

We Gather for Worship

Prelude & Entrance of Christ's Light

Celebrations

*Call to Worship

L: The saving mercy of the Lord Jesus be with you all.

P: And also with you.

L: Sometimes Christ's love is assuring and comforting.

P: Sometimes it disrupts and challenges.

L: Sometimes we feel that we really have something to offer the church.

P: Sometimes we wonder why Christ puts up with us.

L: But Christ is always here, calling us together, excluding no one, leading us to worship in sincerity and truth.

ALL: Amen!

*Hymn: "Lord, I Want to be a Christian"

UMH #402

A Time for the Child in all of Us

Prayer (unison)

God of infinite goodness, throughout the ages you have persevered in claiming and reclaiming your people. Renew for us your call to repentance, surround us with witnesses to aid us in our journey, and grant us the time to fashion our lives anew, through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

Sung Response

"Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying"

TFWS #2193

Ministry of Music

We Proclaim the Word

Reading the Word: Isaiah 55:1-9; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

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

P: Thanks be to God.

Message: "Repenting" Rev. Deb Hanson

We Respond to God's Word

*Hymn: "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" TFWS #2158

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)

Merciful God, you have given us so much, without money and without price. Help us to freely give of ourselves in serving you and loving other people. Amen.

We Go Forth to Serve

*Hymn: "I'll Fly Away" TFWS #2282

*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 - Kevin Fickenscher

Lay Leader - Susan Sarosiek

Director of Music - Bevan Bloemendaal

Acolyte - Sue Richards

Greeters - Joyce Blanchard & Marilyn Stebbins

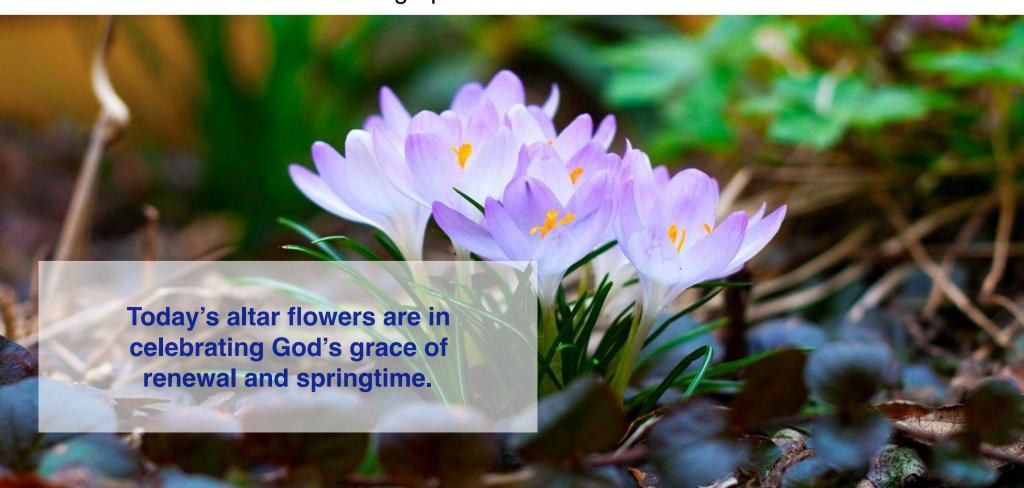
Ushers - Dave & Sue Richards

Sunday School - Airial Silanpaa & Kaya Sarosiek

Sound Tech - Sue Sarosiek

Worship Service Tech - Steve Scott

Photographer - Dave Atkinson





Marion Collishaw
Sue Goodhue
Hunter Pinkley
Sylvia Bartlett
Brian Thompson
Our Church family
Gil Stebbins
Rev. Bill Gardei
Woodie Lange
Roseanne
Rev. David Kerr
Jim New
Kim Hishop
Charles Gilman

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 24th marks the the third 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 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! Bags may be returned to Sanburn Hall for collective donation.



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.

