

EPISTLE

April, 2018



Bradford Congregational Church – UCC
An Open & Affirming Congregation!
Bradford, VT (802) 222-4034

Our website: <http://bradforducc.org>
email us at: bradfordvtucc@gmail.com
see us on Facebook: **Bradford Congregational Church**

Message from Pastor Jeff:

By the time this is read, Easter will be over. Or will it be? It's just a day and for many folks, indistinguishable from all the others. The Sun rises. The Sun sets. A day.

But if it truly is unremarkable, then I would ask the skeptic to explain what happened to those eleven frightened disciples meeting in a locked room. What changed? They went from being victims with a price on their heads to being people freed from fear. I fail to see how such a drastic transformation can occur without their being a transforming event. Had it been only one who believed and staked his life on the fact of the resurrection, we might be able to dismiss it as a singular anomaly. But eleven? They went from cowering to courage.

Now if this is all true, then Easter is not over. It has begun. Imagine what life would be like if our fears were set aside. If we no longer lost sleep worrying about finances, losing a job, the opinion of others who we don't really respect. Is not true freedom found when fear is vanquished?

Long ago and far away a stone was shoved to the side by the strength of God. This is the dawn of our freedom. We should not think of Easter as "over." Rather let the words of the Apostle Paul ring in our ears:

If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33 Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died,

yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 8:33-35, 37-39)

Easter's gift is more than the insurance of eternal life. Easter is the key to living free from fear in the here and now.

Faithfully,
Pastor Jeff



Christ
is
Risen!

A special series of Bible Study begins Monday, April 2nd in the vestry:

The Bible & It's Interpretation
A historical overview of the Bible in Western Culture
Each Monday night beginning April 2 at 7:00 through May 28, 2018

The study will be based on Pastor Jeff's lecture notes developed from a course offered by the Rev. Dr. Peter Gomes. The study will explore much of the history behind the creation of the Bible, how it has been interpreted by Western Culture and the challenges we face in how we look at the bible today.

Below is a listing of the topics to be covered at each session:

April 2 The Christian Bible and the Problem of Interpretation/The Movement Toward "Fixity:" Determining the Shape of Scripture

9th Principles and Profiles in Interpretation/Augustine: the Father of Interpretation

16th Martin Luther: Sola Scriptura and the Politics of Constipation/John Calvin: The enjoyment of God in a Fallen World

23rd The purging of the Margins: King James and the Protestant Consensus/The Great Migration: The Bible and the Exemplary Nation

30th

From Commentary to Criticism: The Germans, Harvard, and the Text/William Ellery Channing and the Baltimore Sermon

May 7th The Bible as a Text Book for Social Reform: The case of Slavery/Charles Hodge and

the Faith Once Delivered to the Saints

14th Charles Augustus Briggs and Protestant Modernism/Pius X and Catholic Modernism

21st Fundamentalism: Battling for the Bible/Modernism: Adapt or Die

28th Neo-Orthodoxy: Closing the Barn Door/Black Power: The Politics of Inclusion/The Feminist Hermeneutic: What has SHE got to do with it?

All are welcome so please share this with anyone you think might be interested. Questions should be directed to Pastor Jeff:

Pastor Jeff Long-Middleton 978-273-6399 pastorjeffuccbradford@gmail.com

Community Supper

Even though there were several events in Bradford that night, the March Community Supper was its usual delicious self! The next supper will be April 26th.

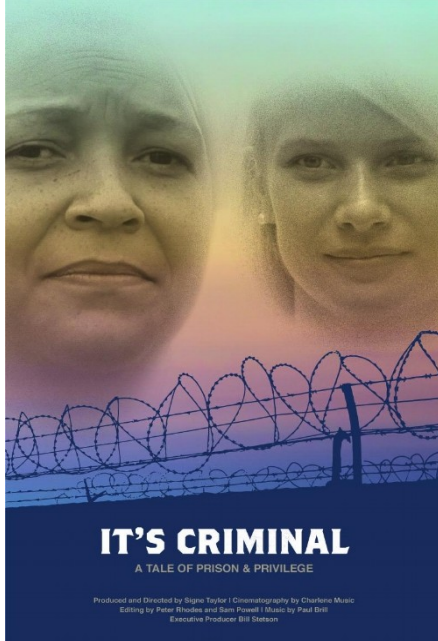
**Reminder: The Community Suppers are now the
4th THURSDAY of each month**

We have made this change back to the original schedule of years ago in order for our own Pastor Jeff to join us! The sign for the supper will be placed out front several days ahead as a reminder to everyone.



