

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2019

March

No. 3

Lent and map-less-ness

Last month we talked about keeping a balance in our lives between the eternal and the temporal, that as people of faith we live in both realms simultaneously. We need to keep them balanced if we are to be religiously well-adjusted.

This month the church enters the Season of Lent and I would like to continue the theme of balance. I prefer not to think of Lent as only a preparation for Easter. It is almost as if we were to say that Jesus' birth, life and finally His death were only meaningful as the prerequisites of His resurrection. There is a balance that we need to foster so that life, death and resurrection are all respected and revered.

Lent does prepare us for Easter, but Lent is a season that ends with the cross and the grave. The poignancy of Jesus' last days should not be mitigated by His future resurrection. Easter does not erase the isolation and desperation of the cry from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Lent focuses our attention on the inef-fable mystery that is the *crucified God* (Jürgen Moltmann's turn of phrase) and what this means for us.

Lent is the time dedicated to ponder Jesus' uncompromising commitment to the point of torture and death, to meditate upon the nature of God's willingness to make such a self-sacrifice as heaven remains passive, and to consider why and how we should respond in our lives to such a God. In this way, Lent becomes a vehicle of discovery. Lent offers us the space where we can think and talk about what our religion should be.

The suffering and death of Christ is far too heavy a price to pay for a tolerated faith rather than one that is embraced.



A friend shared "God" on Twitter the very low scoring portion of the Super Bowl game "God" tweeted: "I've been to church services more exciting than this game." No offense to football fans intended; this joke is well understood because for many people church has made religion boring, more to be endured than explored.

Additionally, Rev. Corey Sanderson will be visiting our church again this month. He has mentioned that the website for his congregation is not designed

so much for those who are church-ed already, but for those who are seeking church. Church is a welcoming and refreshing experience for many of us reading this article, but for many others church means what that God-Tweet is all about. Just like Rev. Sanderson's webpage, we need to keep the ones bored by church in our plans for church.

This is recognized by our church denomination. Sioux Wilusz works for the Connecticut Conference. She has written recently: "Jesus is asking us for a 'new church.' We are soul searching and creating our WHY. We will build new partnerships, cultivate existing ones, do the work in new ways, and re-en-vision our futures. It's a time of uncertainty, excitement, joy and change. I'm eager, and exhausted and overwhelmed just thinking about it. We are at the beginning. God is here. We will trust that and move forward. We must not be motivated on our journey this coming year by what we can see. We are map-less. But we cannot stand still."

We discussed this recently in Bible study in conjunction with Mark 13. In this passage, we watch as the Jewish people in Jerusalem turn against Jesus because Jesus was challenging that which they held closest to God. He predicted the destruction of the Temple, the place where God's glory touched earth. He warned of false prophets with the same kind of words that Moses did in Deuteronomy 13, thus calling into question, for many, His own innovations.

The Jews were not especially hard-hearted. Their resistance to map-less-ness is nothing new to faith. It is not strange. The crucifixion was an unimaginable blasphemy. How dare the Almighty suffer. It lingers still among Christians who resent the implications of a "crucified God," but Moltmann argues that our God is more about unequivocal love than "almighty;" and this is revealed equally in the life and death of Jesus.

"New" and "church" do not hang-out very often, but maybe they should. Maybe Lent's story of a crucified God is the perfect time to reimagine what our faith is. Maybe the unexpectedness of the cross, and all that it lays bare before us of the strangeness of God's love, can make religion exciting because "God is here. We will trust that and move forward."