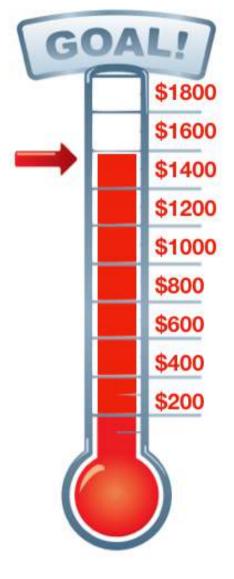
There will be no finance Trustees meeting on 4/2. That meeting will be combined with the Church Council Meeting scheduled for 4/16 at 6pm in the church.

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

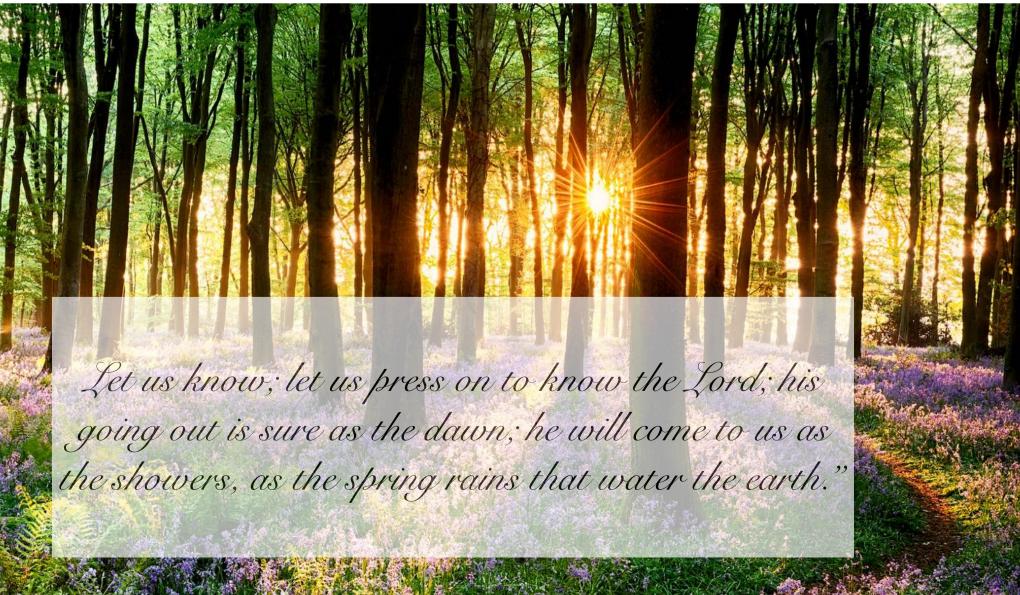
Remember one item a day!



Holy, Holy, Holy
Is the Lord God Almighty
Who was, and is, and is to come

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 129 Miller Avenue - Portsmouth, NH 03801 Office Phone 603-436-6038 office@fumcportsmouth.net 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 3/24/19 BY REV. DR. DEB HANSON

"Repenting" – March 24, 2019 First UMC – Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson

SCRIPTURES: Isaiah 55:1-9; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 THEME: Repentance and God's grace go together.

"The church is not a theological classroom. It is a conversion, confession, repentance, reconciliation, forgiveness and sanctification center, where flawed people place their faith in Christ, gather to know and love him better, and learn to love others as he designed." Quote from writer Paul David Tripp. (Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*, Found at goodreads.com)

It seems to me that the apostle Paul's letter to the church in Corinth affirms this statement. He is frustrated with their bickering over whether or not to eat food that has been dedicated to idols, their immoral behaviors, and their seeming need to categorize people into levels of importance in the Body of Christ. Like the nation of Israel, they seemed to have strayed from God and put themselves first, which is idolatry.

Yet, Paul's letters are also full of assurances that they can turn things around by repenting and remembering their calling to follow Christ. In today's passage from 1 Corinthians, Paul reminds the Corinthian church about the Israel's journey through the wilderness, and how God provided for them with food – manna – and water, and yet, they continued to turn away from God. After they settled in the Promised Land, they strayed repeatedly, and in spite of warnings from prophets to turn back to God, they continued to try to do things their own way, thinking they didn't really need to follow in God's ways. Eventually, the nation of Israel divided into the Northern Kingdom and Judah, and they continued to fight with each other. This weakened their ability to defend themselves, so they were conquered by other countries and taken into exile.

