

Greetings members and friends of the First Congregational Church of Shelburne,

This Sunday is Thanksgiving Sunday. The attached Worship Resource is designed for thoughtful reflection on our national holiday as well as giving thanks for those who founded the First Congregational Church Shelburne 250 years ago.

Advent Sunday Services are being prerecorded in the church sanctuary and will be available on YouTube. These services will include the lighting of our Advent Wreath, music, prayer, scripture and a preaching series titled, "The Questions of Advent."

Advent Wreaths: We have six Advent Wreaths with candle sets left to give away. If you desire a brass wreath, complete with candles.

If you wish one, they will be available this Saturday at the church sanctuary. First come, first serve. Please come to the front door and wear your PPE. We will also deliver one to your door when you make a reservation through my address.

Wishing you a safe, peaceful, and enjoyable Thanksgiving Day,

Pastor Rob

Welcome to Thanksgiving Sunday Worship
November 22, 2020

Good Morning to our members and friends at home,

This Sunday is Thanksgiving Sunday as we prepare for this week's holiday. Included in this service is a grateful remembrance of our congregation's founding 250 years ago this past October. Due to the pandemic, plans for an all church celebration of this anniversary have been judiciously postponed for another Sunday.

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.

A Thanksgiving Proclamation

Abraham Lincoln issued Thanksgiving Proclamations in the spring of 1862 and the spring of 1863; both proclamations gave thanks for victories in battle. Abraham Lincoln's Thanksgiving Proclamation in the autumn of 1863 - the second Thanksgiving Proclamation in that year - gave thanks for the general blessings of the year. This second 1863 Thanksgiving Proclamation, the first in the unbroken string of annual Thanksgiving proclamations, is regarded as the true beginning of the national Thanksgiving holiday. Following Lincoln's death in April of 1865 President Andrew Johnson issued the next proclamation, the first given after the end of the Civil War that had divided the nation.

THANKSGIVING DAY 1865

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA – A PROCLAMATION

Whereas it has pleased Almighty God during the year which is now coming to an end to relieve our beloved country from the fearful scourge of civil war and to permit us to secure the blessings of peace, unity, and harmony, with a great enlargement of civil liberty; and Whereas our Heavenly Father has also during the year graciously averted from us the calamities of foreign war, pestilence, and famine, while our granaries are full of the fruits of an abundant season; and Whereas righteousness exalteth a nation, while sin is a reproach to any people : Now, therefore, be it known that I, Andrew Johnson, President of the United States, do hereby recommend to the people thereof that they do set apart and observe the first Thursday of December next as a day of national thanksgiving to the Creator of the Universe for these great deliverances and blessings. And I do further recommend that on that occasion the whole people make confession of our national sins against His infinite goodness, and with one heart and one mind implore the divine guidance in the ways of national virtue and holiness. In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this 28th day of October, A.D. 1865, and of the Independence of the United States of America the ninetieth. ANDREW JOHNSON

Morning Unison Prayer & the Lord's Prayer

John Milton (1608-1674)

Holy Spirit of God, instruct us in all truth this day; what is dark, illumine, what is low, raise and support, what is shallow, deepen; that every chapter in our lives may witness to your power and justify the ways of God. In the name of Jesus, giver of all grace. We offer this prayer 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.*

Prayers of the People

Our Prayers this morning offer praise and thanksgiving for every blessing in our lives and recall with gratitude those who founded our congregation and those who, down through the ages, lived their faith through the ministries of the First Congregational Church of Shelburne. There will be an opportunity to offer your own prayers. Let us come to God in prayer.

