

Welcome to First Congregational Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

September 20, 2020

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

FIRST PEOPLES LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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 "Bach: Cello Suite #1 in G" (played by János Starker, mp3)

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

UNISON OPENING PRAYER:

God of the covenant, you promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars. You have also promised us that we might live under those stars as your people, faithful and loved. Show us how to live as your people, and how to nurture all your Creation with whom we share the same canopy of sky, night after night. Amen.

SONG: #12 I Sing the Mighty Power of God (Isaac Watts, 1715)

*I sing the mighty power of God, that made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at God's command, and all the stars obey.*

*I sing the goodness of the God that filled the earth with food;
God formed the creatures with a word, and then pronounced them good.
Oh, how your wonders are displayed, where'er I turn my eye;
If I survey the ground I tread, or gaze upon the sky!*

*On earth there's not a plant or flower but makes your glory known.
The clouds arise and spread their showers by order from your throne.
All life is but a gift from you and ever in your care;
Wherever people gather, you, O God, are present there.*

HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Genesis 15:1-6 (The Voice)

Some time passed. One day, the word of the Eternal One came to Abram through a vision—a kind of waking dream.

Eternal One: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am always your shield and protector. Your reward for loyalty and trust will be immense.

Abram: Eternal Lord, what could You possibly give to me that would make that much of a difference in my life? After all, I am still childless, and Eliezer of Damascus stands to inherit all I own. Since You have not given me the gift of children, my only heir will be one of the servants born in my household.

Immediately the word of the Eternal One came to him.

Eternal One: No, Abram, this man will not be your heir. No one but your very own child will be an heir for you.

God took him outside to show him something.

Eternal One: Look up at the stars, and try to count them all if you can. There are too many to count! Your descendants will be as many as the stars.

Abram believed God and trusted in His promises, so God counted it to his favor as righteousness.

GOSPEL LESSON

Luke 3:8 (The Voice)

Don't just talk of turning to God; you'd better bear the authentic fruit of a changed life. Don't take pride in your religious heritage, saying, "We have Abraham for our father!" Listen—God could turn these rocks into children of Abraham!

HOMILY

"Finding Hope Amidst Grief"

Rev. Emilia Halstead

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

PASTORAL PRAYER

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.

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

CLOSING SONG: #18 Guide Me, O My Great Redeemer (William Williams, 1745)

Guide me, O my great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but you are mighty,
hold me with your powerful hand:
Bread of Heaven, bread of Heaven,
Feed me till I want no more,
feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain
where the healing waters flow;
let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
ever be my strength and shield,
ever be my strength and shield.

When I reach the River Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on heaven's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever sing to you,
I will ever sing to you.

BENEDICTION & SENDING