



**With All Your Heart
Lenten Series 2019**

“IMITATING”

**March 17, 2019
FUMC Portsmouth, NH**

We Gather for Worship

Prelude & Entrance of Christ's Light

Celebrations

***Call to Worship**

L: We are on a journey of faith. Jesus is our leader and our guide.

P: We place our trust in him.

L: As the daylight hours grow longer, our journey takes on an urgency.

P: We must prepare our hearts for Jerusalem.

L: Do not fear! God goes before us, into Jerusalem, into the world.

P: Amen!

***Hymn: "Fairest Lord Jesus"**

UMH #189

A Time for the Child in all of Us

Prayer (unison)

God of promises fulfilled, we gather as descendants of Abraham; we stand before you as faithful testimony to your covenant; we assemble as living proof that your love for humanity knows no limits. When we feel overwhelmed by the stresses of daily life, we need only look at the stars in the sky to remember your abiding faithfulness. When we are overcome with despair by the pain of war and poverty in our world, we need only see the light of a single candle to remember the one you sent as our light, our strength, and our salvation. We pray now in the name of that light, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sung Response

"Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying"

TFWS #2193

Ministry of Music

We Proclaim the Word

Reading the Word: Genesis 15:1-12; Philippians 3:17-4:1

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

P: Thanks be to God.

Message: "Imitating"

Rev. Deb Hanson

We Respond to God's Word

***Hymn: "O Jesus, I Have Promised"**

UMH #396

Concerns and Joys

Silent Prayer and Pastoral Prayer

The Lord's Prayer (unison)

Our Father, who art 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 in temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

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)

Faithful God, you have kept your promises to us. Our lives give witness to your abundant blessings. May we faithfully keep our promises to you. Strengthen our commitment to live as true disciples of Jesus Christ. Your love sustains us, guides us, and empowers us. Take these gifts as signs of our promise to give ourselves completely into your care—to live without fear; to trust your love without reservation. Amen.

We Go Forth to Serve

***Hymn:** "Great is Thy Faithfulness" UMH #140

*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*

Large print bulletins are available from the greeters

UMH = United Methodist Hymnal TFWS = The Faith We Sing

Welcome!

Whether you are joining us for worship for the first time or after many years of attending here at First UMC, we want you to know that you are welcome!

We are an inclusive community that invites everyone to be part of our church fellowship. Thank you for being here, and we hope that you have had a meaningful experience of worshiping our God so you leave this place feeling that you have been blessed to be a blessing. Please join us again!



Rev. Deb Hanson

Pastor - Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson

Pastor's Assistant - David Richards

Liturgist - John VanReenan

Lay Leader - Susan Sarosiek

Director of Music - Bevan Bloemendaal

Acolyte - Alexa Langs

Greeters - Yvonne Griffin & Marilyn Stebbins

Ushers - Jan & Al Cansdale

Sunday School - Dave & Sue Richards

Sound Tech - Sue Sarosiek

Worship Service Tech - Steve Scott

Photographer - Dave Atkinson



Today's altar flowers are in thanksgiving to all our first responders.

**PRAYER IS THE PLACE
WHERE BURDENS CHANGE
SHOULDERS. WE GIVE OUR
BURDENS TO GOD AND
HE GIVES US HIS PEACE.**

**Gayle Gardei
Marion Collishaw
Sue Goodhue
Hunter Pinkley
Sylvia Bartlett
BrianThompson
Our Church family
Gil Stebbins
Rev. Bill Gardei
Woodie Lange
Roseanne
Rev. David Kerr
Jim New
Kim Hishop**

**Barbara & Jim Slater
Barbara Sylvester
Pauline Boynton
Barbara Millar
Irene Derosier
Barbara Clement
Malia Broe
Joette MacKenzie
Vicky Fernandez
Alissa Fernandez
Art Munson
Gabor [Brianna's father in-law]
Family of Trudy Parkhurst
Pastor Sue Ellery**



Today, Sunday March 17th marks the the second Sunday of Lent and our Lenten Series “Imitating”. It is through your heartfelt kindness that we continue our community outreach with the “Give Hope” campaign and a challenge...the 40 day - 40 item challenge!

Each day of Lent, remove one item from your closet/home that you longer wear or need and put it into this bag. At the end of Lent we will gather all the bags on Easter Sunday service and donate the items to the community who can really use them. Thanks for being part the Lent Challenge of giving hope to others... With all our heart...Thank you!

Month of March is Women’s History Month. Celebrate and learn about Women’s History throughout the month of March. Reaching out and learning about each others experience makes us all stronger together.

Offering envelopes are available on the kitchen counter for those that would like them.

