

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

Next Sunday is the final Sunday before the season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 17. There are two Lenten program opportunities that we will be taking advantage of.

24th Annual Lenten Discussion Series: This is a six-week program under the title: *Even the Cherry Blossom Falls*. Each session begins at 7 PM, all sessions are on consecutive Wednesday evenings and all will be offered through a Zoom link. There are six congregations involved in this series including First Congregational Church of Shelburne. The first session begins on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 17 with the Rev. Linda Rhinehart Neas from the Whately Congregational Church. The complete schedule is attached to this note.

Franklin County Interfaith Council is offering a Lenten Ecumenical and Interfaith program titled *Lifting the Veil: Racism in Franklin County*. This is a three-part program, beginning at 7 PM and offered through a Zoom link. The three dates are: Wednesday, Feb. 24, Thursday, March 11 and Thursday, March 25. More information will be available soon.

Wishing you God's peace,

Pastor Rob

Welcome to the First Communion of 2021 February 7, 2021

Good Morning 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 communion 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.

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.

Call to Worship (Responsive, L=Leader, P=People) Psalm 147

L Praise the Lord!

**P How good it is to sing praises to our God; for God is gracious,
and a song of praise is fitting.**

L Let us Praise the Lord!

Unison Morning Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Hear this our prayer, O Lord for we are in need of your mercy and forgiveness. When we are grumblers who magnify resentments into wrongs, forgive us. When we are hard hearted and cherish false opinions as the truth, forgive us. When we are fools who must be suffered gladly, forgive us. When we are cynics who ambush our faith and ignore your grace, forgive us. When

we hear your call and refuse to listen, forgive us. Grant us your mercy, O God, and teach us to forgive ourselves and others, for the sake of Christ who taught us 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

Today's prayer is one for every Christian especially in preparation for receiving communion. This prayer is based on the prayer, "Help Our Unbelief" written by the Rev. Dr. Roy Pearson.

God of the seen and unseen, God in whom we live and move and have all of our being, we gather this day in worship, and we turn all our attention to this moment to prayer. We are gathered as one body from different homes and separate situations. Our purposes are many and our hopes are as many as the people in our congregations. We admit that we do not always agree with each other, that there have been misunderstandings, even resentments among us. Yet, here in our time of prayer we stand on level ground; conscious of hungers and questions that only you can satisfy and humbled by our own wayward natures. We affirm before you that as we gather for worship, we are one. One in the search for your nature and being, one in the need of your mercy and forgiveness, one in the need of your unconditional love, and one in the longing for your peace. Come to each of us, uphold our noblest ambitions. Lift up your light within each of us, kindle it into brightness, that we will be unencumbered by the darkness of our doubts and be free from our anxieties. Grant, O God that we have no loyalty other than you. Not wealth, not advancement in work or distinction at large, not comfort or safety or public acclamation. Grant that we make no graven images, nor bow to those around us. Remind us how much we have done in your name and at your calling. Remind us of how much has been left undone that we have been called to accomplish. Encourage us to fulfillment by sparing us the guilt of bearing untrue witness against our neighbors and neglecting to listen, intently, before we pass judgement. Fill us at last, O God, with such gratitude to you and for your blessings, that we need not be diverted by the blessings of others. And now, loving God, hear these our prayers (personal prayer and meditation). God of the seen and unseen, God in whom we live and move and have all of our being, we gather this day in worship, in prayer and in gratitude. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:29-39

The Gospel of Mark traces the ministry of Jesus at a breakneck pace. The word "immediately," is used by the author no less than 27 times. The first chapter sets this pace by concisely relating: The proclamation of John the Baptist. The baptism of Jesus. The temptation of Jesus. The calling of the disciples. The healing of a man with an unclean spirit. The healing of the mother-in-law of Simon Peter. Jesus' preaching tour of Galilee, and the healing of a leper. All this in only 45 verses. This morning we continue to make our way through this first full chapter.

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Here ends the reading from
The Gospel according to Mark

After the reading, you may reflect on this passage.
The sermon for this text is included on our video.

Sermon: *A Day in the Life*

The Sacrament of Communion

The Invitation

Jesus said, *Come, unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.* On this day may we come to this table of Christ seeking a moment of rest. May we find refreshment for our tired and parched souls in the breaking of bread and the pouring of the cup. May we find fresh forgiveness and mercy overflowing in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This morning, may we find that it is here we may see Jesus and receive his grace, and his peace to continue as the body of Christ in our day and our age. So, come from the north and from the south, the east and from the west and gather here not because you must, but because you may.

The Prayer of Consecration

Fill us with your glory, O God, and send your Holy Spirit on these offerings that you have created. As this bread was scattered on the mountains, the hills and in the valleys, and was gathered to become a single body and as this fruit of the vine, sprung from the holy vine of David, and became a single mystery, so too gathers the church of Jesus Christ. Each time that we eat this bread and drink from this chalice we announce Christ's death and proclaim his

resurrection. In Christ, the light which shines for us all has come into this world, and he has become one with us that we may become one with you. Thanks be to you, O God, your Christ, and the Holy Spirit, for this great gift and for bringing us to this, the table of your grace. 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

Holy God, our loving creator, we give thanks for your constant love. We thank you for all that sustains life, for all people of faith in every generation and especially for Jesus Christ whom you have sent from your own being as our savior. We praise you for his birth, life, death, and resurrection and for calling forth your church. In celebration we have come to his table. At this table, in the bread and the cup we may be restored to newness of life. Thanks be to you, your Christ, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Benediction: Romans 15:5–6

May the God of endurance and encouragement,
grant us to live in such harmony with one another,
in accord with Christ Jesus,
that together we may with one voice
glorify God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen