

First Congregational United Church of Christ

Empowered by the Holy Spirit and with the help of God, we open our doors and hearts to all, in service and love as modeled by Jesus Christ.



*Fourth Sunday in Lent
Laetare ~ Rejoice!
Day of Refreshment
Rejoice, Always Rejoice*

*The Lord's Day
Fourth Sunday in Lent
Laetare ~ Rejoice!
Day of Refreshment
Rejoice, Always Rejoice
Nine o'clock in the Morning*

The Worship of God

Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of the conscience by God's holiness; the nourishment of the mind with God's truth; the purifying of the imagination by God's beauty; the opening of the heart to God's love; the surrender of the will to God's purpose—all of this gathered up in adoration.

~William Temple

The Prologue

It is an irony indeed. On this day of refreshment, this fourth Sunday in Lent, our service of worship is dedicated to a lighter temperament calling for much rejoicing! Laetare! It is a Latin word meaning rejoice! Today is the cousin Sunday to the Third Sunday of Advent! The Witness from the Gospels in John forces us to examine the nature of sin in relationship to the existence of evil and suffering in the world. The prevailing view in the ancient world was that personal or communal suffering was the direct result of negative actions and/or attitudes, specifically the sinfulness of an individual or the local community. This idea was certainly prevalent in the Hebrew Bible and in early Jewish theology, so much so, that a book, Job, was written to address it. Where is God in the axis, the equation of evil and suffering compared and contrasted with goodness, mercy, and grace? Through the ages people of faith have tried to answer in vain the age-old question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Inquiring minds want to know! Today, Jesus answers at least a part of that agonizing and important question, an eternal puzzle indeed!

Gathering Music

The Call to Worship and Welcome

The Spirit of the still speaking God be with you.

And also with you.

The Music for Contemplation

The Lighting of the Altar Candles

The Gathering

All who have experienced darkness, come and rejoice in the One whose light shines upon us, whose goodness and mercy passionately follows us!

The Holy One shadows our every step as beloved faith community! We have come to this sacred setting to be refreshed, giving glory to God!

Awaken this day to the One who opens our eyes to the wonders of God, to all that is good, to all the wonderful gifts of the Holy One!

A table has been spread before us, prepared by the One we have come to worship! Gather before the One who leaves us wanting for nothing!

Let us worship God!

The Collect

Let us pray to the Lord,

Refreshing God, we have gathered in this sacred time and space to worship you, to rejoice in the One whose light shines in the darkness, making all of us children of light; we have come to receive your good gifts on this high and holy festival day, this day of refreshment and rejoicing; we have gathered to rejoice one and all in praise to you; we long for your Spirit to be upon us, shepherding God, even as we give glory to you for all your overflowing goodness and mercy that follows us daily; open our eyes when they are closed, that we may see to do all that is good and right and true in your sight; all this we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the holy and still speaking Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

*The Opening Hymn, No. 23 *Praise, My Soul, the God of Heaven* LAUDA ANIMA

*The Litany of Praise

In the care of our shepherding God, we follow as the sheep of God's pasture, protected as a prized and precious flock, wanting for nothing as the people of God!

The Holy One makes us lie down in green pastures, leading us beside still waters, restoring our souls!

It is God who leads us in right paths in the name of the Holy, walking with us even through the valley of darkest evil, removing all of our fear!

The rod and staff of the Holy One gives comfort, preparing a table before us in the presence of our enemies, anointing our heads with oil!

Our cups are filled to overflowing, God's goodness and mercy surely follows us for all the days of our lives!

In the house of the Holy One we shall dwell for our whole life long! Praise the Lord!

*Glory to the Creator, and to the Christ, and to the Comforter!
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
World without end! Amen! Amen!*

The Call to Confession¹

With our limited insight we often misjudge people and situations! Our view of things may be quite different from the way God sees the circumstances of our lives and our relationships. Individually and corporately, we often fall short of God's expectations! Let us admit our need for forgiveness! In the silence and stillness of these moments, let us confess before the Holy.

