



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

SUNDAY WORSHIP March 23, 2025 10:00 a.m.

Children are invited to worship at 10:00am, going to Sunday School after Children's Time. Nursery care is available during worship. We will share joys and concerns during worship. Prayers may instead be submitted in writing. Slips may be given to a deacon before worship or placed in the offering plate.

PREPARING FOR WORSHIP

GATHERING MUSIC *Was Gott tut*, Pachelbel

FRAMING WORDS / WELCOME

Rev. Brent Damrow

KIDS CHOIR

Praise the Lord, Japanese trad. melody

GATHERING IN WORSHIP

SCRIPTURE READING Luke 15:1-10

Jeremy Ridenour

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

"Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

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 are invited to go to Sunday School.

INTROIT

If It Be Your Will, Leonard Cohen

Doug Williams

*CALL TO WORSHIP written by Roddy Hamilton

Jeremy Ridenour

One: let this be the welcoming place; the place of return

All: and let it be built by a love that bends towards those who return here

One: for it is a love that has been waiting like a candle in the window ever lighting the way back

All: and never willing to let go the hope that each child will return home

One: let it be the place where the only appropriate response to love that has come to the end of its longing

All: is to kill the fatted calf, feast and celebrate

One: send up balloons and prepare the party

All for that which has been lost has returned to be among us once more

One: let this be the welcoming place; the place of return

All: and let it be built by a love that bends towards those who return here.

*HYMN

O God, How We Have Wandered

See page 6

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

TIME OF UNBURDENING/CONFESSION

You are invited into a time of silent reflection and confession. Once Doug begins to sing, you are invited to bring your slate-colored glass bead and place it at the base of the cross as a symbol of your prayer.

MUSIC

Devotion, American Folk

Doug Williams

*WORDS OF ASSURANCE

*SUNG RESPONSE *On A Hill Far Away*

See insert

OFFERING OURSELVES AND OUR GIFTS

CALL TO THE OFFERING

OFFERTORY ANTHEM

Doug Williams

Litany, music by John Musto, words by Langston Hughes

*DOXOLOGY

Old 100th

**Praise God throughout these forty days.
Praise Christ, our Lord, whom God did raise.
And praise the Spirit who imparts
God's love in Christ into our hearts.**

*UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION

God of the wilderness, we give these offerings in gratitude, rejoicing in the abundance of your gifts to us. We give these offerings in faith, trusting that you will provide for our needs. We give these offerings in hope, knowing you can use them to spread your love in this world. And with these offerings, we give ourselves; May we live with generous hearts, with open hands. Amen ~ written by Joanna Harader

BRINGING OUR PRAYERS

PRAYER RESPONSE Danish Amen

THE GIFT OF THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Luke 15:11-32 (pew Bible p. 60)

Liza Catino

HYMN (remain seated) *Softly and Tenderly, vss. 1 & 2*

See insert

CONTEMPORARY READING

Ronnie Cunningham

From *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, by Henri J.M. Nouwen
When the younger son was no longer considered a human being by the people around him, he felt the profundity of his isolation, the deepest loneliness one can experience. He was truly lost, and it was this complete lostness that brought him to his senses. He was shocked into the awareness of

his utter alienation and suddenly understood that he had embarked on the road to death. He had become so disconnected from what gives life – family, friends, community, acquaintances, and even food – that he realized that death would be the natural next step. All at once he saw clearly the path he had chosen and where it would lead him; he understood his own death choice; and he knew that one more step in the direction he was going would take him to self-destruction.

In that critical moment, what was it that allowed him to opt for life? It was the rediscovery of his deepest self.

SERMON *Coming Back* Pastor Brent

*HYMN *Softly and Tenderly, vss. 3 & 4* See insert

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Once Doug begins to sing, you may bring up your colorful glass bead and place it at the foot of the cross as a symbol of your gratitude.

MUSIC *Amazing Grace, setting by John Ness Beck* Doug Williams

GOING FORTH INTO THE WORLD

INVITATIONS

MOMENT FOR MISSION One Great Hour of Sharing

*HYMN *Blessed Assurance vss. 1 & 3*

**1 Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
born of the Spirit, washed in Christ's
blood.**

Refrain:

**This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long.**

**3 Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Savior am happy and blessed;
Watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with God's goodness, lost in
Christ's love.**

[Refrain]

The New Century Hymnal (1995)

*BENEDICTION

Pastor Brent

*SENDING SONG *Lift High the Cross*, verse 3

Refrain:

**Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim;
Let all the world adore that sacred name.**

**3 O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
your death has brought us life eternally. [*Refrain*]**

POSTLUDE *Christus, der ist mein Leben*, Pachelbel

Music Notes ~ Tracy Wilson, Minister of Music pro tem

Today we are grateful to our musicians of the morning: Kids choir led by Liza Catino, and Doug Williams. Thank you for helping us worship in this Lenten season. Here are the words to Doug's pieces:

If It Be Your Will by Leonard Cohen

If it be your will that I speak no more, and my voice be still as it was before,
I will speak no more, I shall abide until I am spoken for, if it be your will.

