

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.

A purple-tinted image of a telescope. The text "Looking for Jesus" is overlaid on the image in a large, white, serif font. The telescope is positioned diagonally, pointing towards the upper right. The background is a blurred, light-colored landscape.

Looking
for Jesus

Second Sunday in Lent

*The Lord's Day
Second Sunday in Lent
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

In verse seven of today's gospel reading, Jesus says to Nicodemus, "Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'" And yet, as many times as we have either read or heard these words, we are still astonished. We are astonished by the whole idea of "life from above." We are astonished when ancient traditions become the dwelling place of the Spirit. We are astonished when the Spirit shows up in new and disturbing places. We are astonished (and a bit troubled) that the Spirit continues to make demands of us . . . demands that are often inconvenient or annoying. However, we need to remember that whenever we see signs of faith and new life, they are "from above, gifts of the Spirit." And so, we rightfully give thanks for all the gifts of the Spirit. As Hildegard of Bingen declared, the Spirit is "radiant life, worthy of praise, awakening and enlivening all things."¹ Today we take yet another look at Jesus' statement, "You must be born from above." Maybe we'll find that it still applies to us . . . each and every day of our lives!

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

Lift up your eyes to the One who is your helper, the Holy One who keeps you in the day of trouble!

We have come to be blessed by God that we might become a blessing to others!

Come and worship God! Gather before the One who gives life to the dead, calling into existence even things that do not exist!

With the faith of Abraham and Nicodemus we gather in the presence of the Holy in this sacred setting!

Let us worship God!

The Introit (*Chalice Praise*), No. 44 *Open Our Eyes, Lord*

Bob Cull

The Collect

Let us pray to the Lord,

God of Abraham and Nicodemus and everyone in between, and all of us, we have gathered this day in the presence of the One in whom we believe and in whom we place our trust, turning aside to experience the One whom we sometimes question, even to the degree of subtle skepticism and outright cynicism; we gather as beloved faith community, manifesting both the capacity of Abraham and Nicodemus, a mix of both within us all, full of confident faith and challenged with overwhelming doubt; we rest upon your grace, protecting God, to make up the difference within us even as we worship you in this sacred time and space; be born in us anew as we seek to be born from above, gathering before the One who is our help and keeps us from all evil unto eternal life; we long to be born with your holy and still speaking Spirit; 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. 24 *The God of Abraham Praise*

LEONI

*The Litany of Praise

We lift our eyes to God, the One who helps us when we call!

Our help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth!

The Holy One neither slumbers nor sleeps, but shelters and shades us, keeping us from all evil!

The sun shall not strike us by day nor the moon by night!

The Holy One will keep our lives, protecting us on life's journey!

Whether coming or going, from now until forevermore, God is with us! We are not alone! Praise the Lord!

*The Gloria

GREATOREX

*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 Confession²

Spiritual ancestors, like Abraham, sensed God's call to leave behind the security of the familiar to venture forward to new places God would show them. Others, like Nicodemus, were astonished by Jesus' call to rebirth in the Spirit. Reminded that both calls also come to each of us, we bow before God to confess our unfaithfulness! In the silence and stillness of these moments, let us confess before the Holy.

The Silent Confession

The Corporate Confession³

Let us pray to the Lord,

God of Abraham and Nicodemus and all of us as well, we confess that we have been far more ready to say we believe than to trust You to lead us to new ventures of faithfulness. We are afraid of the evil that surrounds us. We fear rejection, failure, and ridicule. We admire Jesus, but it is difficult to follow in footsteps that lead to a cross. In the midst of life as we know it here, how can we catch glimpses of eternity? Save us, we pray, from our timidity, and use our doubts as an entry to a deeper level of faith!

The Assurance of Pardon⁴

Beloved faith community, hear the good news of Lent. Our lives are in God's hands. We can only glimpse the mystery of the source of love, "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist!" Yet, as we look to God in trust, there comes to us an abiding assurance that we are not alone. Receive, with humility and joy, the rebirth God offers this day and for all eternity!

Thanks be to God!

The Anthem

I Will Lift up My Eyes
Chancel Choir

David Waggoner

The Witness from the Hebrew Bible

GENESIS 12:1-4a

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you! I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing! I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse! And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed!" So, Abram went as the LORD had told him! And Lot went with him! Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran!

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

Thanks be to God!

*We lift our eyes unto the hills, from where shall come our help at last?
What'er the need, God will provide, the Lord, by whom the world was cast!
Each day God is a strength and shield against the onslaught of our foes!
And to the dangers of the night, the eyes of God are never closed!
The promise of the Lord is sure! To hold us in unyielding care!
Throughout our lives, may faith confirm that where we are, the Lord is there!*

The Witness from the Gospels

JOHN 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews! He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person!" Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the realm of God without being born from above!" Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the realm of God without being born of water and Spirit! What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit! Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above!' The wind blows where it chooses and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes! So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit!" Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony! If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man! And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life! "For God so loved the world that God gave the only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life! Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him!"

The Gospel for today!
Thanks be to God!

The Sermon

Night Shift!

Timothy W. Shirley

The Music for Meditation

The Service of Holy Communion

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. 236 *Wind Who Makes All Winds That Blow* ABERYSTWYTH

*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: Chuck Kemp

Ushers: Susan Krivichi and Joe Turpin

*The color for the Sundays in Lent is Purple, symbolizing
the penitential nature of this holy season.*

¹Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies, eds., Hildegard of Bingen: *An Anthology* (London: SPCK, 1990), 118.

²⁻⁴Reprinted by permission United Church Press from *Taught by Love*, by Lavon Bayler. Copyright 2002 by the Pilgrim Press.

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First Congregational UCC - Eagle River, WI

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