Church Council March 19th @ 6pm Church office

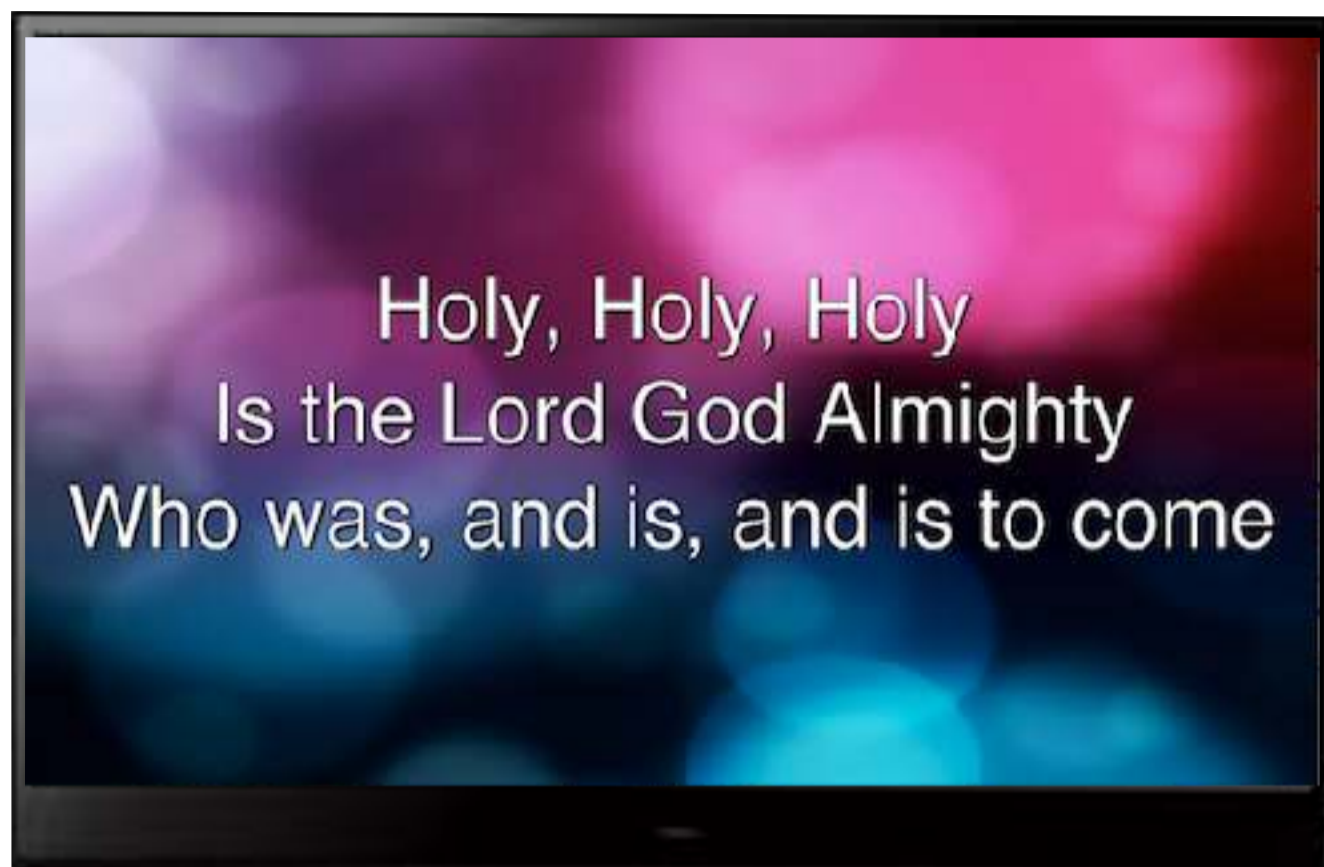
Trudy Parkhurst Memorial March 30th @ 10:30 in the sanctuary

Spring Clean Up April 6th 9-2pm lunch is provided

Lent 40 Day 40 Item Challenge
Remember one item a day!

UPCOMING
EVENTS

MARK YOUR CALENDARS



The Finance Trustees are looking for donations to replace the outdated screen and projector being used each Sunday with a large LED monitor. Please see John VanReenen for details.



**FUMC PORTSMOUTH
A RECONCILING CONGREGATION**

**We, the congregation of the First
United Methodist Church of Portsmouth,**



New Hampshire, are dedicated to worshiping, 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. James McPhee, 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 GIVEN 3/17/19 BY
REV. DR. DEB HANSON

“Imitating” – 3/17/19

First UMC – Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson

SCRIPTURES: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Philippians 3:17-4:1

THEME: Learning to trust is part of the journey of faith.

