

Greetings members and friends of First Congregational Church of Shelburne,

This week's Worship Resource is attached and can also be found on our web page, shelburnechurch.org. There is no Sunday video this week.

Two events to remind you of:

This Sunday, August 23, is our second all church conversation via Zoom at 10 AM. The link for that meeting will arrive via email on Saturday August 22. Your participation and contributions in these conversations will give your Pastoral Search Committee the direction they seek in discovering your next settled pastor.

Sunday August 30 is our first Parking Lot worship service at 10:30 AM. Please note that you need to make reservations to attend through Diantha Wholey and there are certain safe policies that we will be following.

Looking forward to seeing you then!

Faithfully Yours,

Pastor Rob

Welcome to Sunday Worship August 23, 2020

Good Morning to our members and friends at home,

This week's Worship Resource

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

Morning Prayer & the Lord's Prayer

From all that troubles us and worries us, we come in joy to praise your name, O God. Here, in the body of Christ, we find peace for our hearts and refreshment for our parched souls. Here, in the community of faith, we listen to your voice, ponder your word, and come to new understandings for the living of these days. Fill us once again, O God, with the gifts of your Holy Spirit. We ask this in the name of Jesus, 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

Today's prayers offer the metaphor of song and hymns in particular to speak of our personal and difficult experiences as well as our joy and gratitude. Let us come to God in prayer.

O for a thousand tongues to sing your praise, O God! To sing beyond ourselves. Extravagantly, with abandonment, beyond all our possibilities, all our fears and all our hopes, O, for a thousand tongues to sing our great redeemer's name. More tongues and voices than simply our own. More than our tradition, our theology, doctrine and understanding, with saints above and saints below, the church with you, O God, and with us. We sing, to you, our redeemer, savior, bringer of life in death. A salve for our wounds and a resolve of our destructiveness. To sing of your glory, your triumphs your grace. To sing of our gratitude, our hopefulness, our joy. To sing this morning, a thousand tongues, to bring us into this week where the world sings a different tune, and where our tongues are often tied. We hold our breath in anger, bitterness, and envy, keeping our veneer of civility until it wears very thin. We are tongue tied in our moments of sorrow, loss, and grief. Words then fail us, tears overwhelm us. Our voices are dry and parched. Our tongues cleave to our mouths in those moments of fear.

Yet, O God, our heart knows what to say and how to say it. What to sing to whom it should be sung. The hungry and the afflicted. The lost and the forgotten. The lonely and those who mourn. Let us sing, O God, a new song.

One of your love, your mercy and healing. Let us make melody to you, O Lord and then let us open our hearts to make our song deep and abiding. Let our hands and feet become your hands and your feet. O for a thousand tongues to sing of you, O God, our great redeemer, who hears each and every prayer in the stillness of this moment.....

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 5:6-20

Be Careful, Make Melody, Give Thanks, Love Paul

After twenty years of an enthusiastic and all-consuming Christian ministry, the Apostle Paul was brought to Rome as a prisoner to await trial. He had already spent two years in a Roman prison in Palestine and would now wait another two in his new cell before his trial would come to the bar of the Emperor. During this time, he wrote a collection of letters to the churches he helped establish. Often a letter was written and sent to many churches. These circular letters were later given the names of the cities from which a copy was collected when the first collection of Paul's letters was compiled. The letter to the Ephesians is one of these circular letters and it is here that Paul speaks about the establishment of the universal Church of Jesus Christ and writes about living the Christian life.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore, do not be associated with them. For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for

everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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.

Benediction: *Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name* John Ellerton, 1826-1893

*Grant us thy peace upon our homeward way;
with thee began, with thee shall end the day.
From harm and danger keep thy children free,
for dark and light are both alike to thee.*

*Grant us thy peace throughout our earthly life;
peace to thy church from error and from strife;
then, when thy voice shall bid our conflict cease,
call us, O Lord, to thine eternal peace.*

