

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

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“Righteousness of God”

In Paul’s Letter to the Romans, the apostle is confronted with a difficult task. He has never been to Rome and he knows personally few Romans. Additionally, the church in Rome consists of Jews and Gentiles worshipping Jesus together. Paul cannot approach them as a disinterested third party. He has accepted and fostered his identity as the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul’s reformation of the earliest church, his efforts to establish a Christian faith-practice independent of Jewish ritual practice, instigated a strident counter effort. Well established proponents of the traditional Jewish-Christian church opposed Paul actively.

Rome at this time was definitely not the center of the church, but it was the center of the Empire. Paul’s work focused on the eastern portion of the Roman Empire, but his missionary plans were to preach the gospel to the western reaches of the Empire, which almost required that he proceed to Rome first. Thus, Paul’s need to introduce himself to the Roman church, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Paul needed to approach the church without exacerbating any real or latent divisions between Jews and Gentiles. He rose above such matters by introducing himself as “an apostle, set apart for the gospel.” (Rom. 1:1) Not an apostle for the Jews, or for the Gentiles, but “for the gospel.”

This is *gospel* with a lower-case *g*. It is not one of the four written *Gospels* with an upper-case *G*. This is gospel as the proclamation of Jesus and His message. Paul holds forth, as he introduces himself to the Romans, that it is this Christian proclamation in which abides “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.” (1:16)

Furthermore, Paul attests that the very “righteousness of God” (1:17) abides within the gospel proclamation. Biblical scholars debate whether this phrase is a subjective or objective genitive. All this means is whether the phrase means “God Himself is righteous” (subjective genitive) or “the righteousness that comes from God” (objective genitive). Some scholars have settled on the compromise that it may well mean both.

I would like to look at it a bit differently. Paul was well acquainted with the Hebrew Bible’s Book of

Ezekiel. Ezekiel is the prophet to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. For about three centuries, it was believed that God abided among Israel at the Jerusalem Temple, and before that in the moveable Tabernacle that separated the holiness of the Ark of the Covenant from the ordinary. This was centuries upon centuries of tradition.

Ezekiel shares a divine vision in which “the glory of the Lord” rises from above the Ark and rests at the threshold of Solomon’s Temple, and then pauses again at the east gate of Jerusalem, stops at the Mount of Olives, and then journeys to eventually abide among the exiled People of God in Babylon. (Ezek. 10:4, 19; 11:23-24) This is a revelation of God forsaking the building to tabernacle among His people in exile.

Paul’s use of “the righteousness of God,” to me, seems to mimic Ezekiel’s use of “the glory of the Lord.” God abides not in this city or that, nor in Jew or Gentile, but God abides in the gospel proclamation. Wherever it is shared through faith, God abides. Wherever it is accepted for faith, God abides. (cf. Rom. 1:17) The purpose of Paul’s outreach to the church at Rome was the gospel, and it was the gospel that superseded any and all real or potential divisions.

The righteousness of God, the presence and power of God, abide in the gospel proclamation. We may be accustomed to speaking of the presence of God within the community of the church, in the sacraments of Baptism and Communion, but Paul emphasizes that God abides whenever, wherever and however we share the gospel of Jesus and His message. Please think about this as we return to a more active life of the church in September.

When we proclaim Christ by our presence at worship, when we proclaim Christ by sharing our talents to raise a joyful noise, to teach a child, to administer and fund the workings of a congregation, when we proclaim Christ by helping those in need like through the CROP Hunger Walk, when we proclaim Christ by inviting someone to worship, when we proclaim Christ through how we live and what we stand up for, know the righteousness of God is present and powerful in you and through you.

