

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2020

August

No. 8

The Radical Equality of Christ and Church

With so much going on with economic distress and racial inequality, with the anemic response of our country to the COVID-19 pandemic and to the climate change crisis, we may have forgotten about the *Me Too Movement* and its revelation of ongoing sexual violence in our society. This is unacceptable during the month when we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the signing of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, the amendment that finally gave women the right to vote.

It was ratified when Tennessee became the 36th state to approve the amendment on August 18, 1920. Women's Equality Day is observed annually on August 26th, which is the day the US Secretary of State signed the proclamation formally granting women the Constitutional right to vote.

On the Sunday between these two dates, I would like to acknowledge the historic and continuing importance of the women's movement in the context of Jesus' and thus the church's radical equality.

There's a wonderful story in John 4 about Jesus and the Samaritan woman of Sychar. I'm going to skip right over it. Please read it when you can. What I would like to point out is that when the disciples return, well, the Bible says it just fine: "They were astonished that [Jesus] was speaking with a woman ..." To their way of thinking, Jesus was wasting His time. The whole beautiful story that I skipped over should, likewise, have never been told. What good would it do to talk to a woman?

Jesus broke the mores of His culture and more importantly set for us an example of radical equality, but inequality is a tireless opponent. Take for example the faithful witness of Paul in his letter to the Galatians. This is one of Paul's most forthright Epistles. He is less than diplomatic in this writing. He gives way to passionate outbursts without filters.

In Galatians, Paul expresses one of the most inclusive statements in Christian Scripture, one that if he were in a more guarded mood he may not have put quill to parchment. He lays out his vision of the power of faith: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (3:28)

Isn't this an inspired reflection of Jesus' radical equality? Shouldn't it have been protected and promoted? Instead, we can watch retrenchment take place right before our eyes in the Bible. Scholars classify the Pauline Epistles as Authentic Pauline or what are called Deutero-Pauline. The latter are ascribed to Paul, but in actuality were written by men in the generation after Paul. The nascent church was struggling to fit into the society that surrounded it. It was even willing to sand the rough edges and round the corners of its more disruptive teachings.

In a society that would not accept women as equals, the real Paul had to be tamed, thus some of the regressive thoughts of the Pastoral Epistles. The reactionary editing of the real Paul is easiest to point out in the comparison between the authentic Paul of Galatians 3:28 and the Deutero-Pauline writing at Colossians 3:11, which reads: "In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!" Did you notice what was omitted? The equality of women.

To be more acceptable to the world the church backstepped on its commitment to Jesus' gospel of radical equality. The church should always be a leader in freeing people from the limits of prejudice. Our mission is not to follow the world, but to follow Christ. Can anyone be impressed by the apology of the Southern Baptist Convention for its support of slavery 130 years after it was abolished? The pronouncements of a church, no matter how well intentioned, that follow rather than lead in unleashing the blessing of radical equality, are irrelevant. It is not growing the reign of God on earth. It is not sharing salvation. It is not preaching the gospel.

The 1943 *Basis of Union* that led to the formation of the UCC states that when it comes to tradition, creeds and even Scripture that the church is "duty bound to express [them] in the words of our time as God Himself gives us light." Jesus' radical equality is provocative and boundary-breaking – so should be His church always. This is why part of our worship is to struggle for improved economic, racial and gender equality, and why we will honour the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment.

AUGUST EVENTS

Mon. 10 th	On-line <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Wed. 12 th	On-line monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Tue. 18 th	100 th anniversary of the ratification of the 19 th Amendment granting women the right to vote in the United States.
Thur. 20 th	On-line Church Council meeting at 7:00pm.
Mon. 24 th	On-line <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Tue 25 th	On-line meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.
Sun. 30 th	On-line Church Council meeting at 11:20am.

REGULAR GATHERINGS (All in-person church gatherings are on hold until further notice.)

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

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.

