

Greetings members and friends of First Congregational Church of Shelburne,

This week's Worship Resource is attached and can also be found, along with this week's video, on our web page, shelburnechurch.org. The week is a communion Sunday and you are encouraged to celebrate the sacrament at home. If you wish to participate, please have the two necessary elements on hand: a drink for Communion and bread of your choosing and a copy of the worship resource.

Your church leadership has been busy the last two weeks. The Pastoral Search Committee continues to meet and work on our Church profile. You will be hearing from them as they will be offering conversations with the congregation, via Zoom, to hear your responses to certain questions in the profile. They have also been meeting with the team assigned to seek out possible partner congregations who would wish to share a pastor. Your Executive Committee has also been meeting with the Re-Opening Task force concerning our next step forward. You will be hearing from them very soon.

As we transition into the month of August, please keep those who will be finalizing fall plans, such as school teachers, principals, school staff, superintendents, School Committees, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Massachusetts Teachers Association and all the students, in your prayers as they all prepare to do what has not been done in our life time, offer the best education possible in a season of pandemic.

Faithfully Yours,

Pastor Rob

Welcome to Communion Sunday Worship
August 2, 2020

Good Morning to our members and friends at home,

This Sunday is a communion Sunday. If you wish to participate in communion please have two elements ready. First, a drink in a cup or glass. This could be juice of any kind or water. (yes, wine is also acceptable) Second, a piece of bread of any kind. From sliced, to French, a hamburger roll to a Triscuit cracker, all may be used.

Our Sunday morning YouTube video will be posted on our webpage by Saturday evening that follows this order of worship and includes Communion. If you are unable to access the 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 now let us be in worship

Morning Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Almighty and Everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order and created the infinite complexities of living creatures. You provide us with food in its season and feed us in both body and soul. Grant that as followers of Christ, we may seek to nourish and nurture all who knock on our door, welcoming them into the body 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.*

Prayers of the People

Our prayers this morning focus on the communion table, God's invitation, and our response. There will be a time of meditation to include your own prayers. Let us Come to God...

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, 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 path, and especially those with whom we break your bread, and share your cup. So to, do we enjoy the bounties of the table of your creation, 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, all the blessings that come to us from your table and from your almighty hand, we step back, we swallow hard, 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 carry your invitation, may we lead those whom you call, to your table, your table of blessing, of food and drink, of healing and forgiveness, of wholeness in you and in your Christ. May we now find your peace, may we now discover your voice, may we now bring all that we are into your holy presence in this moment of meditation.....

Loving God, who sets a table in our sight, and offers a gracious invitation, may we come to your table even as we lift our prayers before you. Amen.

Gospel reading: Matthew 14:13-21. Feeding the 5,000.

Today's Gospel lesson takes place during Jesus' year of ministry in Galilee. Jesus has been traveling with his disciples, preaching, teaching, and healing. At this time, he also learns about the execution of John the Baptist. Following this tragic piece of news, Jesus seeks a quiet place, away from the crowds. This attempt at finding some personal, private time was not to be as people from the neighboring villages discover where he had gone and follow.

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

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.

The Sacrament of Communion

The Invitation

Just as a seed must be planted in order to bring forth the stalks of wheat and the vines for grapes, so was Christ born in Bethlehem to bring light into our world.

Just as a grain of wheat must die in the earth and the grapes of the vine plucked in order to bring forth a rich harvest, so has Christ died on the cross to bring a rich harvest of love.

Just as the harvest of wheat must be ground into flour to make bread, and the grapes pressed to make wine, so the suffering of Christ brings us the bread of life and the cup of salvation.

Just as bread and drink gives our bodies strength for our daily work, so the risen body of Christ gives us strength to follow the way of our faith. Let us come to the table.

