

EPISTLE

July, 2018

UNITED
in Christ's love,
a **JUST** world for all.



UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

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

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Message from Pastor Jeff:

In such times as these – when one's moral convictions, informed by one's religious faith, may conflict with policies and practices perpetrated by one's government – people of faith are called upon to address the disparity between one's religious conscience and governmental policy. Not everyone agrees. Some feel that religion has no place in government. They may cite the "separation of church and state" as one of the foundations for their argument. This phrase, "separation of church and state," does not appear in the U.S. Constitution. Rather, it was first cited by Thomas Jefferson in a letter to the Baptist Church of Danbury, Connecticut, and was coined in the defense of the Baptists to form a church without interference from the governing majority. In short, it was intended to get government out of religion but not religion out of government. And citing the first amendment to the Constitution in support of removing government concerns from the realm of religious conviction seems contrary to its underlying purpose. I cite the actual amendment below:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

It interests me that an amendment protecting the free exercise of religion is joined by an injunction to protect freedom of speech along with the rights to assembly and petitioning the Government for a redress of grievances. In short, the government cannot infringe on our right to follow our conscience. To do so would violate one's freedom at the most

fundamental level.

I was born in 1951, when Jim Crow laws were alive and well. State governments had been allowed to discriminate between “whites” and “people of color.” Laws were in place that favored one group over the other and served to perpetuate the subjugation of those deemed inferior. These legal statutes came to be seen as an affront to God. People of religious conscience rose up and demonstrated against this injustice. They were seeking to change government practices in the name of religious conviction. I mention this because had the Church remained silent in the midst of such evil, we would have become the captives of the status quo rather than the vanguard of the Kingdom of God. For people of faith to deny their religious conviction when addressing governmental policy is to forfeit their conscience.

This leaves us with the difficulty of discerning God’s will in the present moment. To think that good people of faith will naturally agree on a given course of action is naive. We each bring our unique perspectives and limitations to the process and will, undoubtedly have differing opinions. But a difference of opinion does not nullify God’s purpose. Rather, it pushes us to find religious legitimacy for our given opinions. It calls us to see, as best we can, beyond our prejudices to God’s grander vision.

The struggle before us, then, is not to find a place where conflict does not exist, but to remain open to the image of God in each of us. Such openness makes one’s claim to be the sole possessor of virtue, empty and void. Respect for those of a different opinion must be granted or we soil the universality of Grace – namely, that the love of God extends to all and not just to me and mine. We are called, then, to engage in discerning God’s will while respecting the right of others to disagree but we must refrain from seeking a false peace. We would do well to remember that peace without justice is oppression.

Faithfully, **Pastor Jeff**



Exciting News for August 12th

Our sister church West Newbury Congregational has invited our entire congregation to their worship on **August 12th** ... when Bruce and Caleb Freeburg will be playing! Details are still being made by Rev. Cindy Batten and our Pastor Jeff concerning the time and a possible potluck lunch. Watch for next month's Epistle giving all the details.

Meanwhile, you can plan that morning worship will be led musically by the Father/Son toe-tapping Gospel duo of Bruce and Caleb Freeberg. This Family Worship service will be one that gets you a-humming for the rest of the day, we guarantee it!

A Note from the Diaconate:

There are two important ways in which the Diaconate is working during this time before our settled pastor is hired.

- 1) Making sure the pulpit is filled every week this summer with ministers and speakers as has always been done when our minister is on vacation. This vital function is now being performed by former Deacon Martina Stever.
- 2) Actively working with our Bridge Interim Minister, Pastor Jeff.

As a Bridge Interim, Pastor Jeff:

- attends vital meetings (Council and Diaconate)
- may lead Bible or book studies
- attends the VT Conference monthly Interim meetings
- provides emergency pastoral care for our congregation
- becomes well acquainted with our Guidelines, our Covenants, our sense of Beloved Community
- is someone the children can rely upon to provide wisdom and laughter for their faith journey
- is the one to whom we can turn if we face a crisis.

Board of Missions and Social Action

At our last meeting, Missions decided on a local organization to support this year:

Willing Hands. Willing Hands recovers unsold, nutritious foods that would otherwise go to waste from vendors, and gives the food free of charge to organizations that support people in need. Here is more information from their website (www.willinghands.org):

“Willing Hands Inc. was founded in 2004 by Peter Phippen, an employee of the Hanover Co-op Food Store, who was dismayed by the amount of nutritious produce that was being thrown in the dumpster every day. He left his job and, in collaboration with the Coop, began to recover this food and give it away to folks who otherwise could not afford it.



