

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2024

February

No. 2

Lent and Love

Every year Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. This year Lent begins, as well, on Valentine's Day. Maybe that is the opening to talk about Lent in terms of love.

Our Bible study group is reading currently from the Gospel of John. In chapters 5-10, John uses Jewish feast days to help explain the nature and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The first feast is the Jewish Sabbath. Basically, John is arguing that Jesus is free of the Sabbath restrictions because God is free of them. Jesus is able to work on the Sabbath because God works on the Sabbath: "My Father is still working [on the Sabbath], and I also am working [on the Sabbath]." (5:17)

There is an inherent connection and equality between Father and Son: "[Jesus] was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God." (5:18)

As the biblical text continues, there is a rather profound statement that is masked by the English language. We use the word *love* somewhat indiscriminately. Love can be limited to the physical, it can be platonic, it can be idealistic.

In the New Testament's Greek, however, there are different words for each of these loves. Intentionally, John employs the Greek verb *philein* (φιλεῖν) at 5:20. This Greek word is behind, for example, the city name of Philadelphia, the city of *brotherly love*. 5:20 states: "The Father *loves* the Son ...," and that love is a relational one, a personal one. It is not as shallow as a solely physical love nor as ethereal as an idealistic love. This is the love born of familiarity and closeness.

This is part of John's Sabbath-argument, that "whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise." (5:19) Based on this loving connection, the Father entrusts judgment to the Son. (5:22) However, at this point, John introduces a startling thought that expands upon the contours and reach of this *philein* (φιλεῖν)-love.

It is not only the Son's identification with the Father that defines judgment. It is also the Son's connection with all of us in our ordinary, limited, tempestuous humanity that defines judgment. After reading the preceding verses about the Father-Son connection, it is wholly unexpected to then encounter these words: "And [the Father] has given [the Son] authority to execute judgment because he is ...," and the reader has every right to expect "he is *the Son of God*." Instead, John writes, "...because he is the Son of Man." Son of Man is the biblical way of saying Jesus is one of us, that Jesus' humanity is real, that Jesus knows and has experienced all of the joys and pains of human life.

This means Jesus empathizes with how hard life can be, confusing and daunting. When John writes that Jesus has been granted the "authority to execute judgment," it is from the perspective not of heaven, but of earth, not of Son of God, but as the sympathetic Son of Man.

The *philein* (φιλεῖν)-love that is shared between Father and Son is now revealed to be shared with all of us. Words that can be read as frightening are quick to follow. The end-time judgment resurrects the good to "life" and the evil to "judgment." (Not necessarily *condemnation* as it may be translated.) (5:29) However, the one who judges shares a *philein* (φιλεῖν)-love with us as Son of Man. This, I would hope, mitigates the severity of judgment because Jesus understands the difficulty of human life.

This *philein* (φιλεῖν)-love infused judgment is worth considering during Lent. May we not settle for the fear of judgment. In mathematics, the transitive property states that: If $a = b$ and $b = c$, then $a = c$. If the Father and Son share a *philein* (φιλεῖν)-love, and if the Son of Man shares the same love with all of us, then the Father shares that same relational love with each of us. The intimacy Jesus explored with God during His life is the intimacy open to us through Jesus if we choose to explore it. (cf. John 17:22-23!) Lent is this sacred opportunity to explore.

FEBRUARY EVENTS

Tue. 6 th	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of the Association Committee on Ministry at 5:45pm.
Wed. 7 th	Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Thur. 8 th	Rev. Randy will attend the HEADS Up monthly meeting at 6:30pm.
Mon. 12 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7 – 8:00pm.
Tue 13 th	Rev. Randy will attend the Hampshire Clergy lunch from 12 – 1:00pm in Hadley.
Wed. 14 th	Ash Wednesday, beginning of Lent. All are invited to join the worship Service at the Montague Congregational Church at 7:00pm.
Wed. 21 st	Lenten Discussion at the Sunderland Congregational Church at 7:00pm.
Mon. 26 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7 – 8:00pm.
Tue. 27 th	Monthly meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.
Wed. 28 th	Lenten Discussion hosted by our church at 7:00pm.

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.

