



**United Church of Strafford, Vermont**

February 4, 2024

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

*MH=Methodist Hymnal; PH=Pilgrim Hymnal*

February 4, 2024

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

**United Church of Strafford**

230 Justin Morrill Highway

PO Box 124, Strafford, Vermont 05072

802-765-4585

Email: [unitedchurchofstrafford@gmail.com](mailto:unitedchurchofstrafford@gmail.com)

[rev.thomas.cary.kinder@gmail.com](mailto:rev.thomas.cary.kinder@gmail.com)

Website: [unitedchurchofstrafford.com](http://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.*

“The Kingdom of God [on earth] will be a society in which men and women live as children of God should live. It will be a kingdom controlled by the law of love.” *Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*

“Dr. Vivek Murthy, who is currently serving as the 21st Surgeon General of the United States, is the first person in this position to have taken his oath on the *Bhagavad Gita*, the sacred Hindu scripture.... There is much that sets Murthy apart from his predecessors, but one detail stands out: **he’s a high-ranking government official who insists on the importance of care, compassion and deep listening. Love, he says, is the foundation of good policies and needs to inform the nation’s public health agenda....** [Murthy says,] ‘We need to recognize that we may not have the same point of view as somebody else, we may not see the world in the same way or have the same life experiences, but every person is deserving of respect as a human being; that’s the one essential premise.’” *The Guardian interview, January 29, 2024*

**Gathering Music**

Annemieke McLane

**Silent Prayer of Invocation**

Pastor Tom Kinder

**Prelude** “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands” arr. by P. Wolf

**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.

**Introit** “O Freedom” African-American Spiritual

## Welcome and Announcements

### Call to Worship

**Responsive Reading** *from Psalm 147* Beth Randall

**Leader:** A song of praise is fitting  
for the God whose Spirit  
of forgiveness and graciousness  
flows through all creation!

**People:** **For the Spirit builds beloved community,  
gathering in all who have been shut out.**

**Leader:** The Spirit heals the brokenhearted,  
and binds up their wounds.

**People:** **How vast is the Spirit of the universe,  
sparking into being every star in every galaxy,  
a power beyond understanding,**

**Leader:** And that same Spirit lifts up the downtrodden  
and works against doers of injustice.

**People:** **Sing to God with thanksgiving,  
make melodies to God on stringed instruments,**

**Leader:** For the Spirit of life fills the earth  
with the good things we need,  
sun and rain and grain in the fields,

**People:** **Giving nourishment to all creatures,  
feeding young ravens when they cry.**

**Leader:** God’s pleasure is not in the wealthy or powerful,  
not in the strength of the horse  
or speed of the runner—

**People:** **God takes delight in all who feel awe  
at the greatness and goodness of the Spirit,  
and who place their hope in the power  
of the Spirit’s steadfast love.**

**\*Hymn** God Holds the Whole World in Loving Hands *see page five  
page two*

**\*Reading of Our Open and Affirming Covenant** (in unison)

### Silent Prayer of Confession

### Assurance of Pardon and Grace

**Anthem** “Come Sunday” Duke Ellington

**Scripture** Isaiah 40:28-31; Mark 1:29-39

**Sermon** A Society Ruled by the Law of Love

**\*Hymn** MH #375 There Is a Balm in Gilead

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

Jesus and wise teachers of all traditions offer an alternative vision of how society can be—ruled not by destructive violence and greed but by compassion, kindness and love, leading to healing and peace. What can we do as a church to make clear what kind of society we stand for and want to help build? What can we do right now, in this fateful year of 2024, to promote our alternative vision?

### 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.)*

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### **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** Sarabande, French Suite II J. S. Bach

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

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

**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 Strafford

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

**New Members Group** If you are interested in becoming an official member of this congregation, please speak with Pastor Tom Kinder. The process involves reflecting on your spiritual journey and learning about the history, structure and mission of this church.

**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 February 11<sup>th</sup>. *page four*

God holds the whole world in loving hands,  
God holds the whole world in loving hands,  
God holds the whole world in loving hands,  
God holds the whole world in love's hands.

God holds the earth and all its creatures in loving hands,  
God holds the earth and all its creatures in loving hands,  
God holds the earth and all its creatures in loving hands,  
God holds the whole world in love's hands.

God holds the left, the right—all people in loving hands,  
God holds the black, the white—all people in loving hands,  
God holds the gay, the trans—all people in loving hands,  
God holds the whole world in love's hands.

Love holds the whole world through our hands.  
Love holds the whole world through our hands.  
Love holds the whole world through our hands.  
God holds the whole world in love's hands.

### **Update from the Mission Committee: Supporting Our Youth in Strafford and Across the Country and Central America**

We have offered to support one or two campers for this summer's Green Mountain Conservation Camp. Also, we supported Covenant House whose mission is to "continue to fight human trafficking and relentlessly support young people facing homelessness. We're committed to helping young people get back on their feet and onto their next chapters." Their many shelters across the US and in Central America work "to provide safe housing and holistic care to youth ages 16–21." Please let any one of us know if you have ideas for mission work. With gratitude and love, Danette Harris, Maggie Hooker and Cameron Speth

**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.

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**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.

**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.

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

*Sunday afternoon at 4:00 PM:*

February 4 “All Bach”

March 17 “French Connections”

*Friday evenings at 7:00 PM:*

April 5th, with poet, Jim Schley

May 10th, with Jeremiah McLane

June 21 “Summertime”

**Open and Affirming Covenant**  
*Adopted unanimously at Annual Meeting  
on September 17, 2023  
after a well-informed, careful process  
open to our entire church family.*

We, the members of the United Church of Strafford, Vermont, regard all people as beloved children of God. We give thanks for the many and diverse gifts of God among us.

We declare ourselves to be an Open and Affirming congregation. We welcome and accept into full participation, membership and leadership, people of every sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, faith background, political affiliation, age, marital status and family structure, physical or mental abilities, education and economic status. We acknowledge with humility that this list is not exhaustive and that the terms are in some cases harmful and evolving social constructs. We honor the worth and dignity of all people. We affirm all relationships founded on the principles of love, justice, the Golden Rule and treating others as they wish to be treated.

We commit ourselves to integrate the spirit of this covenant into all aspects of our church life. We pledge to work to end oppression, discrimination and hateful behaviors whenever we encounter them, and, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to help create the beloved community of God’s realm on earth.

Whoever you are, wherever you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.

**Haiku by Mel Goertz:**

Beauty in wild turkeys  
feeding under  
a wild apple tree.