



May 21, 2023

*Morning Worship and Children's Programs at 10:00*

***United Church of Strafford***

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***Our Church Covenant***

*We gather together with freedom of conscience  
in a community of love and inquiry.  
All are welcome, without exception.*

*We practice Christianity with faith and compassion.  
We covenant with one another to embody the love of Christ,  
to nurture contemplation and action,  
and to offer our gifts, talents and energies as we are able.*

***United Church of Strafford, Vermont***

May 21, 2023

Seventh Sunday of Easter

*MH=Methodist Hymnal; PH=Pilgrim Hymnal*

One of the scribes...asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

*from Mark 12:28-31*

**Gathering Music**

The Cantornote Church Musicians

**Silent Prayer of Invocation**

Pastor Tom Kinder

**Prelude** Fantasia Georg Philipp Telemann

**Blessing and Lighting the Candles**

**Leader:** In Christ was life, and the life was the light of the world.

**People:** **The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness does not overcome it.**

**Leader:** Let us pray for peace and the things that make for peace  
as we light the peace candle.

**Welcome and Announcements**

**Call to Worship**

**Responsive Reading** *adapted from the Gospels*

Debbly Richie

**Leader:** No one can serve two masters.  
You cannot serve God and mammon.

**People:** **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

**Leader:** Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life,  
what you will eat or what you will drink,  
or about your body, what you will wear.

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**People: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

Leader: Strive first for the realm of God  
and its right way of being,  
and all these material things will be given to you as well.

**People: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

Leader: Those who want to save their life will lose it,  
and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.  
What will it profit them if they gain the whole world  
but forfeit their life?

**People: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

Leader: When they bring you before the authorities  
do not worry about what you are to say.  
The Spirit will teach you at that very hour  
what you ought to say.

**People: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

Leader: Unless you change and become like children,  
you will never enter God's realm.  
Whoever becomes humble like a child  
is the greatest in the realm of God.

**People: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

\*Hymn PH #234 Breathe on Me, Breath of God

### Children's Time and Lord's Prayer

Scripture John 14:15-21, 25-27

Sermon How Can We Know the Way?

\*Hymn My Peace I Give to You *hymn folder*

### Sharing of Joys, Concerns, Prayer Requests and Reflections

*Reflection Questions:* We have completed the first stage of our Open and Affirming process. Some of us have attended: two Bible Study webinars; a service where the UCC Vermont Conference ONA Consultant preached and led a discussion; Christa Wurm's workshop

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on gender and sexual orientation; three sessions of book study on *Becoming Nicole*; and, Rod Smolla's teaching on jurisprudence and Supreme Court cases involving LGBTQ+ issues. Others of us have not been able to attend, but have done our own reading and thinking and praying about this. What reflections do you have on what you have learned? How do you feel that we should respond as a church?

### Time of Prayer

### Call to Offering

### \*Benediction

\*Hymn Lead on Eternal Sovereign *hymn folder*

**Silent Prayer** *We invite you to end the service in a spirit of prayer.*

**Postlude** "Good Morrow, Fair Ladies of the May" Thomas Morley

**Congregational Meeting** *All are welcome to participate. Please see the announcement on page four.*

*\* Those who are comfortably able may stand.*

*Please stay for refreshments and neighborliness in the Parish Hall.*

**Past sermons** are available on the back table.

**Video recorded services, sermon texts and bulletins**  
are available on our website [unitedchurchofstrafford.com](http://unitedchurchofstrafford.com).

See us on **Facebook** at United Church of Stratford

Sign up for **weekly emails** about upcoming worship and other news  
at [unitedchurchofstrafford@gmail.com](mailto:unitedchurchofstrafford@gmail.com)

***Whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey,  
you are welcome here!***

**Thank you to The Cantornote Church Musicians**, including Sarah Cantor, Susan Hodges, Rachel Kurland and Becky Bailey!

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**Congregational Meeting Today after worship** to decide whether to move forward to the next, final steps in our Open and Affirming process. The first step, our educational series, has concluded. Here is the plan we approved at Annual Meeting: “Step 2) At the end of the educational series, the congregation votes whether to examine what our church could look like as an Open and Affirming Congregation. This could include holding one or more congregational meetings for reflection, envisioning, and discussion. Step 3) At the end of that process, the congregation votes whether to become an Open and Affirming Congregation.” If we vote today to move forward to the next phase, part of our exploration would include drafting a proposed Open and Affirming Covenant and Implementation Plan to fit our congregation. Our last vote would be whether to adopt them.

**Video and Resources Available: Understanding Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation** Christa Wurm led this interactive workshop. Please email the church for the link to the video and resource document.

**Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and the Law: A talk by Rod Smolla, President of the Vermont Law and Graduate**

**School** You can find the video from this presentation on the Welcome page of our website. You will come away with a better understanding of the conflicting philosophies of law behind the opposing sides on LGBTQ+ related cases, as well as a good idea of the arguments being made by each before the Supreme Court. This gives useful background to many current stories in the media.

**Fulfilling Our Vision** The Fulfilling Our Vision committee is continuing our focus on exploring the question of whether our congregation will become officially Open to and Affirming of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. The vision we are fulfilling is our Future Directions Statement that you can find on the pew card or on the Welcome page of our website. *page four*

**Next Story Sundays** All ages are welcome to join us on “Story Sundays” led by Rachel Guaraldi. Rachel uses stories, as well as song, movement, and shared conversation to help everyone from youngest children to oldest adults explore some of the great spiritual questions. Please pass the word about this to anyone who might be interested of any faith or age. Story Sundays are held the second Sunday of the month. The next is June 11<sup>th</sup>: “Gifts of the Spirit.”

**Heartfulness Contemplative Training Circle** gathers on Thursday evenings at 7:00 PM by Zoom and offers an informal meditation all other evenings at 7:30 PM by Zoom. You are invited to be part of the circle. See our website Welcome page for details.

**Pastoral Care:** Pastor Tom Kinder serves only one-third time and counseling, visits and funerals are not included in his ministry. Those in need can reach out to Deacons through Becky Bailey (rbailey@sover.net), Debby Richie (dc.richie@hotmail.com), and Cameron Speth (cece@speth.com) or call the church number.

**Church Calendar:**

Sun. May 21	Congregational Meeting after Worship*
Thurs. May 25	Heartfulness Circle Zoom 7:00 PM*
Sun. May 28	Pentecost
Sat. June 3	Bill Williams Memorial Service 2:00 PM
Fri. June 9	Annemieke McLane Piano Concert 7:00 PM
Sun. June 11	Story Sunday 10:00 AM*
Sun. June 11	Farewell to Denise Cote after Worship

*\* there is an announcement about this in this bulletin*

**Haiku by Mel Goertz:**

The lawn is blossoming  
with dandelions and violets.  
Let wild bees sip. No mow May.

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