This was not God's doing, but their own loss of connection with God, and the results of sinning against God. They failed to repent, ignored repeated warnings from the prophets, and everything fell apart. Our Isaiah passage tells us what the results were. The Israelites were in exile, captured by Babylon, and forced to live in an alien land. While they were there, life was difficult, and they were poor, hungry, and struggling to remember their identity. Paul reminded the Corinthians that they could learn from the experience of the Israelites. Even as God was faithful to Israel and didn't give up on them, so God was faithful to the church in Corinth. Even as God's grace brought Israel home, God's grace was big enough to forgive and welcome the church in Corinth back to right relationship.

Repentance was necessary in order to turn their lives around and receive God's forgiveness. The temptation to sin was ever before them, and let's face it, sin is part of our lives, and temptations face us every day. The spiritual journey is never a straight path, but is full of ups and downs, falling down and picking ourselves up again, and repenting and experiencing God's grace over and over again. We can't even fathom the abundance of God's grace and the patience God has with us.

The Old Testament stories about the nation of Israel in their journeys remind us of that. In today's Isaiah passage, we heard about God offering them food and water without charge.

God waited for them to return with open arms, much like the father waited for his prodigal son to return in the Parable of the Prodigal that is found in Luke. Israel is in exile, far away from home, feeling abandoned and alone, and the prophet Isaiah offers the assurance that God's love for them and God's care for them is still there. They will receive the abundance of grace without cost, but freely given.

When have we experienced such grace? Maybe each of us have recognized times when the grace of God has drawn us in, helped us to understand forgiveness and known that we are loved beyond understanding. There is a story from Spain that tells about a father and son who had not been getting along well. The son ran away from home. His father, however, began a journey in search of his rebellious son. Finally, in Madrid, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in the newspaper. The ad read: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father." The next day at noon in front of the newspaper office 800 "Paco's" showed up. They were all seeking forgiveness and love from their fathers. (Illustrations Unlimited, p. 218, #15)

Repentance brings forgiveness, and sometimes forgiveness brings repentance. In Isaiah, God reminds the Israelites that they are loved and God will make an everlasting covenant with them. "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near . . . return to the Lord, that he may have mercy . . . and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:6-7) Reconciliation and redemption are promises given to all God's children, whether or not we deserve them. Repentance is our action that helps us realize the depth of God's mercy and grace.

A friend of mine and I used to have long conversations about God's grace. She would use the example of someone who had lived a sinful life, maybe even murdered a person. Then she would ask, if that person repents on their death bed, would they be saved? Of course, we don't know the answer to that, except that the scriptures tell us that God's grace is offered to all. The last verses of Isaiah read: "for my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord." (v. 8)

We can't understand God's thoughts, but we are told that sincere and true repentance in someone's heart is received with love and grace. My answer to my friend was that we don't know because it ultimately is between the person and God, and God's grace is far bigger than we can comprehend. To which she would again reply, "That's not fair." No, to us maybe it isn't, but I'm glad that God has an open heart because that means there is always hope for me, for you, for everyone to know God's love and acceptance.

In the church, the community of faith, as in the Corinthian church, we are reminded that our calling is to offer such grace and acceptance to each other. As the quote I offered earlier says, the church "is a conversion, confession, repentance, reconciliation, forgiveness and sanctification center, where flawed people place their faith in Christ, gather to know and love him better, and learn to love others as he designed." (*see beginning of sermon for citation*) We are called to work together for the sake of the Gospel, and we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to share the Good News with each other and others.

