

Greetings members and friends of First Congregational Church of Shelburne,

Attached is the Sunday Worship Resource for May 17. I hope to get a Sunday morning YouTube video up in time to view with this resource. If it happens, and it did last Sunday, it will be posted on our web page, shelburnechurch.org.

Please remember we include prayer requests every week.

Any requests may be sent to me at pastor01089@gmail.com.

And there is a new Chapel Moment. Click on the link on our web page.

Yesterday, as I was working on the computer, I glanced out my window. I can see the road as it bends into a 180-degree turn, increasing its downward slope in the midst of the turn. Coming around the turn, going uphill was our neighbor's young son on a bicycle. And trotting along side was his father, one hand on a handlebar, and the other on the back of the seat. He was in the midst of that most wonderful, and often hazardous, ritual of teaching a son or daughter how to ride a bike for the first time. It was a loving scene that seemed so familiar as he would take his hands away, let his son pedal and try to keep balance, and then step back in with his hands of stability and reassurance. As I watched them continue down the road, it occurred to me that perhaps God works the same way with us. In this case, I thought, as a species, as God's children. Even when we are convinced, we have mastered how to pedal the bike of life and history, we discover that we are a little wobbly and in desperate need of stability and reassurance.

It never ceases to amaze how God's truth can be discovered by looking out your window.

God be with you as we unite in praise, in ministry and in worship even from a distance.

Pastor Rob

Welcome to Sunday Worship

May 17, 2020

Good Morning to our members and friends at home,

This week's Worship Resource focuses on the love of God and the greatest commandment spoken by Jesus of Nazareth. We encourage you to set aside a space in your day to follow the service and reflect on the Gospel passage. Check the church web page to see if there is a video posted for this Sunday's service.

Prayer Requests: We are accepting requests for prayer (healing, comfort, thanksgiving and others). Please send your requests to the Pastor at pastor01089@gmail.com. Requests will then be sent out through our email list to the congregation for our common prayer life during the week. PLEASE remember that all prayer requests received become public knowledge. If you are uncertain if your request for another might be confidential, do not send it.

Chapel Moments videos: We are posting Chapel Moments videos on our web page, shelburnechurch.org, as often as possible. These are brief moments that include prayer, scripture, reflection, and music.

And now let us be in worship

A Call to Worship from Psalm 106

Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good and the love of God endures forever. Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord our God.

Morning Prayer & Lord's Prayer

O God of glory, your people gather to proclaim your steadfast love and to proclaim the risen Christ in whom we are baptized. Let the light that shone upon the first disciples shine upon us. May the love that you brought fill our hearts anew. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray together saying... *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.*

Prayers of the People

You may wish to add your own prayers for healing, prayers of thanksgiving, prayers for comfort and others during our time of meditation. Our prayer today is based one from the Prayers of Walter Brueggemann, *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth*.

Let us come to God.

You, O God, call. Out of your love, you call to people like us and not like us. We stand in a long line of women, men and children who have heard your call, and trusted you enough to answer it. And so, we give thanks that you are a calling God, who invites us to places we know and love, and to places we would rather not go, and yet you call us to. And when we go, we journey with love for you in our hearts. This day we pray in the name of the one who embodies your call, who enacted your call, whom we can follow. In Jesus we see, hear and feel your love and your commitment to us in your creation.

You have said yes to us in our birth.

Yes, to us in our baptism

Yes, to us in our awakening this day.

We confess, O God, that we are not always so committed,

We say, "perhaps.....maybe.....we'll see...."

So, we pray for your mercy this day that we may live as committed to you as you are to us, that we may say yes,

Yes, with our love

Yes, with our resources, our time and our money,

Yes, with our strength and with our weakness

Yes, to love you and our neighbor
Yes, Lord and no longer “perhaps.”

In your call to us, you invite us to enter into your peace, even in the heat of your ministry. You offer a place of solitude, where we might surround ourselves in the fleeting moments of quiet, and come to you, in prayer, in reflection... (personal prayer and meditation time.)

Loving, calling God, we lift these our prayers to you, even as we endeavor to love you and our neighbor, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Gospel Lesson: John 14:15-21

One way to understand the structure of the Gospel according to John is to see this book as a series of seven signs performed by Jesus. Each of these signs is either preceded or followed by a discourse. Our Gospel lesson for this morning is a continuation of Jesus’ lengthy talk that follows the sign of his washing of the disciple’s feet prior to his arrest in Jerusalem. In preparing the disciples for the events that will soon overtake them, including the reality that Jesus will indeed leave them, two concerns arise in this piece of the discourse; first, that the disciples do not believe themselves abandoned by Jesus and second, that they demonstrate their love by continuing his teachings and his ministry. Our lesson this morning is from: The Gospel according to John, chapter 14, verses 15 through 21.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me.”

After the reading, you may reflect on this passage and share your thoughts.
There is a set of notes concerning this text for your reflection.

Benediction:

May God give us light to guide us
Courage to support us
and love to unite us,
Now and evermore, Amen.

Notes on the text

It has been my experience that there are many Gospel passages that are problematic. This passage from the Gospel of John is one of them. It is both reassuring, *I will not leave you orphaned, those who love me will be loved by my father*” and a little disconcerting: *they who keep my commandments are those who love me. Whoever does not love me, does not keep my words.* We might be tempted to conclude that if I want to love the Lord, I need to abide by his commandments, and if I do so, then the Lord will love me. If I do not abide by the Lord’s commandments, then, I do not love the Lord, which, could imply that God will not love me either. This circular and at first glance, self-sealing, conclusion has been nagging at me for some time. I do confess that I have a tendency to be very wary of exclusive Christianity, the kind that says, *we have the truth, we are the one true church God only loves.....certain people. Only Christians that meet a specific criteria will be saved.....* That sort of exclusiveness makes me nervous. I am much more taken by the theology that says *and there is more light and truth to break forth from God’s word.* This practical theology is a part of our own New England congregational tradition. In the 1800’s the Congregational Church of New England unanimously agreed that we are but one expression of the faith, that there are others and they may indeed have pieces of God’s truth that we need to hear and understand. Therefore, we will seek out opportunities to be in fellowship with them. Keeping that in mind my ponderings on this text have gone something like this: while Jesus does say, *those who love me will keep my word*, he does not say the opposite, *those who do not keep my word do not love me*, nor does he conclude that if you don’t love him, he won’t love you either and if that should be the case, then God doesn’t love you. Having gone around and around with this, I suddenly noticed that there was another question to be asked that would only compound the confusion. Jesus says, *they who have my commandments and keep them.* His commandments? Jesus’ commandments? Notice he does not say the commandments, or the law, a term he has used before to encompass the Torah. He doesn’t say, the Ten Commandments. He says his commandments. What might they be? I suspect we could, as others have done, compile a collection of the verses that are directives from Jesus, like Matthew 28. *Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.* Or Matthew 5. *But I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.* Or the one we all familiar with in Matthew 6. *This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name..* We could label all of those the Commandments of Jesus. The last list I saw had a total of 38 such commandments. That might work, except Jesus does not call them commandments even though they are clearly directives. My conclusion? I have decided to rely on the clearest commandment statement that Jesus made in the Gospels. When he was asked *what is the greatest commandment?* he replied, *the Lord your God is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.* Love God. Love neighbor. Jesus calls this the greatest commandment. Given our tendency to find division in everything, including our faith, I suggest that we will find unity of ethics and unity of purpose in this one commandment that Jesus offers. What do you see in this text from the Gospel of John?