

I CAN DO
EVERYTHING
THROUGH HIM
WHO GIVES ME
STRENGTH.

- PHILIPPIANS 4:13 -



We Gather for Worship

Prelude & Entrance of Christ's Light

Gratitude Moments

*Call to Worship

L: We gather together to worship our God.

P: Let us focus our hearts and minds on Christ.

L: We invite the Spirit to inspire and lead us.

P: Come, Holy Spirit, fill our worship with joy and God's love.

*Hymn "We Are the Church"

UMH #558

A Time for the Child in All of Us

Ministry of Music

Prayer (unison)

Grace-giving God, as we gather in this community of faith, help us to remember that we worship in Jesus' name and that we have been called here as your children to build community with each other, to engage in ministry in the world, and to welcome others to know the love of Jesus for all people. May we claim his promise to be with us in all things and manifest his presence to the world through what we do in his name. Thank you for your guidance and for leading us forward to make positive differences in the lives of others. Amen.

Sung Response "Glory to God in the Highest"

TFWS #2276

We Proclaim the Word

Reading the Word 1 Corinthians 13; Philippians 4:13

L: The Word of God for the People of God.

P: Thanks be to God.

Message "The Greatest of These is Love"

Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson

*Hymn "Blest Be the Tie That Binds"

UMH #557

We Respond to God's Word

Prayers of the People

Silent Prayer and Pastoral Prayer

The Lord's Prayer (unison)

Our Father, who are in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Gratitude Moment

John VanReenen

Giving of Our Tithes and Offerings

*Doxology (Please join in singing the following)

UMH #94

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise God, all creatures here below; Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise God, the source of all our gifts! Praise Jesus Christ, whose power uplifts! Praise the Spirit, Holy Spirit, Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

*Prayer of Dedication (unison)

Lord our God, we thank you for making us your blessed children. Teach us to live as your holy people, obeying your commands in our hearts, and giving ourselves in loving service to others. Receive these offerings and transform them into ways to serve you and your people. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

We Go Forth to Serve

*Hymn "Forward Through the Ages"

UMH #555

*Choral Benediction (Congregation encircles the Sanctuary)

May the Lord, gracious God bless and keep you forever. Grant you peace, perfect peace, courage in every endeavor. Lift up your eyes and seek his face and his grace forever. May the Lord, mighty God bless and keep you forever.

*Pastor's Charge

Postlude

**Please stand as you are comfortable*

*TFWS = The Faith We Sing UMH = United Methodist Hymnal
Large print bulletins are available from the greeters*



UPCOMING EVENTS

2/16 - SPRC meeting after worship.

2/18 - Church council meeting office at 6 pm, all are welcome. This is not a closed meeting.

2/18 - Church Council meeting will be held at 6:00 pm.

2/26 - Ash Wednesday service will begin our Lenten season with a service held in the sanctuary at 12:00 noon.

Sundays - Church Service starts at 10 a.m. Sunday School is right after the children's sermon and we look forward to catching up with you during coffee hour after the worship service...see you there.

Everyday - Be a Prayer Warrior and lift up the world and its people in prayer.

Sometime this week - write a note, card or visit one of our family members who are either living in assisted living, nursing care or homebound.

2020 Flower chart - is posted in the Narthex. You can bring your own arrangement or have the church order them at a cost of \$25 to you. This is a great way to honor, remember, thank or let someone know they are appreciated.

Altar flowers - Are in honor of Steve Westcott.



PRAYER LIST

Timberland Family
Dave Richards
Dan Strange
Bobbie Noble
The Westcott Family

Julia West
Judy Doyon
Rev. Charles Hartman
Emily - for the Fernandez Family
Our Denomination
Our Church Family

All those living in assisted living, nursing care or homebound



WORSHIP TEAM

Pastor - Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson
Pastor's Assistant - David Richards
Liturgist - Nancy Chesser
Lay Leader - Susan Sarosiek
Acolyte - Kaya Sarosiek
Director of Music - Bevan Bloemendaal

Greeters - Jane Richards &
Marilyn Stebbins
Ushers - John & Cathy VanReenen
Sound Tech - Sue Sarosiek
Worship Service Tech - Steve Scott
Photographer - Dave Atkinson
Sunday School - Aerial Sillanpaa &
Rosie Buswell



FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



New England Annual Conference Tri-State District
The Rev. Sudarshana Devadhar, Bishop
The Rev. Taesung Kang, District Superintendent

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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Pastor office hours - Tuesday and Thursday 9 am - 12 pm
[call to ensure availability]
Pastor - Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson

Check out our website at www.fumcportsmouth.com

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT GIVEN BY
REV. DR. DEB HANSON

“The Greatest of These is Love” - 2/16/2020

First UMC - Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson

SCRIPTURES: 1 Corinthians 13; Philippians 4:13

THEME: Because God loves us, we share that love with others.

