

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2021

May

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Pentecost's *Amor*

May is the month of Mother's Day and of Pentecost. In most all cases, a mother's love is not hard to imagine, and this love is honoured on Mother's Day. Pentecost, I would like to offer, is also a celebration of love, although it is seldom described or celebrated as such. Let me try to explain.

Every seminary student is taught that there are three Greek words that are all translated as the single English word *love*. There is *eros*, which is a biological urge; there is *philos*, from which the City of Brotherly Love gets its name; and there is *agape*, which is the perfect, unconditional religious virtue.

But Joseph Campbell introduced me to a fourth iteration of love – the Latin word *amor*. If you look up the definition of the English derivative *amour*, you will likely find it defined as a usually illicit love affair. Campbell, however, saw it differently. He defined it as "the highest spiritual experience ... it is a person-to-person experience." (*The Power of Myth*, p. 186-187)

He also judged *amor* a threat to an institutional faith, which helps to explain *amour's* dictionary definition. *Amor* is of the individual; it is personal; it is experience over tradition. Provocatively Campbell coined the phrase "libido over credo" to explain this threat of *amor*.

Credo summarizes all the formal "I believe" statements that orthodoxy demands, and as a corollary the many more sinful failures that tag along. This can be visualized by turning to Deuteronomy 28. In my Bible, there is one column of blessing for following the *credo*-statements and more than three columns of curses for failing the *credo*-statements. Libido, *amor*, flows from the heart. It is not imposed from without; it is chosen and followed breathlessly.

Paul has something interesting to say along these lines if we equate *credo* with "the law." In Romans, Paul writes that a knowledge of sin comes through the imposition of the law. Qualitatively different is the "righteousness of God" disclosed through the embrace of "faith." This righteousness is the personal love, *amor*, that is revealed perfectly by Jesus. Thus, Paul shares with us: "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." (5:8) Nothing is more powerful than this love.

(cf. 8:31-39) *Credo* is associated with sin, but *amor* with the personal relationship of righteousness.

Pentecost is not about believing. In most of the Gospels, witnessing the risen Saviour leads to belief. Pentecost is defined as empowering that belief. The earliest followers of Jesus in Jerusalem are changed on Pentecost. The imagery is of fire and violent wind. This is not a gentle awakening from a restful slumber. This is the mighty power of God funneled into each soul. This is not faith as a noun. This is faith as a verb. Pentecost is not only believing in Jesus. Pentecost is *amor*, the person-to-person experience of the very breath of God, the Holy Spirit.

And another image of Pentecost that complements fire and storm is that the believers burst out of the confines of their locked room and confront the world with the person of Christ. This is *amor*. This is the energized love of those first believers that will know no constraint.

Campbell illustrates this rapture by sharing the Ralph Morse photo from 1944 of a returned soldier



soldier and his girlfriend in Hyde Park in London. It is spontaneous, honest and non-conventional. Pentecost shatters the formality of the Jewish pilgrims gathered in the holy city for their important holy day. The Jewish feast celebrated the law written on stone. The Christian Pentecost that erupted rudely was *amor* – the righteousness, the love, the personal, disruptive relationship with the Divine.

This personal experience of God's love was overpowering like the emotion in the Morse photo. Pentecost has too often been stripped of this elan and been made official, compliant and staid. It can be turned into one column of blessings and three and half of curses, but Pentecost can never be made conventional. It must be personal. It doesn't call for all to be the same; it demands, instead, that we all be authentic. Pentecost shares the ferocious power of God's love with us. It is fire and storm. It is a passionate, personal relationship with God. Let's not make it safe. Let's make Pentecost *amor*.

MAY EVENTS

Sun. 2 nd	New Member Sunday. Children's Mental Health Awareness Week – May 2 nd through May 8 th . The church will be illuminated by a green spotlight to support this cause.
Mon. 3 rd	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly online meeting of HEART (Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting against Racism Together) at 5:30pm. Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Sat. 8 th	Southern New England Conference Annual Meeting online from 9:00am – 4:00pm.
Sun. 9 th	Mother's Day . A blessed, joyful – and restful – day to all mothers!
Mon. 10 th	Monthly online meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Thur. 13 th	Ascension Day. Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of the Hampshire Association Committee on Ministry at 5:30pm.
Sat. 15 th	Youth Group Spring Flower Sale at the church from 9:30 – 11:00am.
Mon. 17 th	Online meeting of the Church Council at 7:00pm.
Thurs. 20 th	Rev. Randy will participate in the monthly online meeting of HEADS Up – Hatfield Embraces Acceptance and Dismantles Stigma – at 6:30pm.
Sun. 23 rd	Pentecost Sunday . The annual collection for the UCC's <i>Strengthen the Church</i> Offering will be accepted.
Mon. 24 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Tue. 25 th	Monthly online meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.
Sun. 30 th	Memorial Day/350 th Anniversary Parade: watch for the church's float.
Mon. 31 st	Memorial Day. Remember and honour those who served and died for our nation.

