



Steeple Notes

The First Congregational Church of Rowley, U.C.C.
175 Main Street • P.O. Box 364 • Rowley, MA 01969
(978) 948-3993 • www.firstchurchrowley.org



Reverend Tom Bentley, Pastor bentleyconsulting123@gmail.com
Angie F. Estévez, Church Administrator first.church@verizon.net

April 2020

Worship Watch

Sunday, April 5th – Palm Sunday

Liturgy of the Palms

- Matthew 21:1-11
- Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Liturgy of the Passion

- Isaiah 50:4-9a
- Psalm 31:9-16
- Philippians 2:5-11
- Matthew 26:14-27:66,
- or Matthew 27:11-54

Thursday, April 9th – Maundy Thursday

- Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14
- Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19
- 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
- John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Friday, April 10th – Good Friday

- Isaiah 52:13-53:12
- Psalm 22
- Hebrews 10:16-25
- John 18:1-19:42

Sunday, April 12th – Easter

- Acts 10:34-43
- Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
- Colossians 3:1-4
- John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10

Sunday, April 19th

- Acts 2:14a, 22-32
- Psalm 16
- 1 Peter 1:3-9
- John 20:19-31

Sunday, April 26th

- Acts 2:14a, 36-41
- Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19
- 1 Peter 1:17-23
- Luke 24:13-35



*Deadlines for the May
Issue of STEEPLENOTES is
Wednesday - April 15th*

*From the
Pastor*



“A Time for the Sacred in the Ordinary”

It came to me as I was going down the stairs. I was admiring the new carpeting we had put in a few months ago. Suddenly. I thought maybe soon I won't be running up and down these stairs because I would have passed on. Yes, it was a flash of my own demise.

All of us are going through this feeling in unpredictable moments, as we ponder the swirl of threats and fears that surround us.

Back to my stairs. When I caught myself in that feeling of mortality, suddenly something beautiful happened. I really loved that carpeting like I had never loved it before!

Every day more than ever I am experiencing a wonder and gratitude for the little things. I know this sounds like a cliché, but it really is happening, and I feel blessed. Threats of loss are best resolved by seeing again the sacred in the ordinary.

In April we experience Holy Week. In seven short days we are drawn from the high joy of Palm Sunday - on into intrigue, cruelty, torture and death - and then locked in the dark cave of death.

In the end, however, life wins. It wins through ordinary people connecting to the miracle of the simple. The Bible's narratives about the resurrection are not a grandiose bunch of cosmic stories. Instead the appearances of the crucified Christ in the lives of his followers are reported while they are doing very basic things. Fishing, eating a meal, gathering together to comfort one another.

Incarnation is a word we use to identify that the ordinary in our physical existence is charged with the divine, the holy, the miraculous. To overcome any sense of dark imprisonment demands we break out into the light of the new life offered by Jesus. The keys to unlock us from our confinement are available in the ordinary and simple things of our earthly existence. We need to cherish these even more in this of time pandemic...

“As I was going down the stair... I met the One who was really there...”

Peace and Fond Wishes

Rev. Tom

Missions Committee

Investing in Futures - The UCC fundraiser for March was titled "Investing in Futures". And isn't that the purpose of our lives? What we do, the seeds we start, is what determines our individual futures, and also our societies future. The care, the love, the inspiration we put out to our fellow inhabitants of this earth determines how well we all survive. We are completely interdependent, not just biologically, but our souls. How we treat others determines their success, and our own. If others can live well and happily our life in turn will be more successful. Every step we take should be considering consequence on others, and our earth. If this pandemic doesn't bring this home to us I don't know what will. We must care for each other as a family, recognizing we all have differences but in the



end we are interdependent. As you lift up another you lift yourself up. The Missions Committee wishes to engage with you in awareness of what we are called upon to do as Christians. What would Jesus do in response to people fleeing persecution from gangs or military violence, from climate crisis, from the pandemic. Would he say "close the borders!", would he say "lock them all up!?" We don't think so. He would be walking amongst those in the Middle East sitting in tents inches apart in refugee camps, he would be walking amongst those moving from one country to another desperate for a safe place healing their spirits and bodies.