Sometimes that includes the recognition of the need for repentance and the offering of God's grace. As in Corinth, there are times when church folks don't always get along. There is a story about a church choir director who was frustrated at rehearsals for a Christmas choral concert. It seemed that at least one of more of the choir members were absent at every rehearsal. Finally, they arrived at the last rehearsal and he announced, "I want to personally thank the pianist for being the only person in this entire church choir to attend each and every rehearsal during the past two months." At this, the pianists rose, bowed, and said, "It was the least I could do, considering I won't be able to be at the concert tonight." (Illustrations Unlimited, p. 90, #12)

It would seem like there is plenty of room for repentance and grace in that story! The church is the place where we are called to practice our faith, to learn to resolve differences, to offer God's grace to each other. It is the place where we send each other out into to the world to put that practicing to good use as we live in an often hostile and challenging place.

My dad and I often reflect on the nature of the church when we Skype on Sunday nights. He was heavily involved in church leadership throughout his life and has many stories about people making demands that things were supposed to be done "their" way. I've had my share of dealing with difficult situations, and we always seem to come to the same conclusion – actually it's one of amazement. The church is the very place where we are called to offer Christ to each other and the world, and yet, it often is the place where there is the most dissention. Why?

Paul reminds the Corinthian church, and us, that we can learn from our religious history – from Israel turning away from God, and God's faithfulness in calling them back, from the spiritual journeys of the faithful in the Bible, as well as those saints in our lives who teach us about what following Jesus is all about. Except for Jesus, they all have sinned and fallen away, but they also have given us the example for repentance and receiving God's grace. It's not that we should think that it's all right to sin because we will be forgiven anyway – God really does know what is in our hearts, and we do too.

The testing we have every day comes in the form of temptations. It isn't that God tests us, but that life tests us, and God has given us ways to stand up to the testing. Sometimes we are able to get through it, and sometimes we are not – certainly not alone. When we realize that we have fallen short, we find the path that leads us back to God, and God has sent companions to be with us on the journey to help us get through the tough times and to celebrate with us when we make it through. Many of those companions are right here in this room, many have gone on before us, and there are still many who will walk with us.

Think of all those whose examples and ways of living for Christ have influenced how this church has grown and been in ministry together. Think of all the lives that this church has touched either in person or from far away. Who are the ancestors who built the foundation of spiritual growth? Did they all get along? Were they able to celebrate their accomplishments together? Did they have commitment to the mission and ministry of Christ in the world? What are the lessons we can take away from them, both the lessons that help us continue to carry on some of the traditions, as well as the ways of doing things that we don't want to repeat?

When I was in confirmation class back in the 1960's, we spent two or three years studying Luther's Catechism, (I was raised in the Lutheran Church) learning and studying the Bible, learning about the Lutheran church's way of doing things, and a lot of other things that would help to prepare me for membership in the church. Our class was charged with choosing our confirmation hymn, and we decide on "O Master Let Me Walk with Thee" because we felt that it was a guide for the rest of our lives. That was 55 years ago, and, as you can see, I still remember the class hymn. That church left it's imprint on me, even though I eventually left the denomination to come to Methodism, much to my Methodist grandmother's delight.

This church, too, has left an imprint on many people. One example has taken place on Facebook when one of the young persons who grew up in this church began a weekly appreciation of the pastors who had served while she was here. She listed the many ways in which she was influenced and how much she learned from the pastors, and it was clearly also a reflection on how this church supported and helped to raise her in the faith. This is a witness to the grace of God and the work of this community in the lives of your children, youth, and membership.

Since I have been here at First UMC, I have often heard comments about how much people appreciate prayers, cards, support, encouragement, and compassion. I have also heard about times when there were disagreements, but people were able to resolve their differences. Repentance and grace are certainly part of such happenings.

I'm also sure there are many places where we all – including myself – can improve our communication, our repentance, our ability to forgive, our welcoming, our care for one another, and offering God's grace. It's our job to figure out where those places are and to experience God's grace in that process. And we can celebrate that we have been called together to be the Church with our many gifts and talents and our diverse opinions and experiences.

The letter to the church in Corinth reminds us of God's call in our lives, of the ways in which we grow together in faith, and the faithfulness of God even when we may not always be so faithful. Grace abounds; God's love abounds; Christ is in us and with us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray: (SING)

O Master, let me walk with thee in lowly paths of service free; Tell me thy secret; help me bear the strain of toil, the fret of care. (UMH #430, v.1) Amen.