

First Congregational Church, U.C.C.
102 Middle Street
Hadley, Massachusetts 01035-9429



CHURCH STAFF

Minister – The Reverend Dr. William Wright
Organist & Choir Director – Toni S. Wilcox
Christian Education Director – Jean Baxter
Deacon of the Month – Ken Parker
Church Administrator – Cathy Samson
Custodian – Bryan Harper

WORSHIP SERVICES

Sunday Morning – 10:00 a.m.
Live virtual services and recorded
services on YouTube and Facebook

CHRISTIAN ED

Sunday Morning – 10:00 a.m.
also via Email and Facebook

Telephone: 413-584-4117

Website: www.firstchurchhadley.org

Facebook.com/FirstChurchHadley

YouTube: <https://youtube.com/c/FirstChurchHadley>



The Rooster Crows

October, 2021



The Chanticleer Canticle: Love and the Demands of Discipleship

By Pastor Bill

God loves you just the way you are; and God loves you too much to let you stay that way!

-Sandhya Jha

I heard my friend Sandhya (pronounced “Shawn-da”) cheerfully give that line many years ago. As best as I have been able to trace it, she took it from the movie *Junebug*—not a source I would have guessed would contain incredible theological profundity, but there it is.

In fact, my first book was a very dense and self-reflective meditation on the paradox contained in that great