Willing Hands

Willing Hands has developed an efficient system for food recovery and distribution. They arrange for regular pick-ups with over 25 food donors and deliver to at least 57 organizations every week, all year long.



In 2017, Willing Hands delivered approximately 249 tons of food to our neighbors in need. 93% was fruit and vegetables. The rest was mostly eggs, milk, frozen meat, and locally baked bread. This nutritious, wholesome food is a welcome and essential supplement to the boxed and canned food typically consumed by many of Willing Hands' recipients.

Willing Hands serves people in need of all ages throughout the Upper Valley region. They supply produce to food shelves, community meals, daycare & rehabilitation programs, and to families & seniors in subsidized housing. They serve everyone free of charge.



By providing fruits and vegetables on a regular basis Willing Hands reduces food insecurity of many of our neediest neighbors. They make it possible for struggling families to bring their diets into a healthier balance. They open the door for these folks to develop a lifelong pattern of healthy eating habits.

Willing Hands offers a popular series of taste-testings and cooking workshops for our recipient sites. Each workshop has a designated nutritional focus and provides inspiration and hands-on instruction about ways to utilize the fruits and vegetables that they provide.

Community Supper

We're looking forward to seeing you on July 26th

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

Hope you can join us!

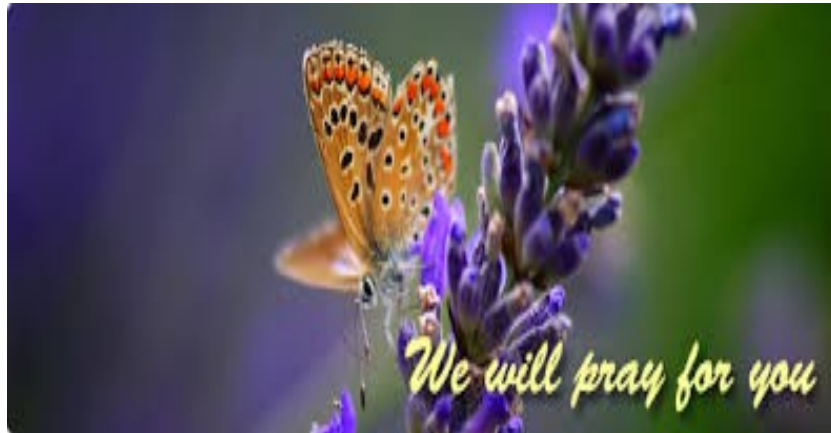


Always plenty for everyone at Community Supper

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.**



Sunday School: remember, we meet year round now!



This Little Light of Mine

On behalf of the Sunday school children and teachers, I want to thank you for your support throughout the year and your attendance at Children's Sunday on June 10th.

The children really enjoyed performing the various duties during the service and singing "This Little Light of Mine" for you all.



Lighting the Peace Candle

Congratulations to Emma Colbeth, Maisy Frydman and Nettie Morse on receiving their bibles as they "graduate" the third grade.



To all the children, we congratulate them on their attendance and participation throughout the year.





Summer is upon us. The backpacks have all been put away. The laughter of little voices can be heard in the backyards as they catch fireflies and roast marshmallows.

Sunday school will remain in session all summer, with the exception of August 12th. Feel free to attend West Newbury church that Sunday to enjoy the music of the Freeburgs.

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

Lectionary Readings JULY (Year B)

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



our time ... spreading the Good News

July 1

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27 (How are the mighty fallen!)

2 Corinthians 8:7-15 (yet for our sakes he became poor)

Mark 5:21-43 (in faith is the healing)

Psalm 130

theme hymn: [God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending](#)

July 8

2 Samuel 5:1-5,9-10 (the elders anoint David as King)

2 Corinthians 12:2-10 (God's Grace alone sustains us)

Mark 6:1-13 (many took offense and rejected him)

Psalm 48

theme hymn: [O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee](#)

July 15

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19 (David learns the power of the Ark)

Ephesians 1:3-14 (give us discernment regarding our calling)

Mark 6:14-29 (John is imprisoned)

Psalm 24

theme hymn: [Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather](#)

July 22

2 Samuel 7:1-14a (God is not contained inside a temple)

Ephesians 2:11-22 (we are a family united by Christ)

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 (the people plead for healing)

