

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2022

February

No. 2

All love is not the same

Mid-month is Valentine's Day's celebration of romantic love. I once shared with you Joseph Campbell's teaching on the Latin word *amor*, from which the English word *amorous* is derived, and which is related to sexual desire. Campbell, the great professor of comparative mythology and comparative religion, argued that it was more than this. He emphasized that *amor* is not a general concept of love, but one that is individuated. This is what falling in love meant, it was powerfully personal. This is what made *amor* love's highest experience, and this applied, as well, to the religious virtue of love.

The ancient Roman poet Ovid did not see it like this. He retells the myth of Apollo and Daphne in his *Metamorphoses*, written around the time of Jesus' childhood. Daphne is a river nymph who Apollo lusts after and pursues relentlessly. Ovid portrays Apollo's *amor* in the imagery of predator and prey. Daphne is not playfully avoiding Apollo's advances. Daphne fears Apollo not as lovesick, but as a mortal enemy. Ovid has Apollo say, "Love (*amor*) is the reason of following for me." *Amor* causes Apollo to stalk his prey, to hunt her down.



Apollo eventually captures Daphne. She is so frightened of being raped that she screams out to her father the river god to save her, and he does so by transforming her into a laurel tree. She is protected from the assault, but at the cost of losing her agency, her capacity to act as she would choose. Adding insult to injury, Apollo then wears constantly a laurel crown to carry Daphne with him so that she may celebrate his accomplishments and triumphs as if she cared.

An equivalent word for *amor* in the Greek of the New Testament is *eros*, but the word never appears. *Eros* is an unreasoning passion; it's a strong appetite often accompanied by furor and

agony. This kind of love does not inspire respect and is not a part of the Christian lexicon.

On the other hand, the Greek word for selfless love, *agape*, is actually made popular by its biblical usage. It appears in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, but its use explodes in the New Testament. It was a dead word resurrected by Christians in their expression of Jesus' revelation of divine love ("God proves his *agape* for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." [Romans 5:8; cf. John 3:16]) and also of Christian love ("*Agape* the family of believers." [1 Peter 2:17]). It is the culmination, the greatest blessing of faith: "Faith, hope and *agape* abide, these three; and the greatest of these is *agape*." (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Agape is not predatory nor self-serving. In a sense, it is not even natural as in the way Ovid depicts *amor* with the imagery of an animal on the hunt. Christian love, *agape*, calls us beyond natural inclinations. It inspires us to a higher calling, an unnatural one, a godly one.

In the oldest extant piece of Christian literature, 1 Thessalonians, Paul encourages those earliest of believers to be "imitators of us and of the Lord." (1:6) Paul then goes on to explain what this looks like by describing his own ministry among them: "We were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only gospel of God but also our own selves ..." (2:7-8)

From the earliest outreach and establishment of the church, *agape* has been its theological and ethical center. (cf. 1 John 4:7-8) *Agape* is the church's and the world's best hope for the present and if there is to be a future. *Agape* is a message the church needs to proclaim heroically because if we are not brave enough to love selflessly, if we even put bandoliers on pictures of Jesus, then we may well end-up ending everything. As scarcity, deprivation and violence increase, *agape* is the only practical survival alternative. Maybe Jesus isn't just a dreamer.

FEBRUARY EVENTS

- Tue. 1st Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of the Hampshire Association Committee on Ministry at 5:45pm.
- Mon. 7th Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of HEART (Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting against Racism Together) at 5:30pm.
- Tue. 8th Online *Exploring the Bible* study group from 7-8:00pm.
- Mon. 14th Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
- Tue. 22nd Monthly Clergy Brown Bag Lunch at noon.
Monthly meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.
- Mon 28th Online *Exploring the Bible* study group from 7-8:00pm.

REGULAR GATHERINGS

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 9:30am online and in person. Sunday School begins after the children's sermon during the worship Service.