Always plenty for everyone at Community Supper

Board of Missions and Social Action



On **April 5th at 6 p.m.**, the BMSA will be sponsoring the viewing of **It's Criminal** at the Bradford Academy. **It's Criminal** is a documentary that highlights the economic and social inequities that divide the U.S. and offers a vision of how separated communities can learn to speak to each other. This documentary follows the life-changing journeys of incarcerated women and Dartmouth College students working together to write and perform an original play about the troubled and painful paths that landed the women behind bars.

After the film, there will be a panel discussion. If you would like more information please go to: <https://www.itiscriminal.com/>

APRIL 22nd ... Earth Day ...

... and a special POTLUCK SUNDAY BRUNCH!

The Diaconate is playing host for this fun time of parish togetherness over a midday meal right after worship.

It's a true potluck: bring what you choose and join the fun of seeing what others bring to share!



from the Church Council:

- Decided that next Council meeting will be moved to April 15th so as not to conflict with Missions movie on the 5th.
- Annual meeting reports by each organization need to be in Barbara Joslyn's hands by April 15.
- Date for Annual Meeting set for 7 PM May 17th.

A note about the Palm Sunday Choir Festival:

The annual festival of hymns and anthems was a full house of joy and enthusiasm. Choirs and singers and musicians came from Corinth, West Topsham, West Newbury, Newbury, Wells River, Haverhill, Piermont, Fairlee, Lebanon and Bradford. What an evening of praise it was!

A link to the video recording will be uploaded to the website as soon as it is available from videographer Tim Swaan of Haverhill.

Marcia Tomlinson, John Atwood

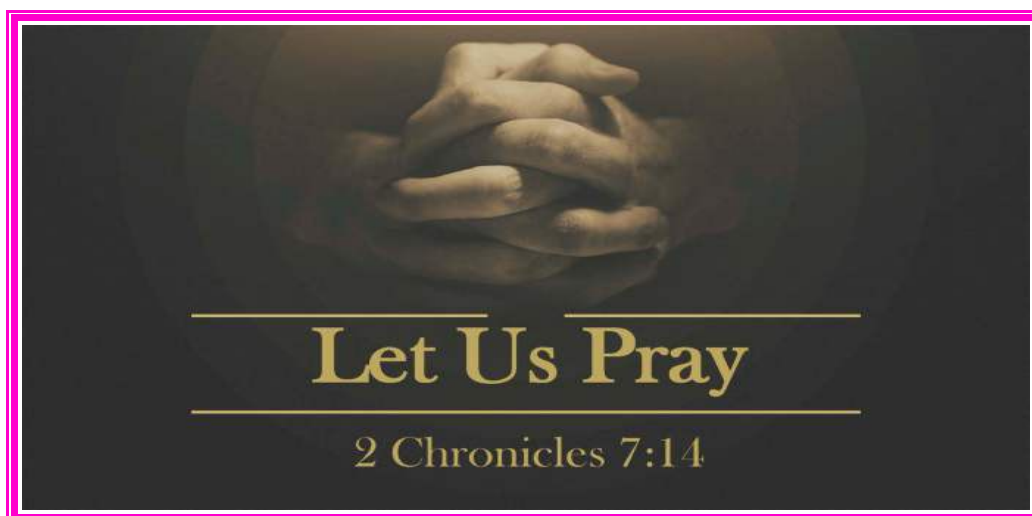
Prayer requests may be emailed to
[our prayer group](#) or [here](#)

It is our privilege to pray for you and those you care about.