The scripture passages today came to mind this week as we saw and experienced what is going on in our lives and in our world. I could list everything, but we might be here for a long time! Suffice it to say that we have had two funerals in the last two weeks, a heinous act of violence at Timberland, violence in actions and words reported in the news media, and the list could go on and on. In our community, state, nation, and world, we as the church can, and I believe MUST, bring a message that counteracts the negatives.

We may not think that we can make a difference; the world is so big and so much is happening. How can we cause a ripple effect big enough to change things? On a web site called “Humanity Healing” the author writes: “Everything we do and think affects the people in our lives and their reactions in turn affect others. The choices you make have far-reaching consequences. Each of us carries within us the capacity to change the world in small ways for better or worse. We can use the Principles of the Ripple Effect to magnify our actions and their effects.” (<http://humanityhealing.org/who-we-are/the-ripple-effect/>)

The ripple effect describes what happens when one act of kindness produces another and another and another until the ripples reach much farther than we could have imagined. We really can make a difference beginning right where we are, one person, one situation at a time.

There is a story called “The Starfish Story” based on a true event and adapted from the book *The Star Thrower* written by Loren Eiseley (1907 - 1977) who was an anthropologist and included this in his book. As I said, this is an adaptation of that story:

Once upon a time, there was a wise man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach before he began his work. One day, as he was walking along the shore, he looked down the beach and saw a human figure moving like a dancer. He smiled to himself at the thought of someone who would dance to the day, and so, he walked faster to catch up. As he got closer, he noticed that the figure was that of a young man, and that what he was doing was not dancing at all. The young man was reaching down to the shore, picking up small objects, and throwing them into the ocean. He came closer still and called out "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?" The young man paused, looked up, and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean." "I must ask, then, why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?" asked the somewhat startled wise man. To this, the young man replied, "The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in, they'll die." Upon hearing this, the wise man commented, "But, young man, do you not realize that there are miles and miles of beach and there are starfish all along every mile? You can't possibly make a difference!" At this, the young man bent down, picked up yet another starfish, and threw it into the ocean. As it met the water, he said, "It made a difference for that one."

Think of the way the ripple effect invites others to make a difference for even one person. There are people who pay a toll for the car behind them or someone who buys the coffee for the person behind them or all the police officers or even for a bunch of people, none of whom ever expected to have it handed to them with the comment, “It’s already been paid.” Acts of kindness open doors for more acts of kindness. They are acts of the type of love God wants us to share in the world, in our lives, in and through our churches.

1 Corinthians 13 is one of the scripture readings that addresses this through a description of God’s love that manifests through the way church folks live and interact with each other. This passage is quite familiar to many people and is most often read at weddings, erroneously thinking that it is about romantic love. Paul’s intention was not to teach about romantic love - “Eros” in Greek, although,

there is nothing wrong with reading this for anyone who is entering into a marriage covenant. But we miss the intentions of Paul's writing when we focus only on this one aspect of 1 Corinthians 13.

When we read this passage in a larger context, we learn that the church in Corinth was constantly fighting and bickering over what it meant to be a church and how to act as the church. Paul's letters were meant to help them understand the love of God that leads them to get along. In earlier chapters, he addressed their gifts and encouraged them to recognize everyone's gifts as equal and important to the life of the church, regardless of how seemingly insignificant that gift may be.

Apparently, some of them bragged about having better gifts than another person and that their gifts were more important than others. Because of their bickering, they had lost their direction and focus: the poor were being neglected; they argued over speaking in tongues and the importance of having prophetic visions; some folks took the more visible and prominent seats in the worship center, and some built themselves up as the most important people in the church. In other words, according to Paul, they were acting childish. They didn't have all the answers, and their disagreements were moving them away from living the way God wanted them to live and serving as Jesus had called them to serve.

The Greek word "Agape" is the kind of love that means giving, caring, compassionate, kind, selfless, patient, celebrating others, building others up, seeking the wholeness and well-being of others. That kind of love doesn't end but grows and builds. We don't understand it because, as Paul says, "We only see in a mirror dimly." We see ourselves with a dim idea of God's presence somewhere around us.