Thanks be to you, O God, for the circle of community in this place. Thanks be to you, O God, for the circle of community from all generations whom we have not seen but have met in the spirit. Thanks be to you, O God, for those who desired a place for worship and followed your direction to create this church and begin its life with faithful people. Thanks be to you, O God, for that great cloud of witnesses through whom you have blessed us and blessed our world – those who came before us; parents and grandparents, ancestors from other lands, who strove in courage for freedom and the opportunity to live as you intend. Thanks be to you, O God, for prophets and apostles, creators of beauty and artisans of craft and art, discoverers of your will and your way, teachers, preachers, writers, soldiers and sailors, doctors and nurses, all who have come before us, who paved the way for us in our time, that we may walk further down the road that you have set our feet upon. Thanks be to you, O God, for our moment in your endless spiral

of time and space. Thanks be to you, O God, for being in our lives this day, for the countless blessings, for the love shared with us from our friends, our neighbors, our families and, from you. Thanks be to you, O God, for setting our mission before us, to be your hands and your feet in this community today. Thanks be to you, O God, for each time we celebrate a healing, each time we rejoice in a birth, every opportunity we have to comfort those who mourn, and bring cheer to the afflicted, to live in your joy and make that joy greater by bringing it to others. Thanks be to you, O God for in confidence we offer prayers for that which is yet to be. Our future is shrouded in wonder, anxiety, and mystery. Though the details are left to the unfolding of time, your love is ageless, your mercy timeless, and your righteousness eternal. Thanks be to you, O God for as we offer prayers from healing and for strength, especially for a friend who is supporting her parents as one is suffering from Alzheimer's and other is in Hospice care. We pray for the healing for those who are affected by the current surge of COVID-19, both here and across our nation. We pray for those on the front lines, the nurses, doctors, emergency care personnel, all those who give care to those who suffer. We pray for strength and perseverance as we continue to focus our attention on prevention. We pray for healing for those who are sick and for their families, particularly those recently diagnosed with cancer. We lift prayers of joy for those who are recovering and more prayers of support that they don't feel guilty for surviving their time of crisis when others are not responding as well to treatment. We pray for the healing of our nation in this divided time between administrations. Grant us a margin of hope in our process. And now hear these our prayers in this time of meditation..... Gracious God who hears each and every prayer, and who answers not according to our desires, but according to your holy will, we offer our gratitude in thanksgiving. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Acts 16:6-10
Come Over and Help Us

The Apostle Paul made three missionary journeys over the course of his ministry. During the first journey Paul teamed up with Barnabas and his nephew, John Mark. They traveled over 1500 miles and preached in Cyprus, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. Paul's second journey would be made with Silas and Timothy. They would travel over 3000 miles. As this journey begins to unfold, Paul has a vision.

They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

Here ends the scripture lesson for today.

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

Benediction: Based on Psalm 86

We give thanks to you, O Lord, Our God,
With our whole hearts and voices,
we declare that we will glorify your name in all we say
and in all we do.

And may your blessings be upon us this day and forever more. Amen

Notes on the text

You may be aware that the seal for the State of Massachusetts is under review due to the caricature of a Native American. The seal and the flag bearing it feature a disembodied, sword-wielding arm above the Native American. The horseshoe of the state motto wraps around him in Latin, usually translated as “*by the sword we seek peace, but peace under liberty.*” For decades Native Americans have been offended by this seal and have said so. Given their history in New England, you can understand why. The first seal issued in Massachusetts was granted to the Massachusetts Bay Colony by King Charles I in 1629. On that seal is a Native American holding an arrow pointed down in a gesture of peace, with the words “*come over and help us,*” on a tape coming from his mouth. This text is from the Book of Acts and was chosen to emphasize the missionary and commercial intentions of the original colonists. This seal was used until 1686. The current seal of Massachusetts no longer has the words from the Book of Acts. However, this piece from the Book of Acts has a context that we should be aware of. The Massachusetts Bay Colony was strongly Puritan. They were from the same Anglican Communion as the Separatists at Plymouth, but they were not the same. The Separatists had left England, and the Church of England, to begin a new church on their own. One that would not be connected to the Anglican Communion. The Puritans, on the other hand, wanted to purify the Church of England. This group thought to leave England, begin a successful commercial venture, and return to England. In 1660, the English civil war began with Oliver Cromwell leading the Puritan cause. Part of the mission of the Bay Colony was to Christianize, to convert, the local inhabitants. The story from the Book Acts was used to fit this mission. Instead of a Macedonian saying to the Apostle Paul, *come over and help us*, a Native American is saying it to the Puritans, *come over and help us*. Meaning, *come over and convert us*. The desire of the first colonists in Massachusetts was to convert the Native Americans to Christianity and take possession of their land. The Wampanoag tribes that befriended the Pilgrims found themselves in a war with the English. King Philip’s war. What started this? The practice of the English of getting a Wampanoag chief drunk and having him sign over the tribe’s land. In the end, the Wampanoags lost that war. Many were sold into slavery and the tribe was disbanded. In 1928, the remnant of this tribe was recognized by the federal government. Needless to say, the other tribes in New England did not fare well either. This text, embedded in our first seal, has historical significance for us in Massachusetts. To understand the plight of New England Native Americans, is to understand how they were systematically stripped of their land, their heritage, and their culture. The seal of that day implied that this is what they wanted. In recent times