We pray for each other,



without ceasing
**and your prayer requests
are held in strict confidence.**



Lectionary Readings APRIL (Year B)

The theme hymns are linked to video performances ... click on each if you desire listening to hymns as you read your scriptures or meditate on them



Season of EASTER

April 1 - He is Risen

Acts 10:34-43 (Peter recounts his story)

1 Corinthians 15: 1-11 (this is the good news ... he died for us)

Mark 16:1-8 (tell them he is risen)

Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24 (the Lord has become our salvation)

theme hymn: [*Christ the Lord Has Risen Today!*](#)

April 8 - 2nd Sunday of Easter

Acts 4: 32-35 (totally sharing community)

1 John 1:1 - 2:2 (God is light)

John 20:19-31 (Jesus appears to Thomas)

Psalm 133 (unity is blessed)

theme hymn: [*Breathe on Me, Breath of God*](#)

April 15 - 3rd Sunday of Easter

Acts 3: 12-19 (Peter preaches to his fellow Israelites)

1 John 3: 1-17 (we are right here and now God's children)

Luke 24: 36b-48 (Jesus appears again and eats with his disciples)

Psalm 4

theme hymn: *Lord, I Want to be a Christian*

April 22 - 4th Sunday of Easter

Acts 4: 5-12 (God's power is ironically in the crucifixion)

1John 3: 18-24 (love in deed and in truth)

John 10: 11-18 (He is the Good Shepherd)

Psalms 23

theme hymn: *Blest Be the Tie That Binds*

April 29 - 5th Sunday of Easter

Acts 8: 26-40 (Philip baptizes the Ethiopian)

1 John 4: 7-21 (now we know HOW to love one another)

John 15: 1-8 (Jesus is the true vine; you will bear much fruit by this)

Psalms 22: 25-31

theme hymn: *O Word of God Incarnate*

May 6 - 6th Sunday of Easter

Acts 10: 44-48 (the Spirit descends on Gentiles too!)

1 John 5: 1-6 (what comes when you profess Jesus as the Christ)

John 15: 9-17 (love one another as He loved us)

Psalms 98

theme hymn: *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*

History and Back Stories

As our church historian I will be attending the Vermont Conference Annual Meeting in April. One of the workshops will actually be on church history so I will be excited to learn what other historians are doing, and to share with them what we do to keep our history alive for each new generation.

Several times a month I write a “back story” for the weekly email and the website. These back stories expand on an element of the upcoming worship service. Sometimes the back stories are on the history behind a tradition, sometimes they go into the history of a hymn, and sometimes they are a biography of a composer or Saint or preacher.

All of these back stories can be found on the website's “Church News” page and to locate them you can [click here](#). (Soon there will be a separate link for these short extras.) Each month I post one Back Story here for those without access to our website.

March's back stories:

18th – **Congregational Half-Way Covenant** Part Two of the series on our Congregational heritage

25th – **Palm Sunday Here and World-Wide** a look at how we celebrate Palm Sunday and how it is celebrated around the world

1st – Easter – **When Easter Wasn't Our Thing** a look into how our church's recognition of Easter has dramatically changed over the centuries. (shown below)

Due to our Puritan roots, New England-based Congregational churches have traditionally been much more reserved in their Easter traditions and expressions than other more liturgically based denominations. For them Easter was the joyous culmination of a series of elaborate rituals and observances: Mardi Gras, Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Passion Week, Grand Processions, and Great Vigils. And here's why Bradford Congregational Church didn't always celebrate in kind.

In 17th century England, after spearheading the drive to arrest and execute the Catholic king, Puritan Oliver Cromwell named himself the Lord Protector of England. Under his reign, the whole culture experienced a ban on religious celebrations. So-called Holy Days were forbidden, including Easter. In January 1645, a group of ministers declared: "festival days, vulgarly called Holy Days, having no warrant in the Word of God, are not to be continued."

Stained glass windows were smashed throughout England and were frowned-upon in our New England as ornamental, a distraction from focusing only on God. Our church's lovely windows would have shocked our Puritan forebears, as well as the wearing of Easter bonnets and colorful new clothes!

