

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2021

April

No. 4

“Whoa! What just happened?”

April 1st is when we commemorate the last as in Jesus’ Last Supper. The month begins with the cataclysmic ending of Jesus’ life. Jesus’ Passion begins with His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and ends in the darkness of Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb. The end of Jesus’ life, however, is not the end of Jesus, and this is the glorious, joyous mystery of Easter’s resurrection. The two cannot be separated.

I think there is an interesting and insightful verse in the Acts of the Apostles that can be overlooked as a rather conventional expression of the familiar Easter story, but oh is it so much more.

The Jerusalem speeches in Acts are judged by scholars to represent primitive (early) Christian proclamation. In these earliest telling’s of the Easter story, Jesus does not *resurrect*. Rather, Jesus is *raised*. This may seem merely semantics, but it is much more.

Resurrect is a later Christian construct. It attributes to Jesus the power to conquer death. Earlier professions attributed the power to God raising Jesus. Resurrect is Jesus acting; being raised is Jesus being acted upon. Scholars see this distinction as an indication of an extremely early, primitive Christian proclamation.



I realize this may sound glib and it is definitely not meant to be disrespectful, but it puts a smile on my face to imagine Jesus being raised from death, awaking from its sleep, and basically saying, “Whoa! What just happened?” I love to imagine Jesus emerging from the darkness of His grave and seeing the world anew. What wonder that must have been and how much Jesus deserved it. I hope Jesus laughed that first Easter morn.

Let me now turn to that Acts of the Apostles verse: “God raised [Jesus] up, having freed him from *the pains of death*, because it was impossible for [Jesus] to be held in its power.” (2:24) The italicized words in the quote are from the original Greek, but do not appear in all English translations. The omitted words, however, are important.

Jesus is raised by God and this Jesus, the Gospels strive to make clear, is the same Jesus of Christmas to cross. There is a continuity between the pre- and post-resurrection Jesus. Jesus is not freed from *death* as the abbreviated translation would say. The Jesus who is raised by God from death knows full well the human life we share with Him, a life which is mortal, which ends in death.

When Jesus is raised, I like to imagine with a happy smile on my face, that He looks upon His sacred and scarred body. The wounds remind Him of His death and also the reason for His death. It was the completion of His lived gospel. Jesus isn’t freed from death per se. It will always be a part of Jesus just like the nail prints in His glorified hands.

What Jesus is freed from is “*the pains of death*.” “*The pains of death*” could not hold Jesus in their power. Jesus suffered “*the pains of death*” once for all, but on Easter that is in the forever past. The pains of death are gone, but Jesus’ experience of death is now an eternal part of the nature of God in Christ. And in this, death has been defeated.

We are a resurrection people because of Easter. We are a people defined by hope. We are called to preach the potential of what may be. The world condemned Jesus, His ministry and message, when they nailed Him to the cross and then threw His body into a grave. This judgment would not stand. It was overturned by God. God vindicated every wonderful hope and aspiration that Jesus preached when He raised Jesus from the dead, and with this, death itself was defeated and hope restored.

As believers we should not go around preaching sin here, sin there, sin everywhere. We should not consign the future to a destructive end. If we preach depravity, ruin and helplessness, then we encourage people to act accordingly. If we insist that people are evil in their very nature, then we only inflame our worst instincts.

But Jesus showed us otherwise and God vindicated Him by raising Him from the dead. Easter fills us with the reality of hope and this sets our better selves free. Therefore, rejoice! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

APRIL EVENTS

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| Thur. 1 st | Maundy Thursday. Worship Service online and in person at 7:00pm. |
| Tue. 2 nd | Good Friday. Church building will be open from 11:45am – 3:15pm. |
| Sun. 4 th | Easter Sunday. Sunrise Service at 6:20am. Worship Service at 10:00am. |
| Mon. 5 th | At 5:30pm Rev. Randy will participate in the online monthly meeting of HEART – Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting against Racism Together. |
| Wed. 7 th | Online New Members Class starting at 7:00pm. |
| Thur. 8 th | Rev. Randy will participate in the monthly online meeting of the Hampshire Association Committee on Ministry at 5:30pm. |
| Sun. 11 th | Online Installation Service of Rev. Don Morgan at the Haydenville Congregational Church at 3:00pm. |
| Mon. 12 th | Monthly online meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm. |
| Tue. 13 th | Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm. |
| Thur. 15 th | Rev. Randy will participate in the monthly online meeting of HEADS Up – Hatfield Embraces Acceptance and Dismantles Stigma – at 6:30pm. |
| Thur. 22 nd | <i>Earth Day</i> youth project. |
| Sun. 25 th | Online Annual Meeting of the Hampshire Association at 3:00pm |
| Mon. 26 th | Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm. |
| Tue. 27 th | Monthly online meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm. |