MARCH EVENTS

Fri. 1 st	Rev. Randy, Glenda Flynn & Confirmation class attend a two-day Confirmation retreat.
Sun. 3 rd	Youth groups from Hadley, Southampton and Hatfield to meet in Southampton.
Tue. 5 th	Fat Tuesday gathering in the church parlor at 7:00pm.
Wed. 6 th	Combined Ash Wednesday Service at the Whately Congregational Church at 7:00pm.
Sat. 9 th	Remember to move clocks AHEAD one hour before retiring for Daylight Savings Time.
Mon. 11 th	Volunteer opportunity at the Food Bank from 1-4:00pm.
Tue 12 th	Bible study group meets in the church parlor from 7 – 8:00pm.
Wed. 13 th	Real Folks Mystery Ride and dinner leaves the church at 6:00pm. Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm. Lenten Discussion gathering at the Whately Church, led by Rev. Sherril Willis at 7:00pm
Thur. 14 th	Hampshire Association Clergy Committee of Practice meeting in Hadley at 12:00pm.
Sat. 16 th	Tri-Conference Super Saturday gathering in Wilbraham from 8:00am – 3:30pm.
Wed. 20 th	Lenten Discussion gathering at our church, led by Rev. Cynthia at 7:00pm.
Mon. 25 th	Bible study group meets in the church parlor from 7 – 8:00pm.
Tue. 26 th	Rev. Calvo participates in the HEADS-Up meeting from 6 – 8:00pm.
Wed. 27 th	Lenten Discussion gathering at the Montague Church, led by Rev. Randy at 7:00pm.
Sun. 31 st	<i>One Great Hour of Sharing</i> offering accepted at our morning Service.

REGULAR GATHERINGS

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 10:00am. Sunday School at 10:15 am. Chat and Coffee at 11:00am.

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 rehearsal every Thursday at 6:30pm.

Saturdays: AA meets at the church every Saturday at noon.

CONFIRMATION RETREAT

The month begins with Rev. Randy, Glenda Flynn and our Confirmation class heading off to the Prindle Pond Conference Center in Charlton, MA. There we will participate in a Conference Confirmation retreat. The theme is "Be the Church?" It will revolve around the central questions of Who am I? Who is the church? And How do I "be" the church? In other words, what is our identity in faith, and in a community of faith? What does it mean to "be" the church in this time and place? The retreat master is Rev. Matt Carriker, the Protestant Chaplain at Brandeis University. Please keep our Confirmands in your prayers during this time of spiritual exploration and renewal.

YOUTH GROUP

The Youth Groups of the Hadley, Hatfield and Southampton Congregational Churches gather on the first Sunday of the month – and hopefully some share in a light meal, join in a fun activity We will meet at the Southampton Sunday, March 3rd. This gathering is open 12th grade. If you would like to attend,



other congregations as we move forward. We and then have a bit of worship or discussion. Congregational Church from 5:30 – 7:30pm on to any of our youth or their friends from 7th – please contact Rev. Randy.

SEASON OF LENT

The Season of Lent consists of the 40 days that the church sets aside prior to Easter so that the faithful may prepare themselves for the mystery of the cross and the mystery of the empty tomb.

We will anticipate Lent on Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday. We will gather in the church parlor and over a piece of King Cake we will talk about the purpose and expectations of Lent.

Ash Wednesday is the formal beginning of the Lenten Season. In The Book of Worship of the United Church of Christ, they write: "During the moving ancient ceremony, the ashes were placed on foreheads of the faithful with the words from Genesis: 'Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.'" The imposed ashes are a visible reminder of our mortality and that in this life we must strive for immortality. Lent is the

sacred period in which we examine the spiritual content of our lives, especially in the context of Christ's selfless, unconditional love for all people evident on the cross. We strive to improve our spiritual well being by doing good and avoiding evil. The pastors of the Montague, Whately and Hatfield churches will gather for a combined Service on Ash Wednesday at 7PM in Whately and any who are interested are encouraged to attend.

During Lent, we will participate in the Lenten Discussion Series. These will be held on Lenten Wednesdays at different churches with different presenters. The general theme of this year's series is *Faith Will Light the Way*. Our church will host on March 20th. If you can help by sharing something of light fare for our collation that follows the discussion, please speak with one of the church's deacons. Rev. Randy will present in Montague on the 27th.

