

Welcome to First Congregational Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

September 12, 2021—Regathering Sunday

First Peoples Land Acknowledgement

Founded in 1730, the First Congregational Church of Concord sits on the traditional lands of the Wabanaki Confederacy, the Abenaki people, and the Pennacook people. The original peoples of this land, now called the state of New Hampshire, since time immemorial have made significant contributions to the broader community statewide. We honor the land itself and those who remain stewards of this land throughout the generations.

Prelude

A Mighty Fortress is Our God

Annie

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (by J. Philip Newell "Celtic Treasure")

For rest in the night and the busy-ness of the day, with the silence of the winter earth, followed by spring's energy, summer's fruiting, and autumn's harvest, thanks be to you, O God.

In the pattern of the seasons and the rhythm of our days, show us the stillness that renews life and the letting go that deepens our strength of soul.

The earth is full of your goodness, O God. It sprouts green and grows into the roundness of fruit. Its touch and its taste enliven our souls.

Let us know the seeds of life's goodness within us and between us. And let us handle its gifts with wonder.

Bringing Ourselves into God's Presence: (by WorkingPreacher.org)

Grand designer of all things: the light and darkness, the dome in the midst of waters, the sky and dry land, the vegetation, the seasons, the swarms of living creatures, birds and great sea monsters, creeping things and wild animals, and us; all these were brought into being with a word on your lips. And it is good. Amen.

REV. CHAVIS PSALTER LESSON

PSALM 1

(Written in Wilmington, NC on the morning of the reincarnation of the Wilmington Ten on February 2, 1976)

MUSICAL REFLECTION

Come, O Fount of Every Blessing (#459)

Come Thou Fount of every blessing
Tune my heart to sing your grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of endless praise
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
Mount of God's unfailing love.

O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I am drawn anew!
Let that grace now like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to you.
Prone to wander, I can feel it,
From the love I've known:
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for your very own.

¹⁻² First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

³⁻⁵ God spoke: "Light!"

And light appeared.

God saw that light was good
and separated light from dark.

God named the light Day,
he named the dark Night.

It was evening, it was morning—
Day One.

⁶⁻⁸ God spoke: "Sky! In the middle of the waters;
separate water from water!"

God made sky.

He separated the water under sky
from the water above sky.

And there it was:

he named sky the Heavens;

It was evening, it was morning—
Day Two.

⁹⁻¹⁰ God spoke: "Separate!

Water-beneath-Heaven, gather into one place;
Land, appear!"

And there it was.

God named the land Earth.

He named the pooled water Ocean.

God saw that it was good.

¹¹⁻¹³ God spoke: "Earth, green up! Grow all varieties
of seed-bearing plants,

Every sort of fruit-bearing tree."

And there it was.

Earth produced green seed-bearing plants,
all varieties,

And fruit-bearing trees of all sorts.

God saw that it was good.

It was evening, it was morning—
Day Three.

14-15 God spoke: "Lights! Come out!
Shine in Heaven's sky!
Separate Day from Night.
Mark seasons and days and years,
Lights in Heaven's sky to give light to Earth."
And there it was.

16-19 God made two big lights, the larger
to take charge of Day,
The smaller to be in charge of Night;
and he made the stars.
God placed them in the heavenly sky
to light up Earth
And oversee Day and Night,
to separate light and dark.
God saw that it was good.
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Four.

20-23 God spoke: "Swarm, Ocean, with fish and all sea life!
Birds, fly through the sky over Earth!"
God created the huge whales,
all the swarm of life in the waters,
And every kind and species of flying birds.
God saw that it was good.
God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Ocean!
Birds, reproduce on Earth!"
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Five.

24-25 God spoke: "Earth, generate life! Every sort and kind:
cattle and reptiles and wild animals—all kinds."
And there it was:
wild animals of every kind,
Cattle of all kinds, every sort of reptile and bug.
God saw that it was good.

26-28 God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them
reflecting our nature
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,

And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.”
God created human beings;
he created them godlike,
Reflecting God’s nature.
He created them male and female.
God blessed them:
“Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!
Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.”
Then God said, “I’ve given you
every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth
And every kind of fruit-bearing tree,
given them to you for food.
To all animals and all birds,
everything that moves and breathes,
I give whatever grows out of the ground for food.”
And there it was.

³¹ God looked over everything he had made;
it was so good, so very good!
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Six.

2 Heaven and Earth were finished,
down to the last detail.

²⁻⁴ By the seventh day
God had finished his work.
On the seventh day
he rested from all his work.
God blessed the seventh day.
He made it a Holy Day
Because on that day he rested from his work,
all the creating God had done.

This is the story of how it all started,
of Heaven and Earth when they were created.

GOSPEL LESSON

John 1:1-5 (NRSV)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

SERMON

"Back to the Beginning"

Rev. Emilia Halstead

PAUSE FOR SILENT REFLECTION

MUSICAL REFLECTION

God, Creation's Great Designer (#371)

God, creation's great designer, architect, and artisan,
Dreamer, builder, and refiner how we marvel at your plan.
You have formed us to reflect you, filled us with your Spirit's breath,
Freed us to accept, reject you, and in Christ, defeated death.

Shape us as your congregations, called together, sent afar,
So as people or as nations we can serve you where we are.
O accept the praise we bring you, bless the work of human hands.
Hear the hymns our voices sing you, echoing through years and lands.

INVITATION TO GIVE (BY BARNGESEWORSHIP.COM)

Gratitude Music

Touch the Earth Lightly (569)

Annie

UNISON PRAYER OF GRATITUDE (BY J. PHILIP NEWELL, "CELTIC TREASURE")

For the gift of life, for the gift of our life and each life, thanks be to you, O God. Open our hearts to gratitude. Free our minds from greed. Heal our lives with grace. And awaken our souls again to generosity. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

PASTORAL PRAYER (BY J. PHILIP NEWELL, "CELTIC TREASURE")

Lord's Prayer: (translated from the Aramaic by Neil Douglas-Klotz)

O Thou! The Breathing Life of all, Creator of the Shimmering Sound that touches us. Help us breathe one holy breath feeling only you--this creates a shrine inside, in wholeness. Let your counsel rule our lives, clearing our intention for co-creation. Let all wills move together in your vortex, as stars and planets swirl through the sky. Give us the food we need to grow through each new day, through each illumination of life's needs. Forgive our hidden past, the secret shames, as we consistently forgive what others hide. Don't let us enter forgetfulness, the temptation of false appearances. To you belongs each fertile function: ideals, energy, glorious harmony--during every cosmic cycle. Amen.

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

MUSICAL REFLECTION

Crashing Waters at Creation (#326)

Crashing waters at creation
Ordered by the Spirit's breath,
First to witness day's beginning
From the brightness of night's death.

Living water, never ending,
Quench the thirst and flood the soul.
Well-spring, Source of life eternal,
Drench our dryness, make us whole.

COMMUNION PRAYER - by the Rev. Victoria Larson

(Communion gluten-free "to-go" cups will be served to those in-person, as they depart from the sanctuary, to be eaten outside/at home/in the park. For those online, you are welcome to eat your elements at the end of the Communion prayer.)

UNISON SENDING & BLESSING (from J. Philip Newell in "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 neighbor heal our world.

As nations, as peoples, as families this day may the love of life heal our world.

Amen.

POSTLUDE

Sent Forth by God's Blessing

Annie