He would be railing against those that would inflict further injury and pain through their rules, regulations, incarceration and ostracizing of these people from safe society. We must speak up every day in some way to the injustices being suffered across the globe. Our Christianity does not allow us to take pieces of scripture to lord power over individuals who are powerless. Instead it asks us to uplift individuals and support their cry to have some control over their lives and their futures and be allowed the grace to succeed in living a full life. Every step we take should consider our investment in the future of the co-inhabitants of this planet. Please consider with the desperate situations created by the pandemic by those in refugee camps and detention and those fleeing violence and give a donation to the UCC Investing in Futures, UNICEF, and the IRC. **THANK YOU**

Compassionate Care Network

Some of our members have reached out to ask, "*How can I help?*" during this time of social isolation. To that end, we are creating a "Compassionate Care Network." This is a group of folks who will check in with church members to see how they are doing and what, if anything, they might need. Sometimes a simple phone call or a handwritten note is enough to stay connected and know that others care. Someone may need help with grocery shopping, or just need a listening ear. If you are interested in joining the team of those who are reaching out, please contact Angie at the church.



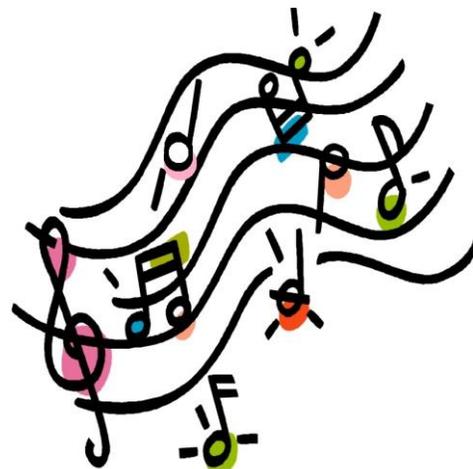


We're In This Together

I am going to be hosting a 30-day online group for women, starting the week of April 5th. There is still room for 2 more participants. If you are worried, lonely, have nothing to do or want to encourage others while going through the COVID19 crisis - join us! For more information you call 978-914-1343 or email me c/o first.church@verizon.net. Angie. #Were In This Together

MUSIC

Happy Spring! We hope everyone is staying safe and healthy. We're beginning plans for one of the year's big events for the Music Committee: the annual Plant Sale. We're hoping that the current situation will have improved and everyone can join us on Saturday, May 16 from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. The Plant Sale features a huge variety of annuals and perennials to beautify your garden and window boxes. We'll be outside in the front driveway if the weather is good, and in the Parish Hall if the weather is inclement. Be sure to stop by – and bring a friend or two!



In music news, we miss being together as a Congregation and look forward to being back together again soon. Our future plans include providing different types of music for Sunday worship services, including an all-guitar service. Our goal is to provide a variety of music throughout the year. If something makes your heart sing, let us know! The Music Committee is always happy to hear your feedback!

Do you sew? Are you crafty?



There is an opportunity for our church to contribute towards several community initiatives focused on mitigating the shortage of protective masks & face gear. Even though DIY cloth facemasks aren't as

effective as N95 masks or disposable surgical masks – nearby medical personnel have desperately requested cloth mask donations. We have established communication with community partners that would provide guidance, patterns, drop off locations and other useful resources if we decide to do this collectively as a ministry of the church. In addition to medical personnel - we can also make masks for front line responders, grocery store personnel, vulnerable citizens and other designated individuals or groups. **Is anyone interested in making masks?**

Furthermore, is anyone interested in helping to oversee this initiative if we make it church wide?



SPECIAL DAYS IN APRIL



Anniversaries

Ray & Nancy Hill	4/7
Bob & Shirley MacRae	4/8
Burton & Lynne Gray	4/9
Randy & Janice Goss	4/12
Roger & Karlene Merry	4/13
Barbara & Thomas Friend	4/13
Larry & Melissa Gaspar	4/15
David & Gidget Roberts	4/17
Bill & Ellie Manning	4/24
John & Marie Grover	4/29

Birthdays

Jerry Schmidt	4/5
Merle Phipps	4/7
Scott Parker Loring	4/10
Sara Stafford	4/11
Elizabeth Ruth(Somers) Reep	4/15
Julie Grover	4/16
Nicholas Morris	4/16
Les Warren	4/16
Ann Myers	4/18
Scott Gebow	4/19
Katie Blouin	4/20
Bradley Reep	4/21
Don Russo	4/21
Allison (Russo) Sayre	4/21
Ethan Davey	4/22
Sabba & Sara Whitmore	4/23
Annalise Jensen	4/27
Beverley Phillips	4/28
Sean Pyburn	4/28
Amanda Rotberg	4/29
Dorothy Spurling	4/29
Christopher Barry	4/30

Historical moments in the month of April

- America's first astronauts were announced by NASA on April 9, 1959.
- The first Webster Dictionary was copyrighted by Noah Webster on April 14, 1828.
- The Titanic sank on April 15, 1912.
- The Revolutionary War in America began on April 19, 1775.
- The United States Library of Congress was established April 24, 1800.
- Our first President George Washington was inaugurated on April 30, 1789.