some of the injustice has been addressed and yet, the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe had to fight for three decades to be re recognized by the federal government in 2007 and this past March the President of the United States sought to remove over 300 acres of land from the federal trust and take away the designation of "reservation," meaning that the tribe would have no land and no recognition. That case is still in court. When we celebrate thanksgiving, it is important for us to realize not everyone has something to celebrate. Given the reality of this historical narrative, you might conclude that this text from the Book of Acts can no longer be informative for us today and in our New England historical context you may be right. We might be able to utilize this text if we return to the original context of the text itself. Paul's dream may have something for us. Paul is convinced that God is directing him to go to Macedonia to proclaim the Gospel and to help those who lived there. Off he goes. Let us take just those two aspects of the text. Following God's direction and helping those in need. I suppose Paul could have simply ignored the dream with God's message, and stubbornly kept trying to go in the direction he wanted to. Instead he found his ministry and his mission in living the life God had called him to.

One morning, a number of years ago, I found myself in the Veterans cemetery in Agawam, officiating at a committal for a Vietnam era Air Force Staff Sergeant. I had known him and his family for more than two decades. One of his great loves was all things Disney. So much so, you might take notice that he even looked like a Disney character. Over the course of his life, he had served his community in any number of ways. He had been a good husband, loving father, and grandfather. In conversation with his widow, I had asked what was important for me to say at the committal, since time is very limited at the Veterans cemetery. "*He lived his life taking care of others,*" she said, "*he was a servant, do unto others, was how he lived.*" And so, standing in the chapel, I read the Gospel account of the Judgment of the Nations, the sheep and the goats with the sheep inheriting the Kingdom of God. They had fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, visited the sick and imprisoned, and in so doing to any and to all, they had tended to the needs of God. *And that,* I said, *is how this man lived his life. Like one of God's own sheep, tending to the needs of others, and in so doing tending to the needs of God.*" After the service, as we stood out in the cold and said our goodbyes, the widow said, "*send me your remarks about my husband. I can think of no better compliment of his life than being one of God's sheep.*" **Come over and help us, help us to listen, to follow and the make a difference to live the life God calls us to.** On March 13, 1769, the town of Shelburne voted to build a church. And they did. As far as we know sometime in 1770 twelve Christians got together and founded The First Congregational Church. Since that time, our congregation has moved through the years with an assortment of pastors, Deacons, Sunday School Superintendents, musicians, teachers, craftsmen and women, builders and any variety of faithful members who contributed and participated in the ministries they believed they were called to. This congregation has lived through wars, fires, conflicts, and more than one pandemic. 250 years later, we have every reason to give thanks that we are still doing our best to follow where God leads us, and to help any and all in every way we can. To be God's hands on earth. Thanksgiving is headed our way this week. It is inevitably tied to our history in Massachusetts, both joyful and regretful. It is also tied to the history of our congregation and our individual family history. I would encourage you to consider the best our ancestors and our faith can offer us, to follow the call of God, to help even the least among us, to be one of God's sheep, and to give thanks, with a grateful heart.