SEPTEMBER EVENTS

Wed. 1 st	Rev. Randy will attend the HEADS Up online meeting at 3:30pm.
Tue. 7 th	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of the Hampshire Association Committee on Ministry at 5:30pm.
Sun. 12 th	Home Coming Sunday. Picnic to follow the worship Service.
Mon. 13 th	Rev. Randy will attend the monthly meeting of HEART (Hatfield Equity Alliance fighting against Racism Together) at 5:30pm. In person meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Tue. 14 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Sat. 18 th	Chicken BBQ take out supper from 5 – 7:00pm.
Mon. 27 th	Online <i>Exploring the Bible</i> study group from 7-8:00pm.
Tue. 28 th	Online meeting of the Board of Deacons at 6:30pm. Online meeting of the Church Council at 7:00pm.

REGULAR GATHERINGS

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 9:30am online and in person.

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 6:30pm.

HOMECOMING SUNDAY

On the second Sunday of September, we will return to our tradition of holding a Homecoming Sunday as we transition from the more laid-back pace of summer to the more exciting schedule of autumn. The worship Service will intentionally be shortened. This will allow us more time to gather (hopefully!) outdoors to share in a bit of food and a lot of “Hello’s.” Make sure to bring a lawn chair with you!



The Suppers Committee is in charge of Homecoming. There is no charge for any of this, but a donation jar will be out. Whatever is collected will go into the Suppers Committee account for their next event. There will also be a couple of gift baskets for which tickets may be purchased. The proceeds from this will benefit the church.

We hope you and yours will join us for Homecoming Sunday. We could not meet last year because of the pandemic. At present, Hampshire County is doing very well, just about the best in the state for the number of COVID cases, but we don't know what the future holds so let's take advantage of this opportunity while we can.

CHICKEN BARBECUE

And talking about returning to our pre-COVID schedule, we are holding our Chicken Barbecue again this year. It will take place on Saturday, September 18th from 5 – 7:00pm. This will be a take-out only meal. Tickets may be reserved by calling 413-210-3965 or 413-247-9624, or by email at randyc1897@gmail.com, or they may be purchased at church on Sundays. The cost per ticket is \$15 for half a barbecued chicken and all the sides. We hope you will support this church fundraiser, and if you could help work the event that would be greatly appreciated.



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. No prior Bible knowledge is needed, only a desire to become more familiar with the written Word of God. This month we will be reading from what are called the Deutero-Pauline Epistles (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus) as we work toward our study of the four Gospels.



CROP HUNGER WALK

Two years ago, our congregation participated in the CROP Hunger Walk, and then last year the Walk was cancelled because of the pandemic. Now it's back. The Walk will be in New Salem on October 3rd. The kick-off Rally was at the New Salem Congregational Church on August 10th. At the Rally, we received our collection part of our church's team, please let Rev. donation envelopes. It's a pleasant walk on a pleasant Fall afternoon. The CROP Walks are the granddaddies of all charitable walks. They began in 1969. They help fund Church World Services work here in our communities and around the world. CWS is a faith-based organization transforming communities around the globe through just and sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement and disaster. Twenty five percent of the funds raised are returned to the host community to support local hunger fighting efforts. For more information please visit <https://events.crophungerwalk.org/2021/team/hatfield-congregational-church>.



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 I have no problem wearing a mask on top of that. I have been trying to stay in touch, but a phone call is not the same as seeing each other in person. 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.

PLANNING AHEAD

Our **Roast Pork Supper** is back too with a tentative date of early November. If all goes well, we're hoping that this will be our first dine-in supper since the Youth Group's Spaghetti Supper back in February 2020. Again, we love it when volunteers surprise us with offers to help.

Lastly, the **Craft Fair** returns on December 4th. This year's event had to be modified because much of the prep-work could not be done during the pandemic. We are planning to have a bake sale/prepared food sale, raffle baskets, and outdoor items such as cemetery boxes, door swags, etc. We are hoping that individuals, families or groups will donate themed baskets. Be creative. Have some fun. I think you know what comes next, but we'll ask anyway – we will need volunteers to help with the Craft Fair and you would be such a blessing.

Thanks for putting these events on your calendars, and thanks for supporting your local church.

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. 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

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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.