Notes on the text

Since the age of 16, when the state of Connecticut saw fit to grant me a driver's license, my father would always say to me as I just about out the door, "Rob, drive carefully." When I was younger, I would often reply, "come on Dad, you know I'm a good driver." "Yes," he would reply, "you are, it's not your driving I'm worried about, it's the other idiots on the road so, drive carefully." And then, a few years before my father went home to God and when the wonderful art of sarcasm seemed to become more prevalent in my life, and after 34 years of driving with no accidents to my record (that were my fault), not even one speeding ticket, my father said, as I was leaving, "Rob, drive carefully." I simply could not help myself and I blurted out, "actually, Dad, I was considering driving like a complete maniac, but since you asked..." On occasion, somethings were lost on my father, sarcasm around driving was one of them. When Paul writes to the churches of his day, many of which he helped birth, he reminds them, "live carefully..." I have a feeling that he, like my father, would not particularly appreciate a sarcastic response from the Christians he was worried about. There were too many dangers, toils and snares that could easily divide and destroy a young Christian community. There were empty words and empty promises. There was darkness, an all-consuming darkness in the form of prejudice and persecution, suppression, and oppression. There were many who sought power, wealth, and leadership. Even in the Christian community, there were those who, for whatever reason, missed the entry level orientation course concerning what Christianity was about in the first

place, and there was the Roman Empire. The same one that sent countless Christians to their deaths; feeding them to lions, using them as tiki torches for back yard picnics, or as crash test dummies for gladiator practice. The same Roman Empire that would one day execute the Apostle Paul. Yes, there were plenty of idiots out there, lot of accidents waiting to happen. If the church was not careful, it would become one more casualty of driving while texting, of being distracted from what it was supposed to be and do. So, the first question to ask today is, "how careful do you live?" I have every reason to believe that over the past five months, living carefully has never been more important for every human being on the planet. For most of us, living carefully is our daily mantra. How about as a Christian? Do I live my life before God with the same sense of carefulness as I drive, as I eat, as I am about my finances, as I am about my family and my children? How does one live carefully as a Christian? Paul gives a couple of examples that we might build upon. First, he gives a couple of options listed in opposites. Be wise not foolish. Don't be drunk, be filled with the spirit. However, we must be careful when we think we know what is wise and what is foolish. Let's face it, we live a culture and a society that promotes violence, lavish spending, and rugged individualism. We have billions of dollars for all sorts of things; from hair care products to lipstick, designer sneakers to designer cat food. But the wisdom of the Gospel says, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, free the oppressed, and welcome the stranger. The wisdom of the Gospel is to live in a community where individual opinion and thought is essential and the voice of God works through the congregation. The next suggestion that Paul gives on how to live carefully is to make melody. Sing! Sing gladly. Live your life in harmony. Make melody to the Lord in your heart. Paul says be careful and make melody. When it comes to worship, the Christian scriptures do not include any prescribed order of service (such as announcements or responsive readings) They do, however, continually mention songs and gives great examples: The words of a pregnant Mary, mother of Jesus, during her visit with Elizabeth as they both wait for their children to be born, "my soul magnifies the lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior." The Magnificat. Out in the fields, the heavenly host sing praising God, "glory to God in the highest and peace among all people." The singing of songs shows up in Paul's letter to the Colossians, "and with gratitude in your hearts, sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." It shows up again in the book of James: "are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise." We are encouraged to sing and make melody to the Lord. Perhaps, it is more than that, as one hymnody professor noted, "what makes us think God wants to be serenaded all day long?" Music in worship, especially the singing of hymns is both for God and for us. When we sing together, we sing to God and we sing to each other, it is a corporate act. We can argue. We can debate. We can agree to disagree on most any and every subject known to humanity, But, when we sing Silent Night on Christmas eve, we become one voice, one heart, one spirit. We are united in song. Be careful, make melody Paul says and, he adds, give thanks while you are doing that. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Christian who was imprisoned by Hitler's Gestapo at the close of World War II. Bonhoeffer is described by a fellow prisoner as one who "spread an atmosphere of happiness and joy over the least incident and profound gratitude for the mere fact that he was alive." He was often called upon to comfort other prisoners in their distress. When he was being led away to the gallows, he turned to a fellow prisoner and said, "this is the end, but for me it is the beginning of life." Bonhoeffer spent his life seeking to understand what it means to live with Christ. His faith led him into the risky intrigue of the underground against the Nazis. In writing

about the Christian community during the evil days of Hitler's dictatorship, Bonhoeffer wrote: "we thank God for giving us brethren who live by his call by his forgiveness, and his promise. We do not complain of what God does not give us. We rather thank God for what he does give us daily." Paul, in his commandment to live carefully says something like: "in contrast to the world's foolish, drunken gatherings, we, as faithful Christians, are called to gather as a community that is wise in the Word of God, and is marked by glad singing and joyous gratitude. For the moment, our community finds itself unable to gather as we used to. We now gather on Zoom, through phone calls and email, in very small groups, and in parking lots granting us the distance required. For the moment, singing is now a solo affair, perhaps a duet or family choir. For the moment we have found new ways to hear Paul's voice: live carefully, make melody, and give thanks. Love Paul, Amen.