Thursdays: Choir rehearses in the parlor at 7:00pm, except July and August.

ONLINE BIBLE STUDY GROUP

As we approach and then enter the Season of Lent, I invite you to join our online Bible study group. We meet on alternate weeks for one hour. We are reading from the Gospel of John. We would love to have you join us. Let’s read, study, and discuss the book that literally has changed the world. Send an email to randyc1897@gmail.com for the login.

ASH WEDNESDAY AND LENT

Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday**, February 14th. We are invited to join with others from our Lenten Discussion Series at the Montague Congregational Church for worship on Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday begins the 40 days of Lent. These 40 days mirror the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness after His baptism by John in the Jordan River. During those 40 days, Jesus fasted, prayed and listened for the voice of God. During our 40 days of Lent, we, likewise search for spiritual guidance and a deeper relationship with Christ.



There are many ways to do this, and each of our paths will be different. Participating in the church’s **Lenten worship** is one path I hope we can all share in together. We enter the community to be uplifted, but we also uplift others by our presence. We support each other.

Our congregation participates in the annual **Lenten Discussion Series**. Local clergy share their thoughts on the general theme of “A prescription for loneliness.” These will take place on the Wednesdays of Lent after Ash Wednesday at 7:00pm. The full schedule is below.

This year we are returning to the pre-COVID practice of holding a **light reception** after the discussions. We are hosting our neighbours on February 28th. Would you be able to help by bringing in a dessert, a drink, crackers and cheese, or something else light for that evening’s collation?

There are many ways to take the Lenten journey. I hope it is a meaningful one for all of us.

WORCESTER RED SOX OUTING

The Sunderland and Hatfield churches are Saturday, June 22nd. The cost is \$63 per person. bulletin and at church.



planning a bus trip to see the Woo Sox play on More information is available in the weekly

SOCIAL MEDIA

Don’t forget to check in at our website and FaceBook page. The links are directly below. They are updated several times each week and often share information from the larger church that we may not know of otherwise. Please like our pages and posts and share them as you choose.

GIFT CARDS

Big Y 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.

JOYFUL RINGERS BELL CHOIR

Anyone who is interested in joining The Joyful Ringers is welcome to become a part of the Bell Choir. Younger or older, church member or bell enthusiast, experienced or novice, we would love it if you would come forward and add the gift of more music to our sanctuary. If you may be interested, please reach out to Sue M., the Music Committee Chair.

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

Music Minister: Anthony Tracia anthonytracia@gmail.com

Committee Chairpersons:

<i>Benevolence, Amy N.</i>	<i>Music Committee, Sue M.</i>
<i>Christian Education, Anita W.</i>	<i>Real Folks Society, Martha Z.</i>
<i>Church Moderator, Jonathan B.</i>	<i>Trustees, Ed M.</i>
<i>Deacons, Jeff F.</i>	

2024 - 27th Annual Lenten Discussion Series - 2024

A Rx for loneliness

February 14th - Ash Wednesday

All are invited to join the Montague Congregational Church for a worship Service at 7PM.

February 21st

First session at the Sunderland Congregational Church at 7PM.

Offered by Rev. James Koyama, pastor of the Montague Congregational Church, UCC

Session Title: Why have you abandoned me?

February 28th

Second session hosted by the Hatfield Congregational Church at 7PM.

Offered by Rev. Sherril Willis and Rev. Linda Rhinehart Neas.

Session Title: The Marginalized Many

March 6th

Third session at the Whately Congregational Church at 7PM.

Offered by Rev. Randy Calvo, pastor of the Hatfield and Sunderland Congregational Churches, UCC

Session Title: “[Jesus’] death was a consequence of what he was doing, but not his purpose.”

March 13th

Fourth session at the Montague Congregational Church at 7PM.

Offered by Rev. Dr. Cynthia Crosson-Harrington, pastor of the Whately Congregational Church, UCC

Session Title: Through the Mirror Darkly

March 20th

Fifth session at the North Hadley Congregational Church at 7PM.

Closing group discussion and potluck supper.

All sessions will be offered live-streamed and in person. Please send an email to your pastor or church office for **EACH** week’s unique Zoom login link. We are returning to a light collation following each evening’s gathering.