The Silent Confession

The Corporate Confession²

Let us pray to the Lord,

Great Shepherd of goodness and mercy, we thank you for finding us and bringing us to this time of prayer. Sometimes, we wander far from the paths of integrity, justice, and peace that you have set before us. We are ashamed when we are less than who you created us to be, hoping that we will not be found out by our neighbors. We tend to be quick to judge others and to excuse ourselves, wanting to decide who is acceptable to you and who is not. Surely, we delude ourselves when we persuade ourselves otherwise. We would like to believe that you prefer people like us and not those who appear, believe, or act differently. Even as we say these words, we know we are not always in tune with our way. Forgive us, we pray, and help us to change!

The Assurance of Pardon³

Beloved faith community, hear the good news of Lent. The goodness and mercy of God are always available to us! When we let God touch our unseeing eyes, we gain new insights and can begin to view others with the compassion of Christ! Let us accept with joy the healing we are offered right here, right now! Be refreshed in these sacred moments! Laetare! Rejoice, one and all!

Thanks be to God!

The Response (*Chalice Praise*), No. 117 *Nothing Can Trouble*

St. Teresa de Jesus; fr. Taizé

The Witness from the Epistles

EPHESIANS 5:8-14

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light! Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true! Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord! Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness! Rather, expose them! For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light! Therefore, it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!"

Listen to what the Spirit of the still speaking God is saying!

Thanks be to God!

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth! His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned! He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him! We must work the works of God who sent me while it is day! Night is coming when no one can work! As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world!” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent)! Then he went and washed and came back able to see! The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” Some were saying, “It is he!” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him!” He kept saying, “I am he!” But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash!’ Then I went and washed and received my sight!” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know!” They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind! Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes! Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight! He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes! Then I washed, and now I see!” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God for he does not observe the Sabbath!” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided! So, they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened!” He said, “He is a prophet!” The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes! Ask him! He is of age! He will speak for himself!” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue! Therefore, his parents said, “He is of age! Ask him!” So, for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner!” He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner! One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see!” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I have told you already and you would not listen! Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses! We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from!” The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes! We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships God and obeys God’s will! Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind! If this man were not from God, he could do nothing!” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out! Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him!” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he!” He said, “Lord, I believe!” And he worshiped him! Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind!” Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin! But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains!”

The Gospel for today!

Thanks be to God!

The Sermon
Music for Meditation

The Problem of Goodness!

Dale Bishop
Phoebe Spier, Soloist

“Amazing Grace”

The Concerns of the Church
The Pastoral Prayer
The Lord’s Prayer

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 debts as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever!
Amen.

The Receiving of Our Gifts
The Offertory
*The Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!
Praise Christ all creatures here below!
Praise Holy Spirit, evermore!
Praise triune God whom we adore!*

*The Prayer of Thanksgiving

*The Closing Hymn, No. 78 *The Lord’s My Shepherd*

CRIMOND

*The Extinguishing of the Altar Candles

*The Procession of the Light

*The Benediction and Blessing

To our guests! At your choosing, we invite you to join us in a long-standing tradition at First Congregational United Church of Christ as we form a circle as one, joining hands and singing together our Fellowship Song.

*The Fellowship Song

Let There Be Peace on Earth

WORLD PEACE

*Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.
With every step I take, let this be my joyous creed.
To take each moment and live each moment in peace, eternally!
Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.*

The Music for Reflection

*You are invited to stand as you are able.

Lector: Bill Marshall

Ushers: Susan Krivichi and Carlton Schroeder

The color for the Sundays in Lent is Purple, symbolizing the penitential nature of this holy season. The color for the Fourth Sunday in Lent is Rose, symbolizing the celebratory nature of the day, and a reminder that we are more than halfway through the Lenten discipline. Reflecting a lighter mood, the liturgical name for this day is Laetare, meaning Rejoice. Called Mothering Sunday in the United Kingdom, the name Laetare is taken from the first words of the Latin Entrance Antiphon: Rejoice Jerusalem! The custom of using Rose paraments and vestments on Refreshment Sunday developed because the color was used for the blessing of the golden rose by the Pope on this Sunday in recognition of outstanding service to the Church.

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