

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, United Church of Christ

2025

May

No.5

Those Weird and Wonder-filled Days after Easter

The Gospel is Volume One and Acts of the Apostles is Volume Two. Luke and Acts share the same author. (cf. Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-2) It is an inspired account of the life of Jesus and then the life of the earliest church. I mention this because Luke's Gospel concludes with an extended story of Easter Day from "at early dawn" (24:1) until well into the evening. At the end of Easter Day, we read in Volume One, "[Jesus] withdrew from [the disciples] and was carried up into heaven." (24:52) According to the Gospel, the Ascension takes place on Easter.

This is part of the unique Lucan material. Scholars tells us this because Luke is based on Mark's earlier Gospel and Mark has not even a resurrection appearance never mind an ascension story. Matthew, the other of the three Synoptic Gospels – the Gospels that share a similar Marcan outline, never emphasizes Jesus' ascension and disappearance. Rather, writes Matthew in his last verse, "'Remember, I [Jesus] am with you always, to the end of the age.'" (28:20)

Thus, Luke's extended account in Volume One of Easter day is his creation. This can seem rather strange because Volume Two is the only biblical reference to the risen Jesus' weeks-long encounters with His disciples. It is the only biblical reference to Jesus' ascension on the 40th day. (Acts 1:3) This incoherence did not go unnoticed by the earliest believers. Evidence of this might be found in the footnotes in the Bible you read. My Bible notes that in 24:51 some ancient authorities lack "and was carried up into heaven," which subtracts the Ascension from the end of Volume One, which clears-up the incongruity. This omission was most likely the work of a later editor who was so bothered by the contradiction that he changed the text. The change is left as a footnote, however, because scholars agree that it is not part of the original Gospel.

The post-resurrection appearances present many difficulties for biblical interpreters. I think it is expecting far too much to receive a prosaic account of such a profound mystical experience of God's most profound mystery. Easter is not proved. It is experienced. Even by its eyewitnesses. I think this is reflected in the repeated reference to doubt among those who interact with the risen Christ ("Why do doubts arise in your hearts? [Luke 24:38]; "But some doubted" [Matthew 28:17])

The Ascension is a part of such difficulties. It is quite plausible that the reality of the disciples' experiences of the risen Christ are varied and if not incomprehensible at least relatable only with the greatest difficulty. This is why theology may overlay the sharing of post-resurrection

accounts. It is a sincere and honest attempt to give meaning to an experience that non-witnesses cannot comprehend, but can appreciate. Accordingly, Volume One begins with Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness as He struggles to prepare Himself for the ministry He will then embark upon in His life. Volume Two begins with the disciples' 40 days with Jesus as they are being prepared for the ministry that they will soon undertake. Thus, the actual number 40 may be more symbolic than anything else.

The point of the number, however, is that the risen Jesus' appearances to His followers changed in character at some time after Easter. This change is embodied in Pentecost. In Jewish tradition, Pentecost was associated with the giving of the Law to Moses, and the Law was the cornerstone of the faith. For Christians, Pentecost is the giving of the Spirit to all believers, and we must not ignore the teaching to non-believers too, for some on the street receive the Spirit's inspiration to hear and understand the Word of God, (cf. Acts 2:11-13), and this event becomes the cornerstone of the new faith. Paul will write of this mystery: "[God] has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Corinthians 3:6) He then goes on to contrast the law "chiseled in letters on stone tablets" with "the ministry of the Spirit." (3:7-8) There appears to be an intentional linkage of the sharing of the Spirit with the inherited tradition of Pentecost, that this is a beginning of a new aspect of the faith.

This month is when Ascension falls, but we must wait until June for Pentecost. Since the Ascension and Pentecost are separated by different pages on the calendar, let us use this to consider the bemused reaction of the disciples as "a cloud took [Jesus] out of their sight." (Acts 1:9) They're like deer in the headlights. They're motionless. They can't help but look to where they last saw Jesus, trying to hold onto something that is not there any longer. Finally, God must send angels to stir them from this paralysis. Until the Spirit is shared, the nascent church is directionless, lifeless, holding onto the past rather than daring to act in the present and move forward.

We can use this separation to remind us of the glorious fact that we are never church on our own. As the community of the church, we are dependent upon the inspiration and empowerment of the Spirit. These are the continuing encounters with the risen Christ. The Spirit within and among us is what keeps Jesus from being an historical figure, and instead the risen-one who lives with us now.

MAY EVENTS

Sat. 3 rd	Spring Roast Pork Supper
Sun. 4 th	Music Sunday. See flier below for more information. Children’s Mental Health Action Week begins.
Tue. 6 th	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of the Association Committee on Ministry at 5:45pm.
Sun. 11 th	Mother’s Day, and Communion Sunday.
Mon. 12 th	Online Bible study group from 7 – 8:00pm.
Tue. 13 th	Rev. Randy will attend the Association clergy lunch in Hadley at noon.
Wed. 14 th	In person monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Mon. 19 th	Online Bible study group from 7 – 8:00pm.
Mon. 26 th	Memorial Day.
Tue. 27 th	Monthly meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:00pm.
Thur. 29 th	Ascension Day.

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.

SPRING ROAST PORK SUPPER

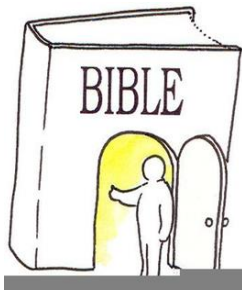
Please see the flier below for details. The clipboard will be making its appearance at church as we ask for volunteers to help with this supper. The more hands the lighter the work, and this is a fundraiser that benefits all of us in the congregation. Thank you for sharing an invitation with those you know, for purchasing tickets and for helping with the supper.

CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH ACTION WEEK

What used to be Children’s Mental Health Acceptance Week morphed into Awareness Week and now is Action Week. The reason for the adaptation is explained by the National Federation of Families as a recognition that “awareness” is not enough, that each of us must take action to create lasting change. “Every action - supporting a friend or loved one, practicing self-care, modeling wellness for others, or reaching out for help - matters.” The campaign theme this year is "That's a WRAP!" and it focuses on Wellness, Resilience, Action, and Purpose. Here’s a link to the website: <https://www.ffcmh.org/cmhawcampaign>. HEADS Up here in Hatfield is running a poster contest primarily through the schools to increase awareness of Action Week. (<https://www.facebook.com/hatfieldheadsup/>) The posters can be viewed once completed at the school and then at Town Hall.



ONLINE BIBLE STUDY GROUP



Our online Bible study group is open to anyone with a desire to become more acquainted with the sacred writings of our faith tradition. No prior Bible knowledge is required, only an excitement about learning and appreciating the most influential book in the history of humanity. Hopefully, whether an everyday Bible reader or one just beginning, our discussions will have something to offer. We are currently reading from what the Hebrew Bible calls the Earlier Prophets and what the Septuagint calls the Historical Books. We are learning about the early, formative years before the nation of Israel emerged, and we will eventually work our way through the time of kings and then onto national defeat and exile. If interested in joining our group, send an email to randyc1897@gmail.com for the Zoom

login or if you have any questions.

MEMORIAL DAY

Memorial Day falls on the last Monday of May. This is not simply an excuse for another three-day-weekend. This is not a joyous holiday. On Memorial Day, we remember solemnly those who have fallen in their service to our country. Armed Services Day honours those who serve currently. Veterans Day acknowledges those who once served. Memorial Day, however, is reserved for the sacred remembrance of all those who died to defend our nation and our ideals. In other nations, citizens fear their military. We honour ours because they protect our liberty. This is why there will be parades and speeches to help us remember. And even on our own, we should pay our respects to those who died in battle or in military service. Take some time in some way to honour their sacrifices. We will offer prayers for their repose at church on Sunday the 25th.



ASCENSION DAY

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that on the 40th day after Easter Jesus ascended into the heavens. This year that day falls on May 29th. For 40 days the followers. The ordinary connection presence of the risen Christ among them. heavens. This leaves the disciples do without Jesus’ constant presence. to return to Jerusalem.



resurrected Jesus interacted with His remained through the extraordinary This all ends as Jesus ascends into the dumbfounded. They do not know what to Finally, God must intervene and tell them

Even with a resurrection faith, the for what is expected of them. This is why the Holy Spirit. It is only with God within and among us that we have the ability to continue Jesus’ ministry in the world.

earthly followers of Jesus are unprepared at the Ascension Jesus promises to send

Ascension Day allows us to celebrate the glory of Jesus in heaven. And it readies us for the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the 50th day after Easter. The transformation that the Spirit engenders is amazing and exciting; it is the birth of the church. But let us also rejoice in Jesus’ triumph and well-earned exaltation to heavenly glory, Like the apostles, we can’t remain in the reflection of that glory. We have work to do in the world. Easter leads us to the Ascension, the Ascension on to Pentecost, and Pentecost to the ongoing work of each Christian and every church.

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.

GROCERY CARDS

Big Y grocery 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.

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, Christina M.</i>
<i>Christian Education, Anita W.</i>	<i>Real Folks Society, Amy N.</i>
<i>Church Moderator, Jonathan B.</i>	<i>Treasurer, Mark G.</i>
<i>Clerk, Carolyn F</i>	<i>Trustees, Ed M.</i>
<i>Deacons, Jeff F.</i>	



To all the mothers of our church and community

Roast Pork Supper

First Congregational Church of Hatfield,
United Church of Christ
41 Main Street, Hatfield, MA

Saturday May 3rd, 2025

TAKE OUT ONLY
From 4:30 – 6:30pm



Menu:

Roast pork, gravy, mashed potatoes, cole slaw,
apple sauce, roll with butter, and dessert.

\$18/ticket

Tickets at the door if available
or in advance by calling
413-247-5905 or 413-247-5604

Hatfield Congregational Church

MUSIC SUNDAY

Service of 100% musical offerings!

May 4, 2025
9:30am

Featuring:
Violin & Viola
Vocal Soloists
Chancel Choir

This UCC church is Open & Affirming.
ALL are welcome!

41 Main Street
www.hatfieldchurch.org