A man asked God how long a million years was to God. God replied, “It’s just like a single second of your time, my child.” So the man asked, “And what about a million dollars?” The Lord replied, “To me, it’s just like a single penny.” So the man gathered himself up and said, “Well, Lord, could I have one of your pennies?” And God said, “Certainly, my child, just a second.” (Illustrations Unlimited, p. 410, #5)

For Abraham, waiting for God to fulfill the promise of an heir must have felt like one of God’s seconds. He had given up everything: left with his immediate family, traveled to an unfamiliar land, wandered through the wilderness and into Egypt where he tried to pass Sarah, his wife, off as his sister in order to save his own neck, and waited for God provide an heir for them. He waited a long time and was beginning to wonder if God would ever follow through with that promise.

When he questioned God, the answer was that indeed, Abraham and Sarah would have a son together who would be their heir. God told Abraham to look at the stars in the sky and know that his descendants would number as numerous as all those stars. That’s a lot of stars! Some estimate that the number is 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 - one septillion – that’s 24 zeros! That’s a lot of offspring! Is it any wonder Abraham questioned this when he and Sarah continued to be barren?

Up until this time, Abraham seemingly has followed God fairly faithfully and trusted in God’s guidance, but just like a lot of us when things don’t seem to happen fast enough, he wondered if maybe he had heard God’s promise wrong or if God had forgotten about it, or if God was just too busy to pay attention. God would make the promise and then – silence – nothing happened. I don’t know about you, but when I want an answer to prayer and have to wait and wait and wait, I become impatient or think that maybe it’s just not going to happen. This is what Abraham was experiencing. His trust in God was sagging, and his faith was fading away, his patience growing thin, even when God says, “No, I really meant what I said – you will have a son!” Uh huh. Right. Is it any wonder Abraham questioned God?

How many times in our lives have we been in a waiting-type situation like Abraham’s? Maybe we have waited for answers to test results, or have sat by the beside of a loved one who is dying, or hoped for a good outcome from a job interview, or some other challenge. Maybe we waited a long time, and our faith in God’s presence through all of it was tested. Maybe we felt alone and discouraged, abandoned by God and others. Abraham was there, and he questioned. Questioning is part of how we grow in faith as we seek to trust God. So many people just give up and end up rejecting God, but it seems to me that the longer we hang on, even if it by a thin thread, our faith, trust and hope begin to grow.

Patience isn’t easy at times, and, even as God told Abraham to look to the stars and beyond his present circumstance, we learn patience by following that example. Years ago, I heard a story about a young nun who prayed fervently for patience. She was assigned to be the

companion to an elderly nun who was known for being demanding and cantankerous. The young nun put up with the older nun's behaviors for two years, and to her credit, she didn't complain or gripe. She ministered to the woman to the best of her ability. Eventually, the older nun died, and the young nun returned to her mother superior for her next assignment. But before she learned what it was, she asked the mother superior why she had been assigned to the older nun. Mother Superior asked her what she had learned. After thinking about the question for a few minutes, the younger nun realized that she really had learned patience, not instantly but through persistence and practice. Patience needs to be practiced in order to be learned, and it strengthened the younger woman's faith.

Abraham was learning patience, and in the verses that followed God's reiteration of the promise of an heir, God also reaffirmed the covenant with Abraham. Biblical covenants are not like what we would think of as a covenant. Most of the time, we think that it takes two people to make a covenant as in a marriage or a contract. But in Biblical times, the covenant was pretty one sided with God making the promises and doing some action to seal the covenant. God is the one who initiates, sets the conditions for the covenant, promises to fulfill the covenant, confirms it and acts out the agreement of the covenant.

So, in our scripture we have this covenant agreement in which animals are cut in half and God passes through with fire. God institutes a familiar ancient middle Eastern way of covenanting in order to assure Abraham that God will follow through with the promise. Kind of a gross way to do it, but it was understood by anyone who read or heard about it. In this covenant ritual, Abraham is only an observer. To us, this is strange to say the least, but it would have been familiar to the ancients. The expectation is that Abraham will follow the covenant and continue to be in faithful relationship with God, trusting God's promise and ability to bring about the birth of an heir. Yet, even after all that, Abraham would have to wait even longer for his son to be born, but eventually, Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah.

The journey of faith isn't always an easy one, and trust in God may be especially difficult when times get tough. Today is St. Patrick's Day, and, when we look at the story of this Patron Saint of Ireland, we have an interesting journey of trust and patience. Patrick was born in Great Britain to a Roman family of high standing. Interestingly, Patrick was not raised with a strong emphasis on religion, and he wasn't highly educated. At the age of 16, he was captured by Irish pirates and sold into slavery in Ireland. Patrick's master was a high priest of Druidism, which was a pagan religious sect that had great influence over Ireland. He saw his enslavement as a test of his faith in God, and he prayed constantly, believing that he was called to eventually escape and then return to Ireland to convert the people to Christianity.

