

# Welcome to First Congregational Church

*An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ*

April 18, 2021

## WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

### FIRST PEOPLES LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to acknowledge that the land on which we worship, live, work, and commune is the original homelands of the Wabanaki Confederacy, the Abenaki people and the Pennacook people. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory, and we honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land on which we gather.

PRELUDE

Minuet in D Major

Adele

## SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (from the Iona Community Worship Book, 1991)

For the beauty of the earth,  
**For the beauty of the skies,**  
For the love, which from our birth,  
**Over and around us lies.**  
God of all to you we raise,  
**This our sacrifice of praise.**

Bringing Ourselves into God's Presence: (by J. Philip Newell from "Celtic Benediction")  
**In the silence of the morning, your Spirit hovers over the brink of the day and new light pierces the darkness of the night. In the silence of the morning, life begins to stir around us and we listen for the day's first utterances. In earth, sea, and sky, and in the landscape of our own souls, we listen for utterances of your Love, O God. We listen for utterances of Your Love. Amen.**

SONG: #31

All Things Bright and Beautiful

**Refrain:** All things bright and beautiful,  
All creatures great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful,  
Our dear God made them all.

Each little flower that opens,  
Each little bird that sings,  
God made their glowing colors,  
And made their tiny wings. **Refrain**

The purple headed mountain,  
The river running by,  
The sunset and the morning  
That brightens up the sky. **Refrain**

The cold wind in the winter,  
The pleasant summer sun,  
The ripe fruits in the garden,  
God made them every one. **Refrain**

**6<sup>1-4</sup>** During this time, as the disciples were increasing in numbers by leaps and bounds, hard feelings developed among the Greek-speaking believers—“Hellenists”—toward the Hebrew-speaking believers because their widows were being discriminated against in the daily food lines. So the Twelve called a meeting of the disciples. They said, “It wouldn’t be right for us to abandon our responsibilities for preaching and teaching the Word of God to help with the care of the poor. So, friends, choose seven men from among you whom everyone trusts, men full of the Holy Spirit and good sense, and we’ll assign them this task. Meanwhile, we’ll stick to our assigned tasks of prayer and speaking God’s Word.”

**5-6** The congregation thought this was a great idea. They went ahead and chose—

Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit,  
Philip,  
Procorus,  
Nicanor,  
Timon,  
Parmenas,  
Nicolas, a convert from Antioch.

Then they presented them to the apostles. Praying, the apostles laid on hands and commissioned them for their task.

**7** The Word of God prospered. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased dramatically. Not least, a great many priests submitted themselves to the faith.

**8-10** Stephen, brimming with God’s grace and energy, was doing wonderful things among the people, unmistakable signs that God was among them. But then some men from the meeting place whose membership was made up of freed slaves, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and some others from Cilicia and Asia, went up against him trying to argue him down. But they were no match for his wisdom and spirit when he spoke.

**11** So in secret they bribed men to lie: “We heard him cursing Moses and God.”

**12-14** That stirred up the people, the religious leaders, and religion scholars. They grabbed Stephen and took him before the High Council. They put forward their bribed witnesses to testify: “This man talks nonstop against this Holy Place and God’s Law. We even heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth would tear this place down and throw out all the customs Moses gave us.”

<sup>15</sup> As all those who sat on the High Council looked at Stephen, they found they couldn't take their eyes off him—his face was like the face of an angel!

**7** Then the Chief Priest said, "What do you have to say for yourself?"

<sup>2-3</sup> Stephen replied, "Friends, fathers, and brothers, the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was still in Mesopotamia, before the move to Haran, and told him, 'Leave your country and family and go to the land I'll show you.'

<sup>44-47</sup> "And all this time our ancestors had a tent shrine for true worship, made to the exact specifications God provided Moses. They had it with them as they followed Joshua, when God cleared the land of pagans, and still had it right down to the time of David. David asked God for a permanent place for worship. But Solomon built it.