If it be your will that a voice be true, if it be your will to let me sing.

From this broken hill all your praises they shall ring. If it be your will.

Litany. Words by Langston Hughes, Music by John Musto

Gather up in the arms of your pity. The sick, the deprived, the desperate, the
tired.

All the scum of our weary city, gather up in the arms of your pity.

Gather up in the arms of your love, Those who expect no love from above.

O God, How We Have Wandered

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Kevin Nichols, 1980; alt.

Luke 15:11–32; 2 Cor. 5:16–20

1 O God, how we have wan - dered and hid - den from your face;
2 And now at length dis - cern - ing the e - vil that we do,
3 O God of all the liv - ing, both ban - ished and re - stored,

In fool - ish-ness have squan - dered your leg - a - cy of grace.
By faith we are re - turn - ing with hope and trust in you.
Com - pas - sion-ate, for - giv - ing, our peace and hope as - sured.

But how, in ex - ile dwell - ing, we turn with fear and shame,
In haste you come to meet us, and home re - joic - ing bring,
Grant now that our trans - gress - ing, our faith-less-ness may cease.

As dis - tant but com - pell - ing, you call us each by name.
In glad-ness there to greet us with calf and robe and ring.
Stretch out your hand in bless - ing, in par - don, and in peace.

The tune for this contemporary text appears five times in J. S. Bach's St. Matthew Passion, and first appeared as a hymn setting in the early 1800s. It has an ecumenical history reaching back many centuries. Originally it was a German love song.

Tune: PASSION CHORALE 7.6.7.6.D.
(HERZLICH TUT MICH VERLANGEN)
Melody by Hans Leo Hassler, 1601
Harm. J. S. Bach, 1729
For another harmonization, see 179

The New Century Hymnal (1995)

The Minister of Music Search Committee
asks you to
HOLD THE DATE
that we might present our candidate for
Minister of Music
* Wednesday, April 9 *

5:30 p.m. Community Supper (J.E. Room)

6:30 p.m. Organ and Piano Demonstration (Sanctuary)

More information about the candidate, the full schedule, and the ways to R.S.V.P. will be sent out soon.

~ Liza Catino, Chair

Cindy Brown, Brian Farrell, Jon Geldert, Deb McMenemy,
Gary Schieneman, and Brent Damrow (ex-officio)

One Great Hour of Sharing

On Sunday, March 30, we will be taking an offering for One Great Hour of Sharing, one of the UCC's special mission offerings. This Lenten offering supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ. This Lenten Offering supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ within Wider Church Ministries. The news reminds us daily of the broken places in our world that need tending.

Checks may be made payable to First Congregational Church, memo line:

OGHS. Offering envelopes and more information will be available that day.

You can also find information in the church's March newsletter. The Mission & Action board encourages you to give to this important ministry with a spirit of joyful generosity!

Thank you to all who helped with today's service, including Deacons Sarah Conly and Helen McCormick; readers Ronnie Cunningham, Liza Catino, and Jeremy Ridenour; usher Joanne Conroy; greeter Charlotte Rodgers; fellowship Cindy Brown and Corinne Burke; storytellers Elisabeth Bellows and Jon Geldert. Will Curtiss is running the Livestream and Scarlett Ritcher and Rae Geddes are in the nursery.

This Lent we encourage you to engage a daily practice. We are pleased to offer you two different resources. Feel free to pick one or use both!

Into the Deep is the theme for this year's UCC Daily Devotional. Each day offers a short reading, reflection, and prayer. The Devotionals are written by clergy and leaders within our denomination. Copies are available in the J.E. Room or by contacting Will Garrison in the Church Office.

The second resource comes from Brother David Steindl-Rast's website Grateful.org. This **Daily Practice** encourages wholeness by discovering the meaning in every moment. We will be using many of Brother David's prayers and materials in worship. His books are also available to check-out. Both can be found in the J.E. Room. The resource is also available on our website, in the "news" section.

Welcome! We are Open and Affirming, 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.

As followers of Christ and committed to Isaiah's charge to "maintain justice and do what is right," we acknowledge with gratitude and humility that we are learning, speaking, gathering, and worshiping on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican people, who are the indigenous peoples of this land. Despite tremendous hardship in being forced from here, today their community resides in Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We pay honor and respect to their ancestors past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all.

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