



*The First Congregational Church
of the United Church of Christ
Stockbridge, Massachusetts*

SUNDAY WORSHIP

September 17, 2023 – 10:00 a.m.

Each week in worship we welcome people to share their prayers. If you like for a worship leader to read your prayer, please fill out a prayer slip and leave it in the marked basket at either entrance to the Sanctuary.

For those worshipping at home: you are invited to text the names of those attending to 413-644-6435 that we might welcome you. Please also include prayers of joys and concerns as we will name them in worship.

PREPARING FOR WORSHIP

GATHERING MUSIC

Peter Frost

PRELUDE

Trumpet Tune by John Stanley,
arr. by S. Drummond Wolfe

FRAMING WORDS

Pastor Brent Damrow

GATHERING FOR WORSHIP

BRINGING IN THE LIGHT / TIME OF GRATITUDE

*SONG

Come, Holy Spirit

A soloist will serve as a cantor for this song. The soloist will sing a phrase and the congregation is invited to repeat it.

*CALL TO WORSHIP Adapted from Thom Shuman, based on Mark 10:27

Beth Cilley

One: Here, in this place, God welcomes all the dreamers, as well as the doubters:

All: Here, the worriers and wanderers can call on God by name.

One: Here, in this time, we can remember all the ways God has graced us:

All: Here, in these moments, we are reminded that God is with us, always!

One: Here are gathered those daring enough to step out of comfort into the unknown:

All: Here we come to hear the stories that call us to the past, the present, and the future.

One: Here we gather remembering that God makes all things new.

All: Here we remember that with God all things are possible.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

TIME WITH CHILDREN *Impossible!*

The Lord's Prayer

Our God, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Children may go to music / story time.

INTROIT *My Lord! What a Morning* (Spiritual), arr. by M.W. Costen

READING *I dwell in Possibility*, Emily Dickinson Gary Cilley

I dwell in Possibility

A fairer House than Prose -

More numerous of Windows -

Superior - for Doors -

Of Chambers as the Cedars -

Impregnable of eye -

And for an everlasting Roof

The Gambrels of the Sky -

Of Visitors - the fairest -

For Occupation - This -

The spreading wide my narrow Hands

To gather Paradise -

THE GIFT OF THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7

Jon Geldert

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, 'My lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.' So they said, 'Do as you have said.' And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.' Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' Then one said, 'I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now

Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' The Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, "Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?" Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.' But Sarah denied, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. He said, 'Oh yes, you did laugh.'

The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Now Sarah said, 'God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.' And she said, 'Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.'

SERMON

Laughter

Pastor Brent

*HYMN

We Limit Not the Truth of God

The tune, "Forest Green," is the same as an alternate to *O Little Town of Bethlehem*.

1 We limit not the truth of God
to our poor reach of mind,
to notions of our day and place,
crude, partial, and confined:
No, let a new and better hope
within our hearts be stirred:
O God, grant yet more light and truth
to break forth from your Word.

2 Who dares to bind to one's own sense
the oracles of heaven,
for all the nations, tongues, and climes
and all the ages given?

That universe, how much unknown!
that ocean unexplored!
O God, grant yet more light and truth
to break forth from your Word.

3 Eternal God, incarnate Word,
Spirit of flame and dove:
enlarge, expand all living souls
to comprehend your love;
And help us all to seek your will
with wiser powers conferred:
O God, grant yet more light and truth
to break forth from your Word.

OFFERING OURSELVES AND OUR GIFTS

CALL TO THE OFFERING

Prayer slips are available at the aisle end of each pew. Place one in the offering plates if you would like it lifted. It will be read as written.

OFFERTORY *Just a Closer Walk*, arr. by Jack Schrader Hui-Mei Lin, *piano*

*DOXOLOGY Lasst Uns Erfreuen

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Christ the Word in flesh born low; Alleluia, Alleluia.
Praise Holy Spirit evermore; One God, Triune, whom we adore.
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

*BLESSING OF THE GIFTS

BRINGING OUR PRAYERS

PRAYER RESPONSE *7-fold Amen* by John Stainer

GOING FORTH INTO THE WORLD

INVITATIONS

Pastor Brent

*UNISON PRAYER

Beth Cilley

God of promise, Abraham scoffed and Sarah laughed when they were told of your plans for them and their family. Yet you remained faithful to your promise and gave them a son, Isaac. Help us to trust in your promises for our lives, and to live according to your will. Amen

*HYMN

Go, My Children, With My Blessing

See page 7

*BENEDICTION

Pastor Brent



POSTLUDE

Toccatà in e minor by J. Pachelbel

Hui-Mei Lin

The Board of Christian Education welcomes anyone from the church family to be a part of our Sunday Storytelling sessions for our kids during worship . Each week we need one person to tell the story and lead a craft and another to simply be present to help. The Bible Stories are picked for you by the lectionary and the CE Board has designed a couple of choices for activities each week. Pastor Brent will also provide support. There is an **information session today at 11:20** in the classrooms to learn more. Contact Kim Ruffing or the church office with questions.