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

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

Thursdays: Choir rehearses in the sanctuary at 7:00pm – **Now in person at the church.**

CHURCH COVID POLICIES

The CDC expects the number of COVID cases to decrease in February. We did feel it necessary to close the church building for most of January because the numbers were so dangerously high. Church leadership will keep an eye on the virus' trajectory, but we are planning to return to in-person worship on February 13th. If this changes due to the numbers, an email notification will be shared and it will be posted on FaceBook.

The Church Council has based its mask policy on the number of cases in Hampshire County. If the cases rose above 10 per day per 100,000 people, building. The numbers have surged worn to attend worship Services in again be optional. Additionally, the balcony for additional seating, which will help us maintain social distancing in the building. The Omicron variant is highly contagious. We, therefore, ask those attending in person to double-mask or to wear a KN95 mask.



we would require masks in the church past this mark. Therefore, masks must be person. When they fall again, masks will Trustees have opened a portion of the

Please remember, as well, that all of our worship Services are live-streamed via Zoom. If you are not vaccinated or if you are not feeling well on any given Sunday, please join us online.

Thank you for your cooperation in keeping us all as safe as possible.

EXPLORING THE BIBLE ON-LINE STUDY GROUP

The Massachusetts Bible Society has published a three-volume text called *Exploring the Bible*. We are reading Volume III on the New Testament. If you would like to become more comfortable with the Bible, I encourage you to join us for Bible study. If you would like to see what Bible study is like, please send me an email (randyc1897@gmail.com) and I will send you the login information for our Zoom meetings.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH



February is recognized as Black History Month, which is also known as African American History Month. It falls during February in honour of the birthdays of the Great Emancipator, President Abraham Lincoln, on February 12th and of the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass on February 14th. During this month, Americans are encouraged to consider the history and contributions of Black people in and for our country. This link will take you to some of the offerings at the Smithsonian, Library of Congress and National Archives: www.africanamericanhistorymonth.gov.

LENTEN PREPARATIONS

Lent comes rather late this year. It begins with Ash Wednesday on March 2nd. Rev. Randy will be participating in the worship Service at the Whately Congregational Church that evening. If you would like to attend, you are more than welcome to join in worship.

The 25th annual Lenten Discussion Series will also be held this year. Its general theme is "Anchors in the Storm: Getting through Difficult Times." Discussions will take place on Lenten Wednesdays at 7:00pm at various local churches. These will be offered in person and online. There will be no social gatherings after the sessions as in years past due to pandemic protocols. More information will be shared in the March Newsletter.



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VISITATIONS

If you would like me to stop by for a visit, please let me know. I have received both of my vaccination shots and a booster, and I have no problem wearing a mask on top of that. Also, if you or a loved one ends up in the hospital, please let me know so that I can come by for a pastoral visit and a prayer.

PIANO AVAILABLE

If any member of the congregation would like the piano that is located in the church parlor, it is available for the taking on a first come basis. This is the piano the choir used to use for rehearsal. With the donation of the Grand Piano to the church, which is in the Sanctuary, the electronic keyboard has been moved to the parlor for choir rehearsals. The other piano is no longer needed, but is still a good, working instrument. If you may be interested in it, please contact Ed M., the chair of the Board of Trustees.

PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY

The Conference is conducting 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 people who do good for the church, 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.



GIFT CARDS

Big Y and *Stop and Shop* gift card sales are a continuing fundraiser of our congregation. Please contact Linda M. if you would like to purchase any. The church earns 5% on all sales. Thank you.

CHURCH DONATIONS

Since online worship has become so prevalent for many of our members and friends, the church accepts your financial contributions that are mailed to 41 Main Street, but online donations may be made through our website at the *Donate* tab at the bottom of the homepage, or by scanning the QR code printed weekly on our bulletin. Your continuing contributions are very much appreciated.

NEW CHURCH OFFICERS

The Annual Congregational Meeting was conducted on Sunday, January 16th. At that time church leaders and officers were elected, and committee and board members were chosen. Church leaders are listed in the table below if you need to contact them. We thank everyone who has agreed to serve the congregation through these positions.

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, Jonathan B.

Deacons, Jeff F.

Music Minister, Anthony T.

Real Folks Society, Martha Z.

Trustees, Ed M.

