

Greetings members and friends of First Congregational Church of Shelburne,

Attached is the Sunday Worship Resource. Please remember we include prayer requests every week. Any requests may be sent to me at pastor01089@gmail.com

Who would have imagined that we would be unable to worship in our sanctuary for 6 weeks so far? That we would be unable to gather for Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Easter? From worship to the economy, the health care system to simply stepping out in public everything has changed. I hear the phrase, "These are different times." And indeed, they are. Our prayers always include those on the front lines of this crisis, our local and state leadership who team up and thoughtfully consider the best course of action every single day, our families and friends that they may be kept healthy and safe, and those who have watched as a loved one has been called home. Our prayer life makes a difference in these different and difficult of times.

The Sunday after Easter, also known as the Second Sunday of Easter, is called "Low Sunday" in England. The adjective, "low", is the anglicization of the Latin word, "laudes," meaning "praise". In most of our churches in this country, the Sunday after Easter is also considered "low Sunday," due to the noticeable drop in attendance following Easter Sunday. But there is more to this than that. In 389 AD, the Roman Emperor, Valentinian II, declared the week following Easter Sunday a holiday, giving rise to the Easter Octave, or Eight Days of Easter. In the early centuries of the Christian church, Easter Tide was a total of 50 days, counted from the day of Easter to evening prayer on Pentecost. The great Fifty Days of Easter was to be a season of uninterrupted rejoicing designed to be a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, yet to come. During these fifty days, whose color is white for resurrection, rebirth and renewal in Christ, Christians prayed standing up, rather than sitting or kneeling. At the close of each day, the anthem "Queen of Heaven Rejoice," was sung. It was said that the words of this anthem were compiled by Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome and Pope in 590 AD. At the height of the plague that decimated the population of Rome Pope Gregory ordered that the icon of Mary, Mother of Jesus, rumored to have been painted by Saint Luke, be borne throughout the city in a penitential procession. As the icon was carried over the Tiber River, Gregory heard angel voices singing, "Pray for us to God, Alleluia." At that moment, Gregory saw an angel above the mausoleum of Emperor Hadrian, sheath its sword, a sign that the plague was over.

While this story may fall into the realm of legend, it is a reminder that we are not the first to suffer through a pandemic. It is also a reminder that once upon a time Easter was a season. It was substantially more than one Sunday a year. On this Low Sunday let us bring our prayers to God. Let us pray for ourselves and for others and let us pray that soon this sword will also be sheathed and that this pandemic will be over.

Pastor Rob

Welcome to Sunday Worship April 19, 2020

Good Morning to our members and friends at home,

This resource is being provided to offer a worship guide for this the first Sunday after Easter. You will need a bible in order to read the passage for this week and we would encourage you to include any music you wish. We hope that you will adapt this to your situation while we wait to reunite on a Sunday morning in the future.

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.

And now let us be in worship

A Call to Worship

From the ends of the earth, God calls us together. The rich and the poor, the joyful, those filled with sorrow, the loved and the unloved, those at home, those at work, all are gathered in the one household of God's love. Let us praise the Lord.

Morning Prayer & Lord's Prayer

On this day, loving God, we thank you that you watch us as shepherds tend to their sheep. We thank you that you care for us as a mother cares for her children. We thank you that you have called us to be as family; sisters and brothers in the one household of your love. We pray in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray together... *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. Silent prayer time for your own prayers and prayer requests is also included. This morning's prayer takes its theme from our lesson from the Gospel according to John. This text presents the image of Jesus as the Shepherd.

Let us come to God in prayer.

Good Shepherd, Care Giver Protector from whom all our blessings flow and in whose pastures, we live our lives, hear our prayers. Hear our offerings of Thanksgiving: Praise be to you in all things and for all things. You provide sunlight and seasons. You bring forth the bounty on by which we are sustained. In the midst of your creation, you have placed us, with one foot on earth and one foot that desires to stretch into eternity. In your wisdom, you have endowed us with incredible passion, unfathomable creativity and the capacity to love you and each other.