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

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 10:00am online and in person. Sunday School at 9:30am online.

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.

NEW MEMBERS' SUNDAY

As the season of Spring comes into the richness of nature's renewal, we will begin May's worship with New Members' Sunday on the 2nd. This is an opportunity for both those seeking to become new members of our congregation and for those of us who already belong to share in a covenant promise with each other and with Christ. The church promises in a sacred covenant to foster the faith and well-being of those who are choosing to join the community, and the new members covenant with the congregation to support its ministries and mission, and all as witnessed in the name of Jesus.

Covenant is a foundational tenet of the way we express ourselves as church. We vow to support one another in widening circles: the congregation; the Association; the Conference; and the denomination. The fullness of the church abides in every individual congregation and every individual member is a minister of that congregation, and in covenant we promise in Christ to support one another. This is church, the called-community of God's people.

New Members' Sunday allows us to remember and reaffirm this covenant, for both those who are brand new members and those who have been a part of this church for a lifetime or even for generations. I do hope that you will choose to be a part of this special day.

YOUTH GROUP FLOWER SALE

The Youth Group is holding another Spring Flower Sale this year. Order forms have been shared with everyone on the congregation's email list. If you need an order form, please email Rev. Randy at randyc1897@gmail.com. The deadline to place orders is Sunday, May 9th. Orders can then be picked-up at the church on Saturday, May 15th between 9:30 and 11:00am. This is a fundraiser for the Youth Group. With

pandemic restrictions easing, the Youth Group hopes to be able to participate in some shared activities, and your financial support of this fundraiser will help with these plans ... so thank you.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK – "Flip the Script"

This national event draws attention to an issue that is sometimes difficult to broach, but must be. We cannot allow our children to suffer silently and unnecessarily. Our congregation supports the efforts to help those young people who may be in need of support. The front of our church building will be lit by a green spotlight throughout this week – green symbolizing hope. And on our lawn, HEADS



Up will display their banner to advertise that there is local help available. Others are encouraged to show their support by displaying green around their homes throughout this week, as well.

CONFERENCE ANNUAL MEETING



The second Annual Meeting of the Southern New England Conference will take place on May 8th. It will be held fully online again this year. The Annual Meeting begins with opening worship at 9:00am. The Conference's work continues after worship, with breaks and prayer throughout the day. Our day together closes at 4:00pm. More information is available at

<https://www.sneucc.org/eventdetail/14923441?month=5&year=2021&day=1&display=m>. The registration deadline is May 5th. If you may be interested in representing our congregation, please speak with Rev. Randy.

PENTECOST SUNDAY and STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH OFFERING

According to the Acts of the Apostles, on the 50th day after Easter, the Holy Spirit was shared powerfully with the first believers in Jerusalem and through them to others. Once inspired by the Spirit of God, these once timid followers of Jesus burst out into the streets of the city and fearlessly began to proclaim Christ as the risen Saviour. When these first followers, inspired by the Spirit, pick-up the mantle of Jesus' ministry, the church is born. Christians worldwide celebrate this sacred occasion on Pentecost Sunday. All are invited to join with us for worship on this, the birthday of the church.

Appropriately, the United Church of Christ accepts our donations on this occasion annually for the *Strengthen the Church Offering*. This offering reflects the shared commitment of people across the United Church of Christ to build-up cooperatively the UCC. The funds raised support leadership development, new churches, youth ministry, and innovation in existing congregations. By our generosity to this offering, we continue the work begun on that first Pentecost to build-up the Body of Christ.



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*. New Testament. If you would like the Bible, I encourage you to join us



join us, please send me an email send you the login information for our Zoom meetings. We have just begun to read 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 III on the to become more comfortable with for Bible study. If you would like to (randyc1897@gmail.com) and I will

350th ANNIVERSARY ROLLING-PARADE!

The pandemic-delayed Town of Hatfield's 350th Anniversary Parade will take place on Sunday, May 30th beginning at 1PM. 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 parade route is 7 miles with 8 separate starting locations. The rolling-parade will come to you so that no groups will need to congregate in any one place. More information as to the parade route, etc. will be posted online at www.hatfield350.com/events.html. 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.

SHARED PASTORATE

Rev. Randy has entered a shared pastorate with the Hatfield and Sunderland churches. 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.

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 people who do good for the church, members has offered to help with this 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. 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.

REAL FOLKS

"A few reminders: We will not be having a food sale during town elections in May. We are still in a pause due to COVID 19. Do not leave items on the back porch, church kitchen, or in the church balcony. At this time we have no plans for a sale. Let's stay connected. Call someone to say hello. 2020 Real Folks' Program has phone numbers of members. See you in church. Marty Z."

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.

