

Welcome to First Congregational Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

May 2, 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

Prelude No. 12 in G minor
by Robert D. Vandall

Adele

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (by J. Philip Newell "Praying with the Earth")

The peace of morning's stillness,

The peace of new beginnings,

The peace of Heaven's kiss,

To welcome us to this day; to root us in this day; to free us for this day,

That we may grow with the greening earth,

That we may grow in the ground of glory,

That we may grow in grateful wonder of you, Great Giver of this day.

Bringing Ourselves into God's Presence: (by J. Philip Newell from "Praying with the Earth")

Clear our hearts, O God,

That we may see you.

Clear our hearts O God,

That we may truly see ourselves.

Clear our hearts, O God,

That we may know the sacredness of this moment.

In every moment help us to see you and to serve you, so that we will be strengthened by you, as the Living Presence.

Clear our heart, O God that we may see.

SONG: #312

We Love Your Realm, O God

We love your realm, O God, all places where you reign.

We recognize, with hope and joy, the world as your domain.

We love your church, O God, for Christ has given life

To form communities of love that seek to heal our strife.

We recognize, with pain, that we have not achieved

The faithfulness of our resolve when we at first believed.

Yet Christ, our friend and guide, continues to forgive,

Delivering us from our mistakes, inviting us to live.

Certain Judeans came with this teaching: "Unless you are circumcised according to Mosaic custom, you cannot be saved." Paul and Barnabas argued against this teaching and debated with the Judeans vehemently, so the church selected several people—including Paul and Barnabas—to travel to Jerusalem to dialogue about this issue with the apostles and elders there. The church sent them on their way. They passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, stopping to report to the groups of believers there that outsiders were now being converted. This brought great joy to them all. Upon arrival in Jerusalem, the church, the apostles, and the elders welcomed them warmly; and they reported all they had seen God do. But there were some believers present who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees stood up and said, "No, this is not acceptable. These people must be circumcised, and we must require them to keep the whole Mosaic law."

The apostles and elders met privately to discuss how this issue should be resolved. There was a lot of debate, and finally Peter stood up.

Peter said, "My brothers, you all know that in the early days of our movement, God decided that I should be the one through whom the first outsiders would hear the good news and become believers. God knows the human heart, and He showed approval of their hearts by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did for us. In cleansing their hearts by faith, God has made no distinction between them and us. So it makes no sense to me that some of you are testing God by burdening His disciples with a load that neither our forefathers nor we have been able to carry. No, we all believe that we will be liberated through the grace of the Lord Jesus—they also will be rescued in the same way."

There was silence among them while Barnabas and Paul reported all the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among outsiders. When they finished, James spoke.

James said, "My brothers, hear me. Simon Peter reminded us how God first included outsiders in His favor, taking people from among them for His name. This resonates with the words of the prophets:

"After this, I will return and rebuild the house of David, which has fallen into ruins. From its wreckage I will rebuild it; So all the nations may seek the Eternal One—including every person among the outsiders who has been called by My name."

This is the word of the Lord who has been revealing these things since ancient times.

Simeon took Jesus into his arms and blessed God. Simeon said, "Now, Lord, You can let me, Your humble servant, die in peace.

You promised me that I would see with my own eyes what I'm seeing now: Your freedom, raised up in the presence of all peoples.

He is the light who reveals Your message to the other nations,
and He is the shining glory of Your covenant people, Israel.

SERMON

"No One is Outside of God" Rev. Emilia Halstead

SONG:

#306

The Church of Christ, in Every Age

The Church of Christ in every age
Beset by change but Spirit led,
Must claim and test its heritage
And keep on rising from the dead.

Across the world, across the street,
The victims of injustice cry
For shelter and for bread to eat,
And never live before they die.

Then let the servant church arise,
A caring church that longs to be
A partner in Christ's sacrifice,
And clothed in Christ's humanity.

INVITATION TO GIVE (by June Christine Goudey)

Gratitude Music

Rev. Emilia Halstead

UNISON PRAYER OF GRATITUDE

O God most merciful and gracious, of whose bounty we have all received: except, we pray, this offering of your people. Remember in your love those who have brought it and those for whom it is given; and then follow it with your blessing that it may promote peace and goodwill among all people. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

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: #311 Renew Your Church

Renew your church, its ministries restore:
both to serve and adore.
Make us again as salt throughout the land,
and as light from a stand.
'Mid somber shadows of the night,
where greed and hatred spread their blight,
O send us forth with power endued,
help us, God, be renewed.

Teach us to pray, for you are ever near;
your still voice let us hear.
Our souls are restless till they rest in you,
this is the life, full and true.
Before your presence keep us still
that we may find for us your will,
and seek your guidance every day.
Teach us, God, how to pray.

Teach us to love, with strength of heart and mind,
each and all, humankind!
Break down old walls of prejudice and hate;
leave us not to our fate.
As you have loved and given your life
to end hostility and strife,
Your grace must be mindful of:
Teach us, God, how to love.

BENEDICTION: (by J. Philip Newell "Praying with the Earth")

May the love of life fill our hearts.

May the love of earth bring joy to Heaven.

May the love of self deepen our souls.

May the love of our neighbor heal our world.

**As nations, as peoples, as families this day,
may the Love of Life heal our world. Amen.**

POSTLUDE

Prelude No. 6 in A major
by Robert D. Vandall

Adele