REGULAR GATHERINGS – Yoga and Choir are on hold for in-person gatherings until further notice

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 10:00am. Sunday School at 9:30am.

Tuesdays: Yoga classes are offered every Tuesday in the church parlor at 5:30pm.

Wednesdays: Hatha Yoga classes take place every Wednesday at 6:00pm.

Thursdays: Choir rehearses in the sanctuary at 6:30pm.

HOLY WEEK

April begins with the sacred observance of **Maundy Thursday**. On this day, the church remembers Jesus' Last Supper, the institution of the sacrament of Holy Communion and the beginning of His Passion as He is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus sat at table with His closest followers for what would come to be known as His Last Supper. It was in the Upper Room that Jesus rose from the servant by washing the feet of set you an example, that you also (John 13:15) At this same meal, had taught them into a single new  the table and took on the role of His followers, telling them, "I have should do as I have done to you." Jesus condenses everything He commandment (Latin *mandatum*, thus *Maundy Thursday*): "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another." (John 13:34)

In every other Gospel beside John, it is at the Last Supper that Jesus institutes the Sacrament of Holy Communion with the words "This is my body" and "This is my blood." He also commanded, "Do this in remembrance of me." Part of our worship on Maundy Thursday will be to share in Holy Communion as we continue to do this in remembrance of Jesus.

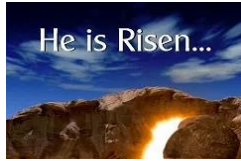
Finally, this is the night of Jesus' capture in the Garden of Gethsemane. To bring this more to life we will share Gospel readings of the Passion. In departed loved ones and light ends with the closing of the Bible the Word of God, Jesus Christ, the  this vein, we will remember our candles in their memory. The Service symbolizing the closing of the life of following day on Good Friday.

In Mark's Gospel, we are told that Jesus is nailed to the cross at 9AM, that darkness descended at noon, and that He died at 3PM. The church building will be open for private devotion from 11:45am until 3:15pm on **Good Friday**. Whether in the church building or not, we should treat this day of Jesus' death with solemn observance. This is the day we remember that Jesus died for each of us because of His love for all of us.

EASTER SUNDAY

In the biblical tradition, the women followers of Jesus head out to the tomb at dawn to perform the traditional burial rituals. Instead, they discover that the tomb has been opened and that it is empty. Jesus has resurrected from the dead! Keeping with this tradition, we will hold an Easter Sunrise Service beginning at 6:20am at 2 Prospect St, the home of Matt and Melody. Sunrise is at 6:27am so say a prayer for the weather to cooperate.

We will gather to continue our Easter celebration with our church worship Service at 10:00am. We are resurrection people because Jesus not only arose from the dead. He is the first fruits of all our resurrections. Jesus conquered death so that we no longer need to fear death. This not only changes our life after death; it changes our lives right now. Everything that the world rejected when they nailed Jesus to the cross has been vindicated by God on Easter. Jesus' lived example has become our living example. Resurrection is how we live not only how we die. Come and celebrate this joyous promise of renewal with the People of God.



NEW MEMBERS CLASS

In the ancient church, new Christians were brought into the faith as part of the Easter celebration. If you may be interested in formally joining Hatfield Congregational Church, United of Christ, the Season of Easter is the perfect time to do so. The heart of our church experience is our covenant with Christ and each other. This pledge of faith to Jesus and our pledge to one another of support in our journey. The church covenant is basically our mutual support of each Christ. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.



Church and soul is our faith's other in

The Board of Deacons and the pastor would like to hold a New Members Class on Wednesday, April 7th at 7:00pm online. If interested, please send me an email (randyc1897@gmail.com). We would then hold a New Member Sunday on May 2nd.