He did escape and returned to his family in Britain, but he also pursued the priesthood and was ordained. Patrick *did* return to Ireland, and in spite of some resistance to his evangelizing at first, he eventually spread Christian teachings with the help of some other missionaries, and Christianity spread throughout Ireland. Patrick worked diligently, and never gave up. There are some legends about him, such as driving the snakes out of Ireland and teaching about the Trinity using a shamrock, but what we can learn from Patrick is trust in God even in times of challenge and difficulty. (information from www.biography.com/people/st-patrick-9434729). Patrick sets an example of faithfully hanging on and believing that God had called him to minister to the people of the very country where he had been held as a slave.

Our epistle lesson reminds us that the Apostle Paul, also was someone who was challenged and often imprisoned for sharing the Good News of the gospel. He entered into Gentile territory and was often met with resistance to his message. The church in Philippi was one of those that he founded. Paul was always open about being “the chief of sinners.” Before his conversion on the road to Damascus, he had persecuted Christians and often was present when they were put to death.

After his conversion, he was full of the Spirit and brought the message of salvation in Christ to many locations. Although there are situations around the world where people are persecuted and imprisoned for being Christian, we don’t have the same type of experiences when we try to share our faith with others. Paul encouraged the church at Philippi to ignore false teachings, to imitate him in the way that he tried to live for Christ, and to stand firmly together as the Body of Christ in the world. The world will be transformed for those who live in the example and follow the teachings of Jesus.

Imitating others who trust in God, live their faith openly, and continue to grow in faith helps all of us to be transformed by the power of the Spirit. Through such transformation, we make a difference in the world. One of my colleagues was asked to introduce himself including where he lived at the beginning of a meeting we attended. His response was that he was a sojourner on this earth, but his true citizenship was in heaven. We are told to live in this world but not of it. In other words, don’t let the world dictate who you are, what you do, and how you live. Instead, turn to God for guidance and trust in God’s presence on the journey, even when it’s not readily evident.

Keeping trust in God isn’t always easy. When we choose to follow Jesus, we will give up things. Think about Paul. His life totally changed when he became a follower. He lost many things: relationships, his way of life, his comfortable work as a Pharisee, his home, and often his freedom. But Paul counts it all as gain because he began to look at the world through the eyes of Jesus. His ultimate goal was to bring others to Christ and to remain faithful to his calling in Christ. When we imitate Paul or those who, like Paul, are faithful witnesses to their faith, we imitate the “belovedness of Jesus.” (*phrase by Wesley White found at the commentaries for the Philippians scripture at Text This Week*)

Imitating the belovedness of Jesus is taking the hard road. Whenever we are faced with challenges, especially in relationships, we have a choice. We can choose to react with anger or with love. Anger often produces more anger, and the opposite is true of love – Love produces more love. As one pastor wrote: “*The pivot from suffering to joy, from pursuing “right-ness” to pursuing community, is found in the choice to love, even if all we have is a little love left in our broken hearts. Love rights wrongs.*” (Donna Schaper, at Still Speaking daily on line devotionals for March 16, 2019)

This week’s shootings at the Mosques in New Zealand remind us that all is not right with the world. Racism and prejudice continue to bring violence. We may wring our hands trying to figure out what to do, and anger may overcome us. But we have a choice. We can choose to express love toward those who have been victimized, even as Jesus chose love and peace when Peter drew a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane. We can imitate Christ’s welcome of everyone and live it with love and open hearts in spite of the actions of our General

Conference to exclude. We can love those who are marginalized and outcasts and support the programs that help them in whatever ways we are able.

We choose to imitate Christ, to trust in God's promises, and to know that we are led by the Holy Spirit. We choose love; we choose the *agape* love that offers kindness, compassion, acceptance, and support. We choose the love of Christ Jesus. We choose love.

Let us pray:

Author of Life, write into our hearts your ways, because the ways of this world have stolen the pages. The ways of this world have put us at the center and made us feel as if all things good are supposed to happen for us. Remind us that you are the one who writes our story, you are the one who calls us to live for others and not for ourselves, to care for the lost and least and to serve one another. Remind us that the ways of this world are not your ways, for your ways call us into love, justice, and mercy, by serving one another. In the name of Christ, the Word made flesh, we pray. Amen.

(Rev-o-lu-tion, Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell found at worship planning for today's lectionary, adapted)