<sup>48-50</sup> "Yet that doesn't mean that Most High God lives in a building made by carpenters and masons. The prophet Isaiah put it well when he wrote,

"Heaven is my throne room;  
I rest my feet on earth.  
So what kind of house  
will you build me?" says God.  
"Where I can get away and relax?  
It's already built, and I built it."

#### 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

"Dona Nobis Pacem"

Julie Gaulk

#### PSALTER LESSON

Psalm 139:1-18 (NRSV)

Sheila Swenson

- 1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
- 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.
- 3 You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

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4 Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O LORD, you know it completely.

5 You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

7 Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?

8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
10 even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night,"  
12 even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.

13 For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

16 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written  
all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.

17 How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!

18 I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end—I am still with you.

MEDITATIONS WITH HILDEGARD OF BINGEN

Sung Response: #433 In the bulb there is a flower (verse 1)

In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree;  
In cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!  
In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be,  
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

MEDITATIONS WITH JULIAN OF NORWICH

Sung Response: #433 In the bulb there is a flower (verse 2)

There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody;  
There's a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope to you and me.  
From the past will come the future; what it holds, a mystery,  
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

MEDITATIONS WITH MEISTER ECKHART

Sung Response: #433 In the bulb there is a flower (verse 3)

In our end is our beginning; in our time, infinity;  
In our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity,  
In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,  
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

SERMON

"The Whole Earth is God's Foot Rest"

Rev. Emilia Halstead

SONG: #434

All Beautiful the March of Days

All beautiful the march of days,  
As seasons come and go.  
The hand that shaped the rose has formed  
The crystal of the snow,  
Has sent the silver frost of heaven  
The flowing waters sealed,  
And laid a silent loveliness  
On hill and wood and field.

*Continued on next page*

2 O'er brilliant fields of sparkling snow  
The radiant morns unfold;  
The solemn splendors of the night  
Burn brighter through the cold.  
Life mounts in every pulsing vein,  
Love deepens 'round the hearth,  
And clearer sounds the angel hymn,  
"Good will to all on earth."

3 O you from whose unfathomed Law  
The year in beauty flows,  
Yourself the splendid vision seen  
In crystal and in rose,  
The passing days with grace declare,  
And passing nights proclaim,  
In ever changing words of light,  
The wonder of your name.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION (from the Iona Community Worship Book, 1991)

Oh Christ, your cross speaks both to us and to our world. In your dying for us you accepted the pain and the hurt of the whole creation.

**The arms of your cross stretch across the broken world in reconciliation.**

You have made peace with us.

**Help us to make peace with you by sharing in your reconciling work.**

May we recognize your spirit disturbing and challenging us to care for creation and for the impoverished who most feel the effects of our abuse of creation.

**O Christ, the whole of creation groans; set us free and make us whole.**

PASTORAL PRAYER (from J. Philip Newell, "Celtic Treasure")

Lord's Prayer:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

CLOSING SONG: #28 "For the Beauty of the Earth"

1. For the beauty of the earth,  
For the glory of the skies,  
For the love which from our birth  
Over and around us lies.

**Refrain:** God of all to you we raise  
This our hymn of grateful praise.

2. For the wonder of each hour,  
Of the day and of the night,  
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,  
Sun and moon, and stars of light. **Refrain**

3. For the joy of human love,  
Brother, sister, parent, child,  
Friends on earth and friends above,  
For all gentle thoughts and mild. **Refrain**

4. For the good that love inspires,  
For a world where none exclude,  
For a faith that never tires  
And for every heart renewed. **Refrain**

CLOSING RESPONSES: (from the Iona Community Worship Book, 1991)

This we know, the Earth does not belong to us,

**We belong to the Earth.**

This we know, all things are connected,

**Like the blood that unites one family.**

This we know, we did not weave the web of life,

**We are merely a strand in it.**

This we know, whatever we do to the web,

**We do to ourselves.**

Let us give thanks for the gift of creation,

**Let us give thanks that all things hold together in Christ.**

BENEDICTION: (from the Iona Community Worship Book, 1991)

Bless to us, O God,

The moon that is above us,

The earth that is beneath us,

The friends who are around us,

Your image deep within us,

**Amen.**