SHARED PASTORATE

Rev. Randy began a shared pastorate with the Hatfield and Sunderland churches on March 1st. If you have any concerns or comments about the shared pastorate at any point going forward, please feel free to contact Rev. Randy directly, or contact our congregation's Pastoral Relations Committee members, Eli Bell and Maureen Burris.

EXPLORING THE BIBLE ON-LINE STUDY GROUP

The Massachusetts Bible Society's past Executive Director, Rev. Anne Robertson, has authored a three-volume text called *Exploring the Bible*. Testament. If you would like to join us, please send me an email



send you the log-in information for our Zoom meetings. We will soon be venturing into the New Testament so this is a great time to start Bible study and since it's online anyone can join from anywhere.

We are reading Volume II on the Old Testament. If you would like to join (randyc1897@gmail.com) and I will

EARTH DAY PROJECT

It's still too early to gather for group projects, but we are asking our Youth Group and Sunday School members to perform an Earth Day project of cleaning up an area around their homes. We ask that they take a picture or two and then we will make a collage of all of them to show in church on a following Sunday. Let's try and get back in the swing of youth activity and help good ol' Mother Earth at the same time.

350th ANNIVERSARY PARADE ... **AND FLOAT!**

The pandemic-delayed Town of Hatfield's 350th Anniversary Parade will take place on Sunday, May 30th. The parade will be held in conjunction with the annual Memorial Day parade on the final day the town is 350! In order to avoid people congregating in the center of town, the parade will venture throughout town so that people may watch from their homes. The church has been invited to be a part of the parade by entering a float. We thank Board of Trustee member Jonathan Stanisiewski of Tri-State Truck and Trailer for donating the use of a flatbed trailer. We will need to decorate the trailer with poster work and bunting, and create a representation of our church. If you would like to help with this fun project, please let Rev. Randy know – young people would be especially welcome to help with this project. We are planning a work party for Saturday, May 22nd.

PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY

The Conference has begun a prayer shawl ministry. They have asked local congregations to make the shawls, pray over them and then send them to the Conference to be shared with communities and others. One of our members has offered to help with this ministry and to get novices going on making the shawls. If you are interested, please contact Rev. Randy.



INSTALLATION SERVICE

Rev. Don Morgan will be installed formally at the pastor of the Haydenville Congregational Church, UCC on Sunday, April 11th at 3:00pm. This is a congregation within our Hampshire Association. In mutual support of each other, it is encouraged that each Association congregation participate in this important event by sending up to four lay delegates and the pastor. If you would like to represent our church on this day, please let Rev. Randy know so that he can share the Service login information with you – and thanks.

ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING

Speaking of our mutual support for each other as members of this congregation and as members of this Association, we are invited to participate in the Hampshire Association Annual Meeting on Sunday, April 25th at 3:00pm. This meeting will be conducted online. We are encouraged to send up to four delegates and the pastor. Also, if anyone is interested in working at the larger level of the Association, there are seven openings on the Executive Committee, three spots on the Church & Ministry Committee (on which I serve currently), and there is also a need for a person to administer the Association's Facebook page.

----- *Youth Group Spring Flower Sale coming in May* -----

GIFT CARDS

Big Y and *Stop and Shop* gift card sales are a continuing fundraiser of our congregation. Due to the fact that fewer of us are attending church in person during the pandemic, our sales of these gift cards have declined. Linda makes it as easy as possible to pick-up the cards at her home. Give her a call to arrange a day and time; Linda places them in her mailbox; you leave your payment there; and it's all done. Please contact Linda M. if you can help with this church fundraiser. The church earns 5% on all sales. Thank you.

CONTACT INFO: HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Website: www.hatfieldchurch.org Facebook: www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC
Pastor: Rev. Randy Calvo 413-824-1630 randyc1897@gmail.com

Committee Chairpersons:

Benevolence, Amy N.

Christian Education, Anita W.

Church Moderator, Amy N.

Deacons, Jeff F.

Music Minister, Anthony T.

Real Folks Society, Martha Z.

Trustees, Jonathan B.



A JOYOUS AND BLESSED EASTER TO ALL!