The Prayer of Consecration

Show us, O God, the brightness of your spirit as we gather about the table of Christ. Show us, O God, the radiance of your grace in the breaking of this bread. Show us, O God, the brilliance of your presence in the pouring of this cup. Reveal to us the depth of your love, reveal to us the ever-flowing streams of your forgiveness, reveal to us the wideness of your mercy. As we come to this table of grace, forgiveness and mercy, may we catch a glimpse of your glory, your mystery and your peace. 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)

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Lord of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off, you met us in Jesus of Nazareth and brought us home. He declared your love, gave us grace and opened the gates of your kingdom. May we who break bread in his name, live the life he calls us to. May we who share of his cup, bring life to others. Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us so that we, and all your children, shall live in love and be free. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Benediction

*Jesus said, "I am the bread of life."
Jesus said, "whoever comes to me will never be hungry,
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."
Thanks be to you O God.
Amen.*

Notes on the Text

840 million people go hungry in our world. In the last 66 years, since 1954, over 400 million people worldwide have died from hunger and poor sanitation. That is three times the number of people in all wars fought in the 20th century. We have the potential of growing sufficient food on a sustainable basis, for everyone on the planet. One billion people, of the world's estimated 6.3 billion, that is nearly 16 % of the world's population, lack access to safe drinking water. Contaminated water kills 2.2 million people every year. These figures are so huge and so beyond our experience, as to be almost beyond our understanding. It's one thing to hear the numbers. It's another to start grasping what they mean. On a global level, they mean children, women and men, die every day simply for lack of enough food and clean water. On a national level, it means that 11.8% of our population of 328 million, 38 million people, live at or below the poverty level set at \$26,000 for a family of 4. On a state level, it means 9.8% of our population lives at the poverty level, and 10% of the population of Franklin county do so as well. And on a personal level? I would hope it would bring two things to heart and soul. First, a profound understanding of how blessed we are. Chances are we do not know any of the 30,000 + children who die every day for want of what we take for granted, and have only to step into the Big Y, or Stop and Shop to find. And second, in light of the realities of hunger in our world, in the midst of this pandemic, there is a profound sadness in my soul. I should hope all Christians would feel the same. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey,

and yet, imagine how overwhelming those figures would be without all the agencies who contribute vast amounts of supplies on a global level to combat the reality of hunger.

Our text today brings to us a number of possibilities to consider when we come to grips with world hunger. There is the crowd who follows Jesus. In their passion they have forgotten how far they've come and where they have ended up. Clearly not a model for being prepared, but perhaps a model for being faithful. Then there's the disciples. Standing there, looking out over the hungry crowd and concluding the need is too great, the resources at their disposal not sufficient. We'd love to feed them, but, well, no, send them away. It is easy to be like the disciples in this instance. When it comes to feeding the hungry, reading the numbers of those in need, it is easy to be overwhelmed and conclude we don't have the resources. Then there are the loaves and the fish that Jesus uses to provide a picnic for those who followed him. The five loaves and two fish were clearly not enough to feed 5,000 people. They became enough when the power of Christ is included in the preparation. That same message is true for us today, especially when we are faced with a task that seems so overwhelming as helping to feed the hungry. It is true that neither you, all of you, nor I, have sufficient resources to do the whole job ourselves. By including Christ in our preparation, we have discovered we do have enough to make a difference.

One box of pasta becomes two and three, a case, one jar of peanut butter multiples out to dozens of pb&j sandwiches. One box of soup becomes a number ten can ready to provide a meal. You've seen this happen, in your church, in your community. One thing First Congregational Church in Shelburne is exceptional at is feeding people and providing food and other items for those experiencing a lack of resources. From socks to hats, walking for CROP and for Meals on Wheels, this community of faith gathers its resources and touches countless lives. It could be argued that this sort of outreach does not necessarily need a faith component. And in one way that would be correct. Anyone can contribute resources to feed the hungry. I have every reason to believe that the difference is we, as followers of Christ, are engaged in this fight because it is at the very core of who we are. It is a priority that is central to our mission and ministry. To love God and to love of our neighbor. In these times of overwhelming need, let us remember how it is we have marshalled our resources in the past to be God's hands, and God's feet, as we continue to include Jesus in our ministries today.