



United Church of Strafford, Vermont

May 7, 2023

Fifth Sunday of Easter

MH=Methodist Hymnal; PH=Pilgrim Hymnal

May 7, 2023

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

United Church of Strafford

230 Justin Morrill Highway

PO Box 124, Strafford, VT 05072

802-765-4585

Email: unitedchurchofstrafford@gmail.com

rev.thomas.cary.kinder@gmail.com

Website: unitedchurchofstrafford.com

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.

“I ask...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us...I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one.” *from John 17:20-23*

“I take literally the statement in the Gospel of John that God loves the world. I believe that the world was created and approved by love, that it subsists, coheres, and endures by love, and that, insofar as it is redeemable, it can be redeemed only by love. I believe that divine love, incarnate and indwelling in the world, summons the world always toward wholeness, which ultimately is reconciliation and atonement [at-one-ment] with God.” *Wendell Berry, from Another Turn of the Crank*

Gathering Music

Annemieke McLane

Silent Prayer of Invocation

Pastor Tom Kinder

Prelude 3rd Gymnopedie E. Satie

Blessing and Lighting the Peace Candle

Leader: In him 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.

Introit “We Are One in the Spirit” P. Scholtes

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship

Responsive Reading *from the Gospel of Thomas 24, 70, 77 & 113*
Christina Robinson, Reader

Leader: The disciples asked Jesus,

“Show us where you will be so we can seek you.”

People: Jesus said to them, “Let those who have ears listen!

There is light within a person of light,

and it shines on the whole world.

If it does not shine, it is dark.”

Leader: “If you bring forth what is within you,
it will save you;

**People: “If you do not find and bring forth what is within you,
it will destroy you.”**

Leader: “I am the light that is within and around all things.

I am all: from me all came forth

and to me all came and found their being in me.

People: “Split a piece of wood; I am there.

Leader: “Lift up a stone, and you will find me there.”

People: “The realm of God will not come by watching for it.

Rather, it is spread out upon the earth,

and people do not see it.”

***Hymn** When We Can See As God Can See *hymn folder*

Silent Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Pardon and Grace

Children’s Time and Lord’s Prayer

Anthem “Still there is Love,” poem E. N. Chase
music M.A. Amidon, arr. P. Amidon

Scripture John 14:1-17

Sermon The Way to Oneness

***Hymn** The Heart That Empties *hymn folder*

Sharing of Joys, Concerns, Prayer Requests and Reflections

Reflection Questions: How do you understand the idea of oneness?

Where do you see it? What does communion mean to you?

Time of Prayer

Call to Offering

Invitation to Holy Communion

Hymn PH #288 Let Us Break Bread Together

Words of Institution and Prayer of Consecration

Sharing of the Elements *remaining seated*

(All are welcome to this feast of love. We all eat the bread and drink the cup together. We serve gluten-free crackers as well as gluten bread, and we serve juice, not wine, so that all may partake.)

Prayer of Thanksgiving *unison*

We thank you, God, for inviting us to this table where we have known the presence of Christ and have received all Christ’s gifts. Please strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and let us show forth your praise in our lives by following the way of Christ with joy. May it be no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us, our truest and best self. Amen

*Benediction

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

Postlude Rumanian Dance #4, Buciumeana B. Bartok

** Those who are comfortably able may stand.*

Please stay for refreshments and neighborliness in the Parish Hall.

Video recorded services, bulletins and newsletters are available on our website unitedchurchofstrafford.com.

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

Sign up for **weekly emails** about upcoming worship and other news at unitedchurchofstrafford@gmail.com

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

Today: Circle Conversation on LGBTQ+ Matters Please join us for hearty refreshments after worship today followed by a circle conversation that is open to all members of our church community. This will be a safe space to share our personal experiences and listen with open hearts and minds to our stories about how people who identify as LGBTQ+ (including some of us) have been treated in our families, churches, schools and other communities. Stories might include positive experiences, negative experiences, or tales of moving from negative to positive over time. All experiences and feelings are welcome, and will be held in this circle in confidence. You are welcome to speak or just listen, as the Spirit moves you.

Next Sunday, May 14th: Story Sunday 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 are May 14th: "Our Mothering God" in honor of Mother's Day and June 11th: "Gifts of the Spirit."

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Next Concerts Admission by donation, 20% goes to the church's Manheim Fund for the Arts. Featuring pianist Annemieke McLane:

Friday, May 19th, 7:00 PM

Friday, June 9th, 7:00 PM

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 dynamic, informative 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, and many to come.

Video and Resources Available: Understanding Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation

Christa Wurm led this interactive workshop. The experience was powerful and transformative for many. Please email the church for the link to the video and resource document.

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.

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.

Covid Precautions at Church The wearing of masks is encouraged but not required. Thank you for helping the church be a safe place!

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Mission Committee Update: A Big Thanks, Helping Immigrant Children and Victims of Tornadoes

First, we want to thank Carmen and Emmett Wurm for inspiring our church with their letter and donation to World Central Kitchen to help the earthquake victims in Turkey. The congregation really got on board and, including the children's donation and a donation from the Mission Committee, we sent off \$727 to World Central Kitchen for meals to be served in Turkey. Thank you, dear Carmen and Emmett for inspiring us and thanks to all who donated!

Also, the Mission Committee recently made a donation to Church World Service for two different purposes. We asked them to use half of the donation to support unaccompanied immigrant children who are fleeing violence, persecution and desperation, providing them with access to education, medical and other services. We asked that the other half be used for CWS kits and blankets for victims of the recent tornadoes in this country.

Please let us know if you have ideas for Mission Work. Thank you.

With love and gratitude,
Danette Harris, Maggie Hooker and Cameron Speth

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.

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Congregational Meeting May 21st after worship We will have a Congregational Meeting on May 21st to decide whether to move forward to the next, final steps in our Open and Affirming process. The first step, our educational series, will conclude on May 7th. 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.” May 21st will be the first of these two votes. If we vote then 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.

If there are any participants who cannot for some reason be at the meeting in person, but would still like to vote, here is the procedure:

- Request a paper ballot from the moderator, Joey Hawkins. Be sure to include your mailing address. You will be sent a paper ballot. Email joeylornell@gmail.com
- Register your vote on the paper ballot, sign the envelope (NOT the ballot itself) and mail it back to Moderator, United Church of Strafford, PO Box 124, Strafford VT 05072.
- Make sure to send your ballot so that it arrives by May 20, 2023.
- Your vote will be counted along with all the other paper ballots at the May 21 meeting.

Haiku by Mel Goertz:

Little green leaves
on a slow gray day
give me sudden happiness.

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