Praise be to you, O God! Hear our prayers for your blessing: Bless those new to life and Those new to death. Bless the tired and the hungry, the lonely and those who sit in darkness. Bless those whom we remember that have gone before us into your safe keeping, those whom we desperately miss. Bless those who rejoice greatly this day, those who are lifted by awe and wonder. Bless, O Lord, those who give of themselves and place their own comfort, even their own health, above those they are called to serve, to care for and protect. Bless all your people, O God, and all your creation.

Bless our endeavors to bring your love to others. Bless our ministries that bring the love and peace of Christ to those who struggle, those who wander, who are lost and alone.

Bless us in our endeavors to be a faithful community above all else, that our understanding of you and your Christ, may inform our leadership, that we may be good

shepherds of what you have entrusted to us. Bless these our prayers as we lift them up to your unfathomable wisdom and discernment.

Silent Time

Loving God, bless our congregation and in your blessing, may we come to know your Christ as our shepherd, our protector, our guide, our comforter and our friend.

Gospel Lesson: John 10:1-10

Our Gospel reading for today takes place as Jesus leaves the temple in Jerusalem to return to the Mount of Olives. As he walks through the city, he finds a man born blind. Jesus heals the man and moves on. The man, whose sight has now been restored, finds himself in a difficult situation as he is confronted by the Pharisees in the temple. After a short discourse he is thrown out of the temple and eventually he meets Jesus again. As Jesus speaks to the man born blind, he also teaches his disciples and those who have gathered around him. The reading for this morning is a part of that conversation.

After the readings, you may reflect on them and share your thoughts.

There is a set of notes concerning these texts for your reflection.

Benediction: Micah 8

*What does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.*

Notes on the text

In another time and another place, I received a call from a piano teacher who wondered if she could use the church meeting house for a recital for her students. She had seen the sanctuary, liked its acoustics and had noticed the Steinway concert grand piano. “Well,” I replied, “let me ask you a couple of questions, would this be a ‘for profit’ venture or a free recital?” “Free,” she replied. “Are these your students?” “Yes, does that matter?” She asked. “Not to me, but you’ve asked to use the building, so I have to bring your request to the church Trustees who are the stewards of our buildings and grounds, and these are questions they are likely to ask. You’ve also asked to use the meeting house, that’s our worship space and under the care of our Board of Deacons, so, I’ll have to bring your request to them.” “I’m afraid I don’t understand, she said. “You’re the priest, can’t you just give me permission?” “I’m sorry,” I confessed, “I can’t do that.” “Why not?” “Well, we’re a democratic congregation. I have no more real authority here than any other church member. Your request will be handled by the Trustees and the Deacons and I will be glad to bring it to them for you.” “You’re a what?” She asked. “I’m a

minister.” “Not that, I meant what you just said... a democratic church?” So, I spent a bit of time on the phone giving the crash course in Massachusetts congregationalism to a person who had never known that Christianity and democracy might actually fit together. It felt a bit awkward. The single most shocking revelation for the woman on the other end of the phone was that all the folk in our church had voice and vote and that all in the congregation were considered ministers in their own right. Everyone is charged with providing the church with leadership and direction.

When we look at the text from the Gospel according to John, the temptation is to say, “Well, this doesn’t really apply to us, we’re the sheep in that narrative. Jesus is the good shepherd, capital G capital S. After him we might see our ministers as shepherds to the local flock. This text tells us, we may then conclude, that we are cared for and further it instructs the clergy on Christian leadership. It’s irrelevant to us, we’re just the sheep.” Really? Nice try. That would fly okay if our congregational heritage hadn’t invested each one of us with the responsibility to minister to each other, to care and support our community of faith and to exercise the privilege of voice and vote in all the affairs of the church. In other words, we may be sheep in relationship to Christ, but we are shepherds in relationship to each other and the community in which we live. We are all called to be church leaders and to tend to not only the welfare of the congregation but to live out the vision of the church to be outward looking and minister to those not already here. While our particular way of doing church has placed us at odds with other Christian communities and while we lay claim to the reality that there is more than one way to follow Christ, I am convinced that God works equally well through an individual as God works through a group of the faithful called to shepherds even as they are the Lord’s Sheep.