We cannot comprehend all of God's love for us because God's love is far too deep and wide. We only know what we read in scripture and experience through our faith journeys and with those who are on the journey with us. God knows us completely; we cannot know God completely or even another person completely. When we see God face to face, we will know, but until then we can strive to live into the fullness of God's love which is a life-long process. Love - God's love and the love we share with others - will never end. No one can remove that from us because it is God's gift to us.

And we can do this because, as Philippians 4:13 tells us, "We can do all things through Christ which strengthen us." Responding to the challenges we face in life will be more bearable because we have that anchor in Christ. It is Christ who holds us up, carries us, loves us, leads us, brings people to walk with us, and who guides us through the valleys and up the hills. Dealing with grief, anger, frustration, loss, is exhausting. Watching the news is exhausting. We may not know what the day holds for us, but one anchor in our lives is knowing that Jesus walks with us and gives us the strength to keep on keeping on.

The church has a commission to be part of helping people to know and understand that anchor, as well as living it and demonstrating it. In Corinth, people had forgotten that, and their behavior revealed that it was all about them. Being the church ISN'T about ourselves, it's about Jesus Christ without whom we would and could not exist. We are the messengers and builders of the Kingdom of God who carry the message of God's love into the world. Of course, we aren't perfect, that's why God sent Jesus to bring forgiveness and the chance to start over again when we have gone off track.

As Christians, as part of a church, as followers of Jesus, the love of God described in 1 Corinthians 13 is our model and goal. We live it in our lives wherever we are. As I've said before, we don't go into the world to represent the church, we ARE the church. The building is a means of offering ministry, but we spend the majority of our lives outside the church building, striving to live faithfully, interacting with family, friends, and co-workers, encountering strangers who, as Hebrews 13:1 reminds us to "Show hospitality in our interactions with others because we may be entertaining angels without realizing it."

Our faith is lived in the context of the community of faith, and it doesn't stay in one place but is part of who we are in the way we live our lives. As I said earlier, we just never know what will happen from day to day when we go into the marketplace, to work, in our neighborhoods, or wherever we are.

Think of families and friends who were killed in the Oklahoma City bombing, or the 911 terrorist attacks, or shootings in schools and at businesses, or the thousands of people who are killed on the streets, in car accidents, or who die from drug overdoses or illnesses. When your loved ones go out the door, don't hesitate to tell them you love them and hold them tight.

When I was growing up, we all knew that our parents loved us, but we rarely said the words. It was an assumption – a given. After we children were grown, and had children of our own, I was talking with my sister on the phone and she told me about something that changed the way she interacted with the family. Her husband was on the phone with his mother, and right before they hung up, they each said, "Love you." My brother-in-law's relationship with his family was often rocky and challenging, but they always said "Love you" when they hung up the phone or left after a visit.

Shortly after he ended his call, my sister was talking with my mom on the phone, and they said "good bye" and hung up. It was at that point that one of my sister's children, asked, "Mom, why didn't you tell grandma that you loved her?" She thought about it and decided that it was something she needed to change, so when we hung up that day, we both agreed that we would start saying, "Love you" to our siblings and parents and others who are close to us. Over the years since we started it, we say it often and whenever we hang up, or leave to go somewhere. As a result, our family has become closer, and even though we don't always agree, we still say, "Love you" knowing that love can change our hearts and help us work through anything we face together or between us. In the Greek, this would be Philos, the kind of love we feel for someone close to us. When we express our love for family and friends, we wish the best for them and walk with them on the journey.

It's the same in the church. We say "Love you," maybe not verbally, but through the ways we treat each other, the listening ear we offer, the friendship, the phone call of caring, the visiting of the shut-ins, bringing food to those who need a little help, accepting people by trying to stand in their place and really understand what they are saying, by treating everyone as a valued and beloved child of God. "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NRSV) God's agape love is a broader term encompassing a much larger group of people, people with whom we share things in common as well as strangers we meet. The Bible talks about agape love more than any other type of love, and that is what we see in this passage.

We don't and won't be perfect at this agape love, but because of God's great love for us in Jesus, we can keep moving on to perfection, as John Wesley (the founder of Methodism) called it. We move on not to flawlessness but to wholeness in God's love – a life-long journey. We do this because we have Jesus as the head of our church – it's not about us but about him. That's where we start, where we anchor our lives, where we keep on keeping on. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray (sing from Worship & Song "Give me Jesus" #3140):

In the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise,
In the morning when I rise, give me Jesus.

Give me Jesus, give me Jesus,
You can have all this world, give me Jesus.

When I am alone, when I am alone,
When WE are alone, give us Jesus.

Give us Jesus, give us Jesus,
You can have all this world, give us Jesus. Amen