



United Church of Strafford, Vermont

January 7, 2024

Epiphany Sunday

MH=Methodist Hymnal; PH=Pilgrim Hymnal

January 7, 2024

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.*

Certain events...serve as signposts.... Thomas Merton identified the 'signs of the times' as *kairos*—a quality of time that is eternal, when time is full of meaning and events point to divine purpose.... When millions of people experience the same event or series of critical events in the world, these events become, according to Merton, occasions to discern the signs of the times. And the messages they contain are not only for the individual but also for the community of faith and the world at large....

Kairos means that the opportunity is right. It is the right time, the real moment, the critical event, the chance of our lives. When our time becomes kairos, it opens up endless new possibilities and offers us a constant opportunity for a change of heart. The events of life—even such dark events as war, famine and flood, violence and murder—are not irreversible fatalities but rather carry within themselves the possibility of becoming a moment of change.

Henry Nouwen from Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life

Gathering Music

Becky Bailey

Silent Prayer of Invocation

Pastor Tom Kinder

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship

Responsive Reading *from Isaiah 60* John Echeverria

Leader: Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

People: **For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you
and his glory will appear over you.**

Leader: Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

People: **Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,**

Leader: A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.

People: **They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.**

***Hymn** PH #145 O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright

Future Directions Vision as a Unison Reading

Silent Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Pardon and Grace

Children's Time and Lord's Prayer

Anthem

Scripture Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon Discerning What the Signs Are Saying

***Hymn** What Were the Wise Expecting *hymn folder*

Sharing of Joys, Concerns, Prayer Requests and Reflections

How do you read the signs of the times as we enter a new and fateful year? Where are they pointing, and where does the Spirit seem to be calling and leading us in response, as individuals and a congregation, or as a town, nation or world?

Time of Prayer

Call to Offering

***Hymn** PH #144 What Star Is This, With Beams so Bright

Invitation to Holy Communion

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

** Those who are comfortably able may stand.*

Past sermons are available on the back table.

Video recorded services, sermon texts and bulletins 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

Story Sundays Continue Rachel Guaraldi leads worship for children and all ages, usually on the second Sunday of each month. The services focus on a big question or theme that they explore through stories, songs and reflections. The next Story Sunday will be the third Sunday this month, January 21st.

Childcare We welcome children of all ages to the United Church of Strafford! Childcare is available during the church service for children second grade and younger.

Pastoral Care: Those in need can reach out to Deacons Becky Bailey (rbailey@sover.net), Debby Richie (dc.richie@hotmail.com), and Cameron Speth (cece@speth.com) or call the church number.

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

Sunday afternoons at 4:00 PM:

January 21 "Healing Powers of Music"

February 4 "All Bach"

March 17 "French Connections"

Friday evenings at 7:00 PM:

April 5th, with Jim Schley and Becky Bailey

May 10th, with Jeremiah McLane

June 21 "Summertime"

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Fulfilling Our Vision Committee Update: You can find the Future Directions Vision we are working to fulfill printed on the pew card. Our Native American Reparations Fund has been established, with a generous start-up donation from a member of our congregation. If you would like to contribute, please make your donation to The United Church of Strafford and indicate "Reparations." We are exploring various ways to use this fund. Our first intent is to support Abenaki needs and wishes here in Vermont. We will provide periodic updates, although confidentiality will be needed in some cases, as with the Deacons Fund. We are also working to fulfill the Implementation Plan for our Open and Affirming Covenant. You can find the link to both the covenant and the plan near the top of the Welcome Page of our website. Keep your eyes and ears open for welcoming language, fresh signs, community building, and active kindness in our church space and beyond! FOV meetings will resume the first Tuesday evening of every month, beginning in February. Please contact Kate Reimanis with any questions or ideas.

Daily Meditation Sessions Our Heartfulness Circle offers an informal meditation gathering on Zoom every evening from 7:30 to 8:10 PM. On Thursdays we have an extended session starting at 7:00 PM. See our website Welcome page for the Zoom link and details.

Haiku by Mel Goertz:

Chickadees flew to the railing to feed.

No sound from their wings.

Silence.

***We are an Open and Affirming Congregation.
Whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey,
you are welcome here!***

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