

Welcome to First Congregational Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

September 5, 2021

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

FIRST PEOPLES LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The First Congregational Church of Concord acknowledges that indigenous peoples and nations, including the Wabanaki Confederacy, the Abenaki people, and the Penacook people have stewarded throughout the generations the lands and waterways that are now called the state of New Hampshire. We honor and respect the enduring relationship that exists between these peoples and nations with this land.

Prelude

Morning Prayer by Cornelius Gurlitt

Annie

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (by J. Philip Newell "Sounds of the Eternal")

In the temple of our inner being, in the temple of our bodies, in the temples of earth, sea, and sky, in the great temple of the universe,

We look for the light that was in the beginning, the mighty fire that blazes still from the heart of life, glowing in the whiteness of the moon, shining in the sun, hidden in the dark Earth, and concealed in unknown depths of our souls.

In the darkness of the night and the shadows of our own being, let us glimpse the eternal, O God.

In both the light and the shadows of our being let us glimpse the glow of the eternal.

Bringing Ourselves into God's Presence: (by J. Philip Newell "Celtic Treasure")

All things come from you, O God:

The light of the rising sun and the enfolding darkness of night,

The lives of those who have gone before and the life of creatures still to be born.

As you blessed us at the beginning of time in the eternal womb of creation,

So bless us at the end of time when we journey into the unknown.

As You graced us with love at the dawn of this day, so guide us and the world today into the unfolding of tomorrow.

OPENING SONG #108

Isaiah the Prophet Has Written of Old

Isaiah the prophet has written of old

how God's new creation shall come.

Instead of the thorn tree, the fir tree shall grow;

the wolf shall lie down with the lamb, the lamb,

the wolf shall lie down with the lamb.

The mountains and hills shall break forth into song,

the peoples be led forth in peace.

The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God

as the waters cover the sea, the sea,

as the waters cover the sea.

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Yet nations still prey on the meek of the world,
and conflict turns parent from child.
Your people despoil all the sweetness of earth,
the brier and the thorn tree grow wild,
grow wild, the brier and the thorn tree grow wild.

God, bring to fruition your will for the earth,
that no one shall hurt or destroy,
That wisdom and justice shall reign in the land
and your people shall go forth in joy, in joy,
your people shall go forth in joy.

HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Isaiah 55:8-13 (The Voice)

Phil Kimball

Eternal One: ⁸ My intentions are not *always* yours,
and I do not go about things as you do.

⁹ My thoughts and My ways are above and beyond you,
just as heaven is far from your reach here on earth.

¹⁰ For as rain and snow can't go back once they've fallen,
but soak into the ground

And nourish the plants that grow,
providing seed to the farmer and bread for the hungry,

¹¹ So it is when I declare something.
My word will go out and not return to Me empty,
But it will do what I wanted;
it will accomplish what I determined.

¹² For you will go out in joy, be led home in peace.
And as you go the land itself will break out in cheers;
The mountains and the hills will erupt in song,
and the trees of the field will clap their hands.

¹³ Prickly thorns and nasty briars will give way
to luxurious shade trees, *sweet and good*.

And they'll remind you of the Eternal One
and how God can be trusted absolutely and forever.

So since we stand surrounded by *all those who have gone before*, an enormous cloud of witnesses, let us drop every extra weight, every sin that clings to us *and slackens our pace*, and let us run with endurance the long race set before us.

² Now stay focused on Jesus, who designed and perfected our faith. He endured the cross and ignored the shame *of that death* because He focused on the joy that was set before Him; and now He is seated beside God on the throne, *a place of honor*.

³ Consider *the life of* the One who endured such *personal attacks and* hostility from sinners so that you will not grow weary or lose heart.

GOSPEL LESSON

John 15:9-11 (NRSV)

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

SERMON

"Building a Love-Blanket Dwelling"

Rev. Emilia Halstead

SONG: #373

They Did Not Build in Vain

They did not build in vain who founded here a church
as witness to God's love amid a world of pain;
They built upon the rock that is the risen Christ,
the one foundation laid which stands each earthly shock.

Those who have loved this place, a cloud of witnesses,
surround and urge us on as we now run our race;
Though the horizon's bend conceals the way ahead,
the footprints on the road show Christ waits at the end.

In every place our world is storm and tempest tossed,
the flumes of fear and hate are evil's flags unfurled;
Yet still the Spirit's power in wind and fire of love
Pours gifts upon the church for service in this hour.

INVITATION TO GIVE

Gratitude Music We Plant a Grain of Mustard Seed (NCH #540)
(First Congregational UCC, Portland. Singers: Sheryl Wood, Adrian Rosales, Elizabeth Winship, Joseph Pettit, Grant Edwards. Musical arrangement of NEW BEGINNINGS by Grant Edwards)

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: (from the New Zealand Prayer Book)

Eternal spirit, Earth-maker, Life-giver, Pain-bearer, Source of all that is and ever shall be, your name be sung with joy! Your peace, your justice, your mercy come on Earth. With the food we need for today, feed us. For the hurt we cause, forgive us. As we lose the way, restore us. When we are enslaved by evil, transform us. For you are the way, and the truth, and the life, now and forever. Amen.

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

CLOSING SONG #497

Guide My Feet

Guide my feet while I run this race,
Guide my feet while I run this race,
Guide my feet while I run this race,
For I don't want to run this race in vain!

Hold my hand while I run this race,
Hold my hand while I run this race,
Hold my hand while I run this race,
For I don't want to run this race in vain!

I'm your child while I run this race,
I'm your child while I run this race,
I'm your child while I run this race,
For I don't want to run this race in vain!

Stand by me while I run this race,
Stand by me while I run this race,
Stand by me while I run this race,
For I don't want to run this race in vain!

SENDING & BENEDICTION (from J. Philip Newell in "Celtic Treasure")

That hope is deeper than despair and that creativity surges from unknown depths within us, thanks be to you, O God. In the world, this day, and in the relationships of all human beings everywhere, let there be new stirrings of your liberating Spirit.

In the world this day and in the depths of our own souls let there be new stirrings of your mighty, liberating, Spirit. Amen.

POSTLUDE

Reign of Love by Keith Murphy

Annie

