

Greetings to our members, those from United Congregational Church in Conway and all our friends at home,

This Sunday is a communion Sunday at First Congregational Church. If you wish to participate in the sacrament, please have two elements ready. First, a drink in a cup or glass. This could be juice of any kind or water. Second, a piece of bread of any kind. Then download the Worship Resource to follow the service and open the video.

Time to open the church! While the details are still being fine-tuned, our goal is to have our first in person worship service in our sanctuary on Sunday May 16. Our Sunday morning will look different for safety reasons. There will be a limited number of safe seats available, reservations and masks will be required. When all is ready, an invitation will be sent through this email list with all the details you will need to know. Your Re-Opening Task Force, the Deacons and the Executive Committee have been hard at work to make this happen.

Looking forward to seeing you in worship!

Pastor Rob

Welcome to Sunday Worship May 2, 2021

Good Morning to our members, those from United Congregational Church in Conway and all our friends at home. Today is the fifth Sunday of Easter and our scripture, from the Book of Acts tells the story of one of the momentous decisions of the early church in Jerusalem.

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If you are unable to access the Sunday video, you are welcome and encouraged to follow this resource on your own and celebrate Communion by reading the Communion prayers and serving yourself keeping in mind that even when alone, we are all a part of the body of Christ and our tradition holds to the priesthood of all believers.

And now let us be in worship

A Call to Worship (Responsive, L=Leader, P=People) Luke 13:29

L And the people will come;

P The east and the west, from the north and from the south,

L And they will recline at the table in the Kingdom of God.

Unison Morning Prayer & the Lord's Prayer

God of all creation, make strong in our hearts what unites us; build bridges across all that divides us; united, make us rejoice in our diversity. And at one in our witness to your peace, a rainbow to your glory in the name of Christ, who taught us to pray 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.

Morning Prayers

Our prayers this morning are ones of thanksgiving for the rich diversity in God's creation and our desire to welcome everyone to live in abundance within it. We are thankful that this invitation includes a seat at Christ's Table.

Loving God, who sets a table in our sight, who invites us, each and every one, the young and the old, the exuberant and the despairing, children, women and men, the lost and lone, the gifted and the struggling, each and every one, to this table of grace where you are continually creating a new thing by the power of your Holy Spirit. Grant us table manners full of your love and directed by your hospitality, that we may welcome, befriend, and care for all who we meet along life's pathways, and especially those with whom we break your bread, and share your cup. Like our ancestors before us, we enjoy the bounties of the table of your creation, intended for all the people of the earth, from the food we eat to the air we breathe, from the sights of splendor, of beach and mountain, forest and glen, backyard roses and highway wildflowers, that we drink in with our eyes, to the overflowing streams of love, compassion and tender moments that fill our hearts and quench our thirsty souls. As much as we offer our gratitude of all we enjoy, we step back and we sense our own awkwardness, as we note that while we are blessed in these ways, so many of your children are not. So many go without and struggle through each and every day, so many are hungry, thirsty, so many are parched of soul and exhausted of spirit. They too are invited to your table, and from our faithfulness, grant us your grace to assist in their arrival to your banquet hall and in their seating. Gracious God, in humility, move us to be enthusiastic in our generosity. Bring us out of the wilderness of hardness of heart, into the land of joyous ministry in Christ's name. May we be your hands, your feet, may we embrace the vision of your new realm where all are seated at your table of blessing, Of food and drink of healing and forgiveness, Of wholeness in you and in your Christ. We offer these our prayers in this time of peaceful meditation. (personal prayer and meditation time)

Gracious God, who sets a table in our sight, who invited us all to your bounty, hear these our prayers as we offer them in the name of Jesus. Amen

Scripture Reading: Acts 10:34-48

The first significant conflict within the new Christian community in Jerusalem concerned who could be a Christian and who could not. On one side were those who believed only Jews were able to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and become a member of the church. If a non-Jew wished entrance into the community of faith, that person would need to convert to Judaism first and then come to Christ. On the other side were those who believed non-Jews could be baptized into the community of faith without becoming Jewish first. Today's lesson recalls one of the major events that opened the doors of the church to all who desired to be Christian.

Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem.

They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” So, he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

After the reading, you may reflect on this passage.

The sermon for this text may be seen in this week’s video.

Sermon: *Can Anyone?*

The Sacrament of Communion

The Invitation

Whether we gather in our meeting house, on our front lawn, in our living room, on the beach, or upon a mountain top, when we gather to break bread in remembrance of Jesus, when we gather to pass the cup of life and acknowledge our new covenant in Christ, we have gathered around the Lord’s Table. All are welcome here. Where you have been, where you are today, what you have done in this life, or left undone, if you are broken, or whole, joyful, or tearful, wandering or confused, you are welcome here in the hopes of finding God’s love, God’s forgiveness, God’s mercy, and God’s healing in this bread and in this cup. This is the Lord’s table, come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and gather here, not because you must but because you may.

The Prayer of Consecration

Come Lord, bless this bread from heaven and this cup of life that we may know your deep and abiding peace. Come Lord, in the wonder of your birth, make yourself known to us in your gentleness and in your innocence. Come, Lord, in the fullness of your life, make yourself known to us in your teaching and your healing. Come Lord, in the fullness of your suffering,

make yourself known to us in your passion and abandonment. Come Lord, in the fullness of your death, make yourself known to us in shadow of the cross. Come Lord, in the fullness of your loving, risen presence, make yourself known to us again and grant us your peace through the breaking of this bread and the sharing of this cup. Amen.

Blessing of the Bread

On the night that Jesus was to be betrayed, he sat at table with all of his disciples. During the course of the meal, he took bread off the table. When he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." (You break your bread and eat)

Blessing of the Cup

Again, on that same night, Jesus took a cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. (You may drink from your cup)

Unison Prayer of Thanksgiving

O God, for the bread that we have eaten, for the cup that we have shared, for the table you have granted, we give you thanks and praise. For the hope of Christ within us helping us to live for others, for the peace of Christ to lead us all our days of this our life, we give you thanks and praise. For the blessings you have granted, for the work you place before us, for the gifts of your creation and the promise of your Spirit, we give you thanks and praise, O Lord, our God. Amen.

Benediction:

Lord, make us instruments of thy peace;

Where there is hatred, let us bring love,

Where there is injury, pardon,

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, your light,

And where there is sadness, joy.

Amen.