ON ANTI-RACISM

In a June 30th letter to the Director of the Center for Disease Control by employees of the agency, "7 Acts of Change" were enumerated, the first one being "Declare racism a public health crisis in the United States." (<https://apps.npr.org/documents/document.html?id=6986780-Cdc>) Significantly higher percentages of minorities are becoming ill and dying during this pandemic as compared to the majority, which has highlighted the education, employment and health care divide between the populations.

The brazen killing of black men and women is another sign that we Christians have much work to do, not to mention the history of prejudice that has been their fate for 400 years in our land where we proudly proclaim "all men are created equal."

The Church Council has begun a discussion of prejudice and racism in society and what we can do to help combat it. Prayer is important, but not enough. Progress in our discussion is slow because church discussion is slow and deliberate, and even more so during these times of social distancing.

We have begun an initial action by posting messages on our church sign emphasizing empathy and our support of Black lives. Rev. Calvo is a member of **Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting Racism Together (HEART)**, which is a local group that emerged ad hoc following the Black Lives Matter gathering by Town Hall on June 7th.

What steps forward do we need to consider as church, a church that believes all people are created in the sacred image and likeness of God? We might begin with ourselves and asking God to open us up to the difficult truths of systemic racism. I was surprised at the amount and degree of prejudice that Black Americans face on a regular basis. It should not have taken me this long to see what they see.

We can avail ourselves of readings that will help us broaden our relationships and expose us to unpleasant facts, books such as *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram Kendi, *So You Want to Talk about Race* by Ijeoma Oluo, *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson, *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo, *Born a Crime* by Trevor Noah, *The Fire Next Time*, by James Baldwin, or listen to Rev. Martin Luther King Jr read his *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATPSh63180>). By doing so, we listen to the voices of the unheard. We don't need to fix or defend what they say. At this time, we need to simply listen and learn.

If we can, we need to support social justice opportunities as they present themselves. We need to speak out when prejudice and racism pass in casual conversation. As people of faith, we believe that change needs to be grounded in love. This belief is rooted in our Scripture. Of the many passages available, I choose the last Scripture quoted in Rev. King's last book: "Let us love one another: for love is of God: and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. ... If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." (*Where Do We Go from Here?*, quoting 1 John 4:4:7-8, 12)

ON-LINE PRESENCE AND PLANS

We are not sure at this point when we will come together in person. The Church Council will discuss the safety and feasibility of gathering during those beautiful days in the Fall when we do not require either fans or heat. We are adhering to the protocols issued by Gov. Baker (<https://www.mass.gov/lists/safety-standards-for-places-of-worship>)

and the recommendations of the Conference (<https://www.sneucc.org/phasingforward>) as we make our plans for the future.

So as to stay connected with people who may not feel comfortable enough and safe enough to gather in the church building, with those who are wonderful friends in local working on getting an internet that will allow us to continue to live- looking at an approximate cost of connection at the church. We are interested in sponsoring any given



at a distance, and even with our congregations, the Board of Trustees is connection into the church building stream our worship Services. We are \$75/month to get an internet wondering if some of you may be month for \$50, with the congregation

covering the other third of the cost. Three months have already been pledged by members of our congregation. Please contact Mark Gelotte if you are able to help in this way. And thank you.

As decisions are made, they will be emailed and posted so make sure and to check your emails and our website. In the meanwhile, we will continue worshiping and meeting on-line. We live-stream our Services, meetings, Bible study, Sunday School, and Youth Group. Log-in information is sent to everyone on our church's email mailing list. If you would like to be added to that list, please drop me an email at randyc1897@gmail.com.

We are posting the recordings of our worship Service, but we do hope that people will join us live so that we may all gather just like on a regular Sunday, but in accordance with the constraints of these irregular times.

In keeping with our past practice, the Sunday worship Service in August will begin at 9:30am rather than the usual 10:00am. Please keep this change in mind.

BUDGET PROCESS BEGINS

We are asking our church organizations to prepare a budget for 2021 and to then submit it to the Board of Trustees before our September meeting on the 12th. The Trustees will then work on submitting an annual budget to the Church Council. Thank you for your cooperation as we begin the difficult task of preparing a budget during a time of so much uncertainty because of the continuing concerns about the pandemic.

CHURCH FINANCES

Even though we are not able to meet in the church building, we continue to worship and serve as church. As such, we continue to need your financial assistance. We have already canceled several church fundraisers and we may have to cancel even more. If you attend these events, please consider sending in a donation as if you were buying a ticket. Also, we are not passing the collection plate in person, but please send in your church pledges and contributions regularly. These contributions may be sent directly to Marty or to the church at 41 Main Street. Thank you for your continuing financial support.

VISITATIONS

The Deacons have been making periodic calls to all of our members to stay in touch during this time of extended separation. Also, I have been staying in regular contact with members who are homebound or who have difficulty in leaving their homes. Since we have not had the opportunity to see each other in person since mid-March, if anyone would like to speak with me, please feel free to give a call or drop an email. If we can practice social distancing, maybe we could meet outside of your homes with masks on. And hopefully, sooner rather than later, we will be able to gather in person again. In the meanwhile, let's keep being smart about our interactions and let's keep praying for the people working on a vaccine.

EXPLORING THE BIBLE STUDY GROUP

The Massachusetts Bible Society's past Executive Director Rev. Anne Robertson has authored a three-volume text called *Exploring the Bible*. We are Testament. If you would like to the Bible, I encourage you to join us everyone talks about but few read



transforming lives for thousands of years. It continues to do so today if we give it the chance, and these stay-at-home days are the perfect chance. We are meeting on-line at present. If you would like to join us from the comfort of your own home, please send me an email (randyc1897@gmail.com) and I will send you the log-in information. We would love to have you join us.

REAL FOLKS

"After calls to committee chairs and some other members (not all), we have decided to postpone our November Election Day Food Sale and our Christmas Craft Fair. Covid-19 made this decision for us. We will meet in 2021. Please do not accept donations of items for sales until we know what 2021 will bring. We cannot store items at the church. Think of fundraising ideas for moving ahead in the new year. NOTE: Any snack food left in the kitchen needs to be in a tin container or in the refrigerator. Also, if you use dishes, please wash, dry and put them away. Do not leave them in the dishrack on the counter. Thank you. Martha Zigmont."

CONFERENCE ANNUAL GATHERING (MEETING?)

This is an on-line event this year on Saturday, September 26th, yet still filled with inspiring worship and informative sessions. If you would like to attend as part of our congregation, here is a link to additional information: <https://www.sneucc.org/eventdetail/14027304?month=9&year=2020&day=1&display=m> If interested in attending, let us know.

FOOD BANK VOLUNTEERS

Unfortunately, volunteering opportunities at the Food Bank have been put on hold until further notice due to the pandemic.

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.

HATFIELD'S 350TH

Due to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 Steering Committee has made the difficult schedule as follows:



pandemic, the Hatfield 350th Anniversary decision to change their upcoming event

General Community Events

August 22nd – Summer Celebration

Rescheduled to **September 19th**, 12- 2:30pm – Historic Homes of Hatfield Walking Tour. This event is limited to 30 people. To register please email Cher Nicholas at CherNicholas@comcast.net.

October 10th – Annual Bonfire (Partnership w/ Firefighters Association)

December 19th – Luminarium/Fireworks (Partnership w/ Firefighters Association)

Rescheduled until Sunday, **May 30, 2021** – 350th Anniversary Parade beginning at 1PM.

Historical Events & Tours

Rescheduled to **September 19th** – Historic Homes of Hatfield Walking Tour

October 10th – Narrated Wagon Rides

May 30, 2021 – Incorporation Day and the Crossing of the CT River. Incorporation Day Celebration will go forward as a modified event.

Agricultural Events & Tours

Rescheduled to **August 22nd** as part of the Summer Celebration – Farm 5K Race

September 12th – Barn Mural Wagon Tour

Rescheduled to **October 3rd** - Cow Pie Bingo as part of the Tractor Parade and Harvest Festival

For the latest information, visit www.hatfield350.com or follow us on Facebook @Hatfield350th.