Welcome! We are an Open and Affirming Church which means that we invite persons of every sexual orientation, gender identification and expression, racial and cultural identity, age, physical ability, economic circumstance, faith background and family structure to share fully in the ministry, leadership and fellowship of this congregation's life in Christ.

The Rev. Brent Damrow, Pastor

Peter Frost, Minister of Music

Will Garrison, Administrator | Marion Pomeroy, Financial Secretary

Will Curtiss and Will Pohl, Livestream Technicians

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James Gertmenian, 1986; alt.

1 God of A - bra - ham and Sar-ah, God of Mo - ses, Mir - iam's Guide;
 2 God who danc - es in cre - a - tion, spin - ning stars a - bove our heads;
 3 God who loves the poor in spir-it, God who com-forts those who mourn;
 4 In our lives from birth to dy-ing, depth of sor - row, height of joy;

God of Da - vid and the proph-ets, God in Je - sus glo - ri - fied:
 God whose face is scribed in mu - sic, by whose hand the earth is fed:
 Balm for wounds, the friend of sin - ners, tak-ing the side of earth's for - lorn:
 Prais-ing God in ev - ery sea - son, let ev - ery key our hearts em - ploy.

Up from the dust you raise a peo - ple, breathe in the breath of life, of soul;
 Up from the ground you raise the moun-tains, raise our spir - its, lift our eyes;
 Up from the depths you raise your peo - ple, giv - ing them cour-age for the day;
 Praise is the heal - ing, praise, the glo - ry, praise is the fin - al mys-ter - y;

Down through the years the peo - ple praise you till al - le - lu - ias make them whole!
 Down through the years your peo - ple praise you till al - le - lu - ias flood the skies!
 Down through the years the peo - ple praise you till al - le - lu - ias light their way!
 Down through the years let peo - ple praise you till al - le - lu - ias set them free!

The healing power of praise and the history of God's dealings with humankind are the themes of this hymn, written by a United Church of Christ minister who is the grandson of Armenian immigrants. The tune is named for his father.

Tune: CONSTANTINE 8.7.8.7.D.
 Melody by James Gertmenian, 1986
 Harm. Ronald Huntington, 1986; alt.

Go, My Children, with My Blessing

Jaroslav J. Vajda, 1983, 1990; alt.

1 Go, my chil-dren, with my bless-ing, nev - er a - lone;
2 Go, my chil-dren, fed and nour-ished, clos - er to me;

Wak - ing, sleep-ing, I am with you, you are my own;
Grow in love and love by serv-ing, joy - ful and free.

In my love's bap - tis - mal riv - er I have made you mine for - ev - er,
Here my Spir - it's pow - er filled you, here with ten - der com - fort stilled you;

Go, my chil - dren, with my bless-ing, you are my own.
Go, my chil - dren, fed and nour-ished, joy - ful and free.

Music Notes ~ Peter Frost

Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706) Pachelbel studied with Johann Sebastian Bach's older brother, Johann Christoph. The *Tocatta in e minor* that Hui-Mei will play for the postlude is one of about 20 toccatas that Pachelbel composed.

He loved to use pedal points (long sustained bass notes) throughout his toccatas. You will hear the first pedal point beginning in just the second bar. He was known for fast passage work in both hands over these sustained bass notes. Pachelbel's toccatas are known for their simplicity with the exception of this e minor toccata as well as in his c minor toccata.

News and Announcements

Bible Study - Starting September 20

Tomorrow at Noon is the deadline to sign up for this study. This year, Pastor Brent will lead a new curriculum: *Kerygma: Discovering the Bible (A New Generation)*. There will be hybrid and in-person sessions on Wednesdays. For more information and to sign up, contact Brent or the church office.

"Wholehearted Faith"

This year, the Board of Christian Education invites you to join us as we read Evans' final book, *Wholehearted Faith*. We are offering small group sessions that will meet monthly beginning in late September and ending in April. For more information, contact Kim Ruffing or the church office.

"Storymapping"

The Justice Task Force is delighted that Maggie Bennett, who is visiting her homeland from the Stockbridge Munsee Community in Wisconsin, will be

speaking with us after church on September 24. Maggie uses story mapping, a technique which bridges geographic info systems, photography, history, and archaeology, to tell the story of the travels of the Stockbridge-Munsee people. Please join us to learn more about the descendants of the first members of this church.

Join the Choir

It is time to sing again. The choir has returned! We are in need of sopranos, altos, and tenors to balance our group. We rehearse from 7-8:30 on Thursdays. Questions? Contact Peter.

Sopranos Riot for Church

On Saturday, Sept 30 at 7:30 pm, there will be a Soprano Riot in our sanctuary! Nellie Rustick and Amy Shake will team up with pianist David Anderegg to present new and improved music for one and two sopranos. The proceeds from the riot will support all the programs of the church.