BIBLE STUDY GROUP – March's Theme → Jesus' last days

Our Bible study and the church's calendar come together fortuitously this month. As we delve into Lent, we just happen to be coming upon the final chapters of Mark's Gospel. Even if you have not joined us before, this is a time to jump into Bible study in order to place Lent in a fuller context. We will read and discuss the account of the Last Supper, the betrayal and desertion by Jesus' closest followers, and the events leading up to and adding to the agony of the cross. We would love to have you join us as we learn about the Word of God.

REAL FOLKS OUTING

Real Folks is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. Its second planned activity is the Mystery Ride and Dinner Out on Wednesday, March 13th. All those who will be participating are to meet at the church at 6:00pm. Then a caravan forms to an unknown destination where the group will enjoy dinner out. If you would like to attend, please contact Jeannie Belden at 247-5905.

SUPER SATURDAY

Super Saturday is an all-day event sponsored by the Tri-Conference. It takes place at Minnechaug High School in Wilbraham. It begins with energetic worship. Then the participants choose to attend one session among the many morning topics, break for lunch, and then do the same with the afternoon topics. The day closes with prayer. Our congregation will be represented at Super Saturday by Mark Gelotte and Rev. Randy

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING OFFERING

One Great Hour of Sharing, as part of Our Churches Wider Mission, is the special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that carries God's message of love and hope to people in crisis. The UCC works with international partners to provide sources of clean water, food, education and health care, small business micro-credit, advocacy and displaced persons, and emergency relief and domestic and international ministries for disaster preparedness and response. This year the collection will be accepted on Sunday, March 31st. Thank you for your generosity.



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RERUN SHOES SHOE DRIVE

Started in 2009, *Rerun Shoes* was created to help people here in the US and in other parts of the world recycle old shoes. In addition to providing shoes (in good condition) to children and families in the neediest nations, these donated shoes provide opportunities to micro-businesses throughout the African continent. *Rerun Shoes* is a nationwide charitable organization, but its home-base is right here in Florence, MA. To learn more about this organization, please visit their website: www.rerunshoes.com. Not all shoes can become *Rerun Shoes*. Shoes that have too much wear, or don't have a need in African countries (i.e., winter boots), won't make the cut. Here are the shoes that



they look for and welcome: athletic shoes, men's

shoes, women's shoes (no high heels please), children's shoes and sports sandals (please no flipflops or Crocs). A collection container has been placed inside the front entrance of the church. So if you have old shoes that are only taking up space in your house, please bring them by the church for this collection. And thank you.

FOOD BANK VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers from our church gather with Linda Milewski at the Western Mass Food Bank on the second Monday of the month to help this worthwhile organization. If you can share three hours of your time or even an

hour or two, it will benefit those of our neighbours who do not have the ability to put enough food on their tables. Please speak with Linda if you can help.

REQUEST

Some of our members have breathing problems that are aggravated by perfumes and other scents. Please keep this in mind when getting ready for church, and we appreciate your attentiveness to the needs of others.

CONSIDER MEMBERSHIP AT HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL

If you may like to be a formal member of this church, it begins with an informal meeting with Rev. Calvo and members of the Board of Deacons. We talk about the church, its organization, how things work, and our core values and covenants. Please contact Rev. Calvo if you are interested.



VIEW CHURCH SERVICES ON-LINE AND ON TV

We air our Services a couple of times a month on public access television. They take place on alternate Sundays. This allows people to see what happens inside our church building and it also reaches into the homes of people who are unable to be with us in church. The recorded Services air on Hatfield Community Television on Saturdays and Sundays at 8 am and 4 pm. All of our taped Services may also be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/user/FCATMedia/videos> or at <https://www.youtube.com/user/HatfieldCommunityTV>.

We could use the help of a few more volunteers to operate the camera on a rotating basis during the Services. If you could help in this way, please speak to Rev. Randy.

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:

Christian Education, Anita Wilson 413 247-5229

Music, Anthony Tracia 781 738-6284

Real Folks Society, Martha Zigmont 413 247-5453

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Trustees, Jonathan Bardwell 413-530-6262

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