Psalms 89:20-37

theme hymn: *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*

July 29

2 Samuel 11:1-15 (David sins big time)

Ephesians 3:14-21 (Paul falls to his knees in prayer)

John 6:1-21 (signs upon signs ... "Fear not")

Psalms 14

theme hymn: *Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah*

August 5

2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13a (David repents)

Ephesians 4:1-16 (building up the church)

John 6:24-35 (The bread of life ... open your eyes)

Psalms 51:1-12

theme hymn: *Bread of Heaven*

August 12

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33 (David and his son Absalom)

Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2 (slander, bitterness, anger = sin)

John 6:35, 41-51 (belief is a gift from God)

Psalms 130

theme hymn: *Amazing Grace*

August 19

1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14 (Solomon's wise choice)

Ephesians 5:15-20 (walk wisely, purposely, joyfully)

John 6:51-58 (abide in Christ)

Psalms 111

theme hymn: *Be Thou My Vision*

*The person whose Bible is falling apart
probably isn't*

Vermont Conference



Message from Rev. Pam Lucas

This June I have been taking a class with the Maine School of Ministry. It's called 'Practicing Torah: The Branches of Judaism'. The last class is this coming Saturday where we will be talking about 'Preaching without Contempt.'

Included as part of the class have been three field trips to visit Saturday Shabbat services in three settings: Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. Along with history and biblical scholarship through the last 3,000 years in a classroom, these visits were a first-hand experience of the power of a small verse in Deuteronomy at the beginning of the Wilderness Journey in the life of the Hebrew people.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.
(Deut. 6:4-9)

In the Orthodox service all men present took part in leadership - in prayers and in Torah reading. This included three teenagers who led with maturity and poise and were seen as equals and full participants. One man brought his five year old son with him when he came forward for his portion of the Torah - and they chanted that portion together. And although most of the service was in Hebrew the chanting and the singing created a holy ground of prayer. The service was two and a half hours.

In the Conservative service everyone participated and there was much more English. However, after the Torah reading, the Rabbi came down from the pulpit and sat down - and led a participatory response to the scripture - what it meant then and now - what questions or wonderings do you have. The service was two hours.

In the Reformed Service the same thing happened after the chanting of prayers and Torah - when the rabbi asked, 'what do you think?' a gentleman answered and the Rabbi said 'Defend yourself.' And a free-wheeling, lively conversation ensued. In this case, after about 15 minutes, the Rabbi said, 'let's go downstairs'. We all went down, had coffee and goodies and sat around a table continuing the conversation for another hour.

I have learned that Judaism is in the same quandary as mainline denominations. Fewer participants, aging members, and people being too busy.

Interestingly, in the Reform service, when we went downstairs for the 'second hour', there were three persons who joined the conversation at that point. One of them told me that she doesn't get much from the service upstairs, but the conversation downstairs is what feeds her.

Could it be that as we are dis-established from being a mainline denomination we are being invited by the Spirit into re-claiming the deep reading of Scripture that has always been the well-spring of church renewal.

The study of scripture is foundational to a teaching ministry that re-claims scriptural images and allusions in order to reclaim the language of our particular heritage and our unique perspective on life - to re-claim that which distinctively marks our congregations as Christian communities. But critical study of the Word is not enough. The whole point of studying scripture is asking the question: "What is God saying to the church today through the particular text in front of us?" "What is God saying to US?" The community use of lectio divina as a way to engage the text certainly needs to stand hand in hand with historical-critical exegesis.

Our churches' ministry must be transformed into continuing Christian formation for members old and new. What does it mean for us to worship God? How can we pray in a way that makes a difference? What kind of life does a Christian life look like, not just on

Sunday but on Monday as well?

Even as the Hebrew washed over me in each of these services and took me to a deep place in my soul, Is this call of the Spirit inviting us all into recovering our first language - the language of God, of bible, of theology - so that we might speak about it with others - in and out of the church.

June 27, 2018

Pam Lucas



Summer Pulpit Supply: as of publication the roster of who will be filling our pulpit in August has not been finalized. Once it is, it will be uploaded to our website Church News [page](#).

All services remain at 10:00 a.;m. Except on August 12th when we will worship in West Newbury (see page 3) with the Freeburgs.



The Freeburgs

This Epistle is a monthly publication of the Bradford Congregational Church. It is uploaded the last day of each month. Anyone wishing to receive the email notification to it may request it by emailing the church email below.

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](#)