Many Puritans fled to the American Colonies under the early reign of Elizabeth I (where raucous and irreverent celebrations were the norm), and Boston was a stronghold of Puritan belief. All Holy Days were banned there, including Christmas and Easter, for an entire generation. The law stated: "observing, by abstinence from labor, feasting or any other way any such days as Christmas day, shall pay for every such offense five shillings."

The Boston law banning Holy Days was lifted in 1681. but it took quite a bit longer for Christmas and Easter to become recognized and observed by the local population. As late as 1869, Boston schoolboys could be expelled for skipping school on Christmas Day. Easter was also considered a heathen holiday and was banned: the only holiday allowed was a somber Thanksgiving Day.

So it's no small wonder that our Bradford Congregational Church didn't regularly "celebrate" Easter (or Christmas) until the 20th century. After all, we did have those pesky Puritan roots. Prior to the Civil War era, our church's observances were much more conservative, filled with prayer, the singing of (Newbury's) Jeremiah Ingalls' hymns of redemption, salvation, and fortitude in a world of crop failure, pestilence, and sin. And 4-hour long sermons broken only for a short time to eat.

Evergreen decorations were forbidden from Puritan meeting-houses like our original church building, and schools remained in session on Christmas Day until it was declared a federal holiday in 1870. It would be a very interesting exercise to locate (our first settled pastor) Silas McKeen's Easter sermons and see if he even used the word "joy" to describe the day.

Eventually, these Puritan-based views toward Easter, Christmas, and other Christian holidays softened. At Bradford Congregational Church we have slowly "rediscovered" liturgical seasons as something to observe and celebrate such as Advent, Lent, Pentecost, special days and traditions. We have seen how these rituals help us learn even more about God the father, God the son, and God the holy spirit.

Now it is our Bradford Congregational Church custom

- to host a great *Palm Sunday* Choir Festival
- to present a *Maundy* (commandment) Thursday candle-extinguishing service of *Tennebrae* (darkness)
- to partake in an ecumenical vigil of prayer on Good Friday

- to join our Methodist friends for an *Easter* sunrise gathering singing “He is risen” and to answer “He is risen, indeed!”
- After gathering together over a communal Easter breakfast, we celebrate in joyous worship at our respective churches.

Marcia Tomlinson, Historian

Christian Ed

Spring is in the air...and it's time to try some new things in Sunday school. We have started to include a mini service during our downstairs time together before the lesson.

The service includes a scripture reading, singing a hymn, taking offering/doxology and saying the Lord's prayer. We hope this gives them exposure to the elements of the service they miss when they come downstairs, helps build a collection of hymns that they know and gives them opportunities for participation.

On Palm Sunday it was the children who skipped along the aisles to hand out palm fronds to everyone. The Diaconate is enthusiastically behind having our older children shadow the adults as they serve in worship: the

greetings, the taking of the offerings, the scripture reading ... all are duties lovingly performed by adults who wish to show the children how and why it's done.

Children's Sunday is scheduled for June 10th.

As always, we welcome new members to the Christian Education committee and anyone that wants to help out with teaching.



IMPORTANT NOTICE
Annual Reports are Due!

From the Clerk:

The date for our church's Annual Meeting has been set for Thursday, May 17th at 7:00pm. All reports from Boards, Committees, and Officers for the Annual Report are due to the clerk by April 15th. The reports can be e-mailed to barbaraj33@gmail.com or USPS mailed to: Barbara Joslyn, PO Box 465, Bradford, VT 05033. Thank you.
~Barbara Joslyn

Some helpful links:

- Our website is <http://bradforducc.org/>
- Our church's email is bradfordvtucc@gmail.com
- Click on [EPISTLE](#) to read back issue of this newsletter
- Our Sunday School, Music and Missions are at [Programs](#)
- Past Sermons can be accessed at [News & Sermons](#).
- Our congregation's activities are listed on our [online calendar](#)
- Our Facebook page link is [Bradford Congregational Church](#)