, Council of Churches in Sierra Leone*)

Responsive Prayer with Sierra Leone:

Let us pray for the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL) as they celebrate the centenary of their ecumenical instrument as they seek to carry out God's mission.

We pray for each member-church of Council in their mission engagement and as they seek to reflect your gift of unity. Enable them, Lord, to continually be instruments of your love and grace as true ambassadors of reconciliation and peace.

Let us also pray for the nation of Sierra Leone as the people go through anxious times associated with the tension that emerged from elections conducted in 2023, followed by an alleged attempted coup d'état and the subsequent ongoing judicial processes.

We pray for justice, peace, unity, and prosperity in the nation of Sierra Leone, dear God, that peace that is derived from you and flows from justice, truth, and freedom. We pray for their President, the Cabinet, the Parliament, and the Judiciary that they may govern the nation justly and in righteousness. AMEN.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

(Response to each prayer:)

God of Wholeness,

Receive our prayers.

PASTORAL PRAYER (Adapted from prayer by Rev. Richard J. Fairchild)

Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, which 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, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Sung Amen: I Have a Right to The Tree of Life (African American Spiritual)

I come to tell you, you got a right,

You got a right to the tree of life.

I come to tell you, you got a right,

You got a right to the tree of life.

Offertory

Invitation (Written by Christine Longhurst)

GRATITUDE MUSIC Volks-Kinderlieder, no. 6 Heidenröslein by Johannes Brahms

UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION (adapted from prayer by Brennan Manning)

**May all our expectations be frustrated;
may all our plans be thwarted;
may all our desires be withered into nothingness,
So that we may experience
the powerlessness and poverty of a child,
and sing, dance, and trust in the love of God
who is Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

CLOSING SONG Somewhere Over the Rainbow (Used with Permission)

[See back of bulletin for musical notation]

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

GREATEST COMMANDMENT

SENDING & BLESSING (written by Cheryl Lawrie)

POSTLUDE Volks-Kinderlieder, no. 10 Das Mädchen und die Hasel by Johannes