April is also host to some famous birthdays

- Marvin Gaye, April 2, 1939
- Jane Goodall, April 3, 1934
- Jackie Chan, April 7, 1954
- Dolores Huerta, April 10, 1930
- Emma Watson, April 15, 1990
- Leonardo da Vinci, April 15, 1452
- Charlie Chaplin, April 16, 1889
- Jack Nicholson, April 22, 1937
- William Shakespeare, April 23, 1564

Thrift Store, Community Groups & Building Accessibility



Programming, meetings, events, services, thrift store hours and general building accessibility continue to be suspended through May 4th per Governor Charlie Baker's advisory. We will notify you if the date has to be readjusted once again.



Palm Sunday & Easter Sunday Services

Details about our Easter Sunday service will be sent out via email and posted on website & Facebook next week.

Palm Sunday Service - Please Join FCOR for the Great Rolling Palm Sunday Walk of 2020

Matthew 21:8-11 ESV

Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

As you know, the Palm Sunday Walk is a delightful tradition in our church, where FCOR parishioners join with members of St. Mary's to walk from the Rowley Town Common to the churches, carrying palm branches. During the Coronavirus crisis, we cannot process in the manner that we have in the past. However, we can honor this tradition with the Great Rolling Palm Sunday Walk of 2020!

The Plan: Meet in the parking lot of the First Congregational Church of Rowley at 8:45 am on Palm Sunday—that's this coming Sunday, April 5. At 9:00 am when the church bell rings, a lead car starts the procession by honking their horn three times (the Trinity). The procession exits out of the back parking lot, taking a left onto Main Street. The line of cars drives around the Town Common once, and then proceeds back to the church through the front entrance. The leader honks their horn twice ("Amen!") and church members depart for their homes.

The Hard Part: Everybody MUST stay in their vehicles. Our church is very social, and it will be very tempting to get out of your vehicle and greet people. We cannot do this! We have to be vigilant about maintaining social distancing during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Fun Part: This is a great opportunity to be creative! Just because we can't get out of our vehicles doesn't mean we can't communicate. Bring paper and markers or a white board and post messages to the vehicles near you! Use your cell phone to send messages, take photos, or post on social media. Decorate your car with real or paper palm branches or crepe paper streamers. Make handprint Easter Lilies to decorate your car (a great craft for kids of all ages). Post your favorite Bible verse or another message of hope on your windows. Wear your favorite hat or tie. Wear your pajamas. Bring stuffed animal friends along for the ride. Listen to inspirational music or Rev. Tom's weekly message. We're limited only by our imaginations!

If you can take a photo of your vehicle and occupants and send it to the church office, we can put together a slide show of the event and post it on our website to show that the Spirit is strong this Palm Sunday in Rowley!

This date is tentative and subject to change due to the current COVID-19 outbreak. Be on the lookout for updates via web, email and Facebook. Thank you!

Please Join Us, for our Annual Golf Event and Fundraiser

May 30, 2020

Black Swan Country Club, Georgetown, MA

Registration begins at 1:30p

2:30p shotgun start

Come early for a putting contest at 1:30p

Dinner and Silent Auction begins at 6:30p

18 holes with cart and Dinner, \$150.00

Dinner only, \$35.00

Corporate Sponsorship, \$150

Family Sponsorship, \$75

All proceeds benefit the

First Congregational Church of Rowley, MA

Call or text for further information

Debbie Confalone, 781-290-6502

Bring your team!!



Plant Sale



**Get ready for summer at the
First Congregational Church of Rowley's**

Plant Sale

Saturday, May 16, 2020

9:00 am-1:00 pm

First Congregational Church, Rowley, MA

**Kick off the summer with beautiful plants for your garden!
Enter our raffle to win a beautiful hanging plant!**

First Congregational Church, 175 Main Street (Rt. 1A), Rowley, MA
Questions? Contact the church at 978-948-3993
or visit our website www.firstchurchrowley.org

The Annual Meeting has been postponed – date TBD. However, due to the ByLaws and the Massachusetts Incorporation Laws this meeting needs to be posted. We apologize for the confusion.

**First Congregational Church, U.C.C.
Rowley, Massachusetts**



March 17, 2020

To: The Members and Friends, First Congregational Church, U.C.C., Rowley
Rowley, Massachusetts

The 380th Annual Meeting of the church will be held on Sunday, April 26, 2020 beginning no earlier than 8:30 a.m. prior to the 10:00 a.m. worship service.

Items on the agenda for the business meeting are:

1. To hear and act on annual reports of the various officers, boards, and committees from the previous year.
2. To hear and act upon the report of the Nominating Committee (elections).
3. To hear a report from Rev. Tom Bentley.
4. To hear and act upon any other business which may properly come before the church membership.

Respectfully submitted,

David E. Irving

David E. Irving, Clerk

March 30, 2020

Members & Friends
First Congregational Church of Rowley, UCC
175 Main Street
Rowley, MA 01969



Dear Friends,

Back in December when I reached out with the Church's year-end giving request, I suggested that we take time to reflect on the beauty of Christmas! I knew that it would be difficult because we're all so busy and often lose perspective on what's really important. Today, with everything that's going on, it's hard to focus on anything but the Corona Virus .. and I would argue that's exactly what Satan wants. As scary as this may be, we need to remember that this is no surprise to God. If we look hard enough, we can still see His hand at work, even in something as traumatic as this. We read over and over in the Scriptures that God works in mysterious and unthinkable ways. While it's hard to think of God's hand being in something as deadly as this, could it be that's He's trying to slow us down and correct a world that's gotten out of control?

As we think about this and watch the news stories day in and day out, I wanted to encourage and direct you to Scripture, that I believe, speaks to the very issues we face today. From the Message Translation, we read in *Psalm 91*:

"Fear nothing ... Not disease that prowls through the darkness, not disaster that erupts at high noon. Even though others succumb all around you and drop like flies right and left, no harm will even graze you; you'll stand untouched ... He ordered his angels to guard you wherever you go. If you stumble, they'll catch you ..."

This doesn't necessary mean we won't get sick, of course, but what it does mean is that God is right in the thick of this with us. As a Church family, we have a unique opportunity in this time of fear and uncertainty. We are strategically positioned to offer a message of hope and comfort to a community that is traumatized by this tragedy. And as we offer that message of Hope, we get stronger ourselves, both spiritually and physically, I believe. There's a song entitled, "Turn Around" that speaks to just this. ***If you're looking for a Savior, all you have to do is turn-around***". He's not waiting for us to run to Him! He's right there with us, all we have to do is look and call on His name. And in this time of need, we can have the assurance that we're not going through any of it alone.

As we approach Easter and look forward to celebrating the resurrection of our Savior, we're doing so with the church closed. If ever there was an opportunity that would test our faith, this is probably it! Yet this is a time that we can offer a Sanctuary of Hope, for many in our community, and it's the perfect time to share the message of the gospel. We understand that the Church can play a vital role in unprecedented times, yet right now we're forced to deal with the realities of a budget that is not very flexible and income levels which are dramatically down.

As you think about the significance of Easter, I'd ask that you consider your giving at the same time. Over the last three (3) weeks our giving has been essentially non-existent, with families stressed both physically and financially. Unfortunately, the work of our Church becomes even more important in times like this and depends almost entirely on the consistent giving of our membership.

While the Church is closed to outside activity and we've reduced things like our electric and fuel expense, we're still incurring expenses to run the building and maintain the property. As you reflect on this in light of your giving, please consider Jesus' words from Luke: 6-38:

"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

Folks, there are opportunities to change lives all around us, and we're not promised that it will be easy. Let's make a statement in the midst of this tragedy and make sure we remain a beacon of Hope for our neighbors in Rowley and the surrounding community. We've played a special role, here, for almost 400 years and I'm sure the Lord has plans for another 400! In times like these, though, we need your help and prayers to weather the storm. We hope you'll consider helping in this effort by mailing your weekly offering(s) to the Church office (175 Main St., Rowley MA 01969) or even consider making an online donation through our website <http://www.firstchurchrowley.org/>.

Thank you, once again, for your continued support of our ministry. I pray that the Lord will watch over you in this time of uncertainty and provide you a "peace that passes all understanding"! Please know that you can reach out to anyone of us, at any time, if you have a concern, need help or just need someone to talk to. You can find more information on our website or reach us in the office at (978) 948-3993. For those of you with a computer or smartphone, don't forget to listen to Pastor Tom's weekly online message. And stay tuned for news on a potential Easter opportunity.

Thank you so much. We love you!!

Respectfully,

Mike

Michael J. Blouin
Treasurer