

Welcome to First Congregational Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

September 27, 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 dreams and hope, You spoke to Joseph in his dreams, and those dreams led him to great danger. Yet you used the challenges in his life to save the lives of others. In you, no good thing is accidental. You work in us and through us, even when we are not aware of your presence. Help us to know that you are with us, and that only you are capable of turning all evil to good. Amen.

SONG: #403 My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less (Edward Mote, 1834)

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' love and righteousness;
I dare not trust this earthly frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Refrain: On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

When shadows veil my Savior's face,
I rest upon unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil. *(Refrain)*

Christ's oath, His covenant and blood
Support me in the rising flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
Christ then is all my hope and stay. *(Refrain)*

When Christ shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Love be found;
Dressed in God's righteousness, alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne. *(Refrain)*

HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Genesis 37:3-8, 17b-22, 26-34; 50:15-21(The Voice)

3 Now Israel (AKA "Jacob") loved Joseph more than any of his other children because he came along when he was an old man. So Israel presented Joseph with a special robe he had made for him—a spectacularly colorful robe with long sleeves on it. 4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than the rest, they grew to hate him and couldn't find it in themselves to speak to him without resentment or argument.

5 One day Joseph had a dream. When he told the dream to his brothers, they hated him even more.

Joseph: 6 Please listen to this dream I had! 7 There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood up, and then your sheaves all gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.

Joseph's Brothers (annoyed): 8 Are you serious? You think you are somehow destined to reign over us? You think you are going to be our king?

This dream and what he told them about it made them hate him even more.

[...]

Man: 17 They've already gone. I heard them say they were going to Dothan.

So Joseph hurried off and followed his brothers to Dothan. 18 They saw him coming even though he was still a long way off. Before he was near enough to hear them, they conspired to kill him.

Joseph's Brothers (to each other): 19 Oh, here comes the great dreamer. 20 Let's kill him and throw his body into one of the pits. Then we can tell everyone a wild animal killed and devoured him. We'll see then what becomes of his stupid dreams.

21 When Reuben heard the plan, he tried to help Joseph.

Reuben: Let's not kill him. 22 We don't need to shed any blood to be free of him. Let's just toss him into some pit here in the wilderness. We don't need to lay a hand on him.

Reuben thought perhaps he could secretly come back later and get Joseph out of the pit and take him home to their father before any more harm came to him.

The brothers agreed.

[...]

Judah (to his brothers): 26 What profit will it be for us if we just kill our brother and conceal the crime? 27 Come on, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites instead. We won't have to lay a hand on him then. He is, after all, our brother, our own flesh and blood.

All of the brothers agreed. 28 As the Midianite traders were passing by, they brought Joseph up out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites for about eight ounces of silver, the usual price of young male slaves. The traders set off with Joseph in the direction of Egypt.

29 Now Reuben had not been around when the caravan came by, so when Reuben came back to the cistern later and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothing in agony and despair. 30 He went back to his brothers.

Reuben: The boy is gone. What do I do now? What am I supposed to tell Father?

31-32 The brothers took Joseph's fancy, colorful robe, slaughtered a male goat, and dipped it in the blood. Then they took the special robe to their father.

Joseph's Brothers: We found this, Father. Tell us if you think this is Joseph's robe.

Israel (recognizing the robe): 33 This is my son's robe! A wild animal must have killed and eaten him. Joseph is without a doubt torn to shreds!

34 Then Jacob wailed in agony and tore his clothes with the depth of emotional pain only a father could feel upon losing a child. He dressed in sackcloth and mourned his son for a long time.

[...]

15 When Joseph's brothers began to realize the implications of their father's death, Joseph's brothers began to worry.

Joseph's Brothers: What if Joseph still bears a grudge in some way against us and decides to pay us back in full for all of the wrong we did to him?

16 So they sent a message to Joseph.

Joseph's Brothers' Message: Your father gave us this instruction before he died. 17 He told us to say to you, "Please, I beg you. Forgive the crime of your brothers and the sins they committed against you. They were wrong to treat you so badly." So please do what your father asked and forgive the crime that we, the servants of the God of your father, committed against you.

Joseph cried when they spoke these words to him. 18 And his brothers approached and fell at his feet.

Joseph's Brothers: Look! We are your slaves.

Joseph: 19 Don't be afraid. Am I to judge instead of God? It is not my place. 20 Even though you intended to harm me, God intended it only for good, and through me, He preserved the lives of countless people, as He is still doing today. 21 So don't worry. I will provide for you myself—for you and your children.

So Joseph reassured them and continued to speak kindly to them.

GOSPEL LESSON Luke 6:35 (The Voice)

If you want to be extraordinary—love your enemies! Do good without restraint! Lend with abandon! Don't expect anything in return! Then you'll receive the truly great reward—you will be children of the Most High—for God is kind to the ungrateful and those who are wicked.

HOMILY

"Trusting God's Hawk-like Vision"

Rev. Emilia Halstead

PRAYERS OF INTERSESSION:

[Response: Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our 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: #404 Give Up Your Anxious Pains (Paul Gerhardt, 1656)

Give up your anxious pains, confusion, and remorse,
To God, who set and still maintains creation's complex course.
God leads what may appear chaotic, random, wild:
So God has planned and will make clear a path for you, dear child.

All things conform to please the faithful when they pray,
So fall upon your trusting knees and all together say:
"O faithful God of grace who rules the raging storm,
Enlighten our poor mortal race; your promised works perform."

"Don't let us be dismayed by grievous social wrong;
Responsive, active, unafraid, may we be brave and strong.
Extend your loving care through all our live-long days;
And when we die, bring us to where bright angels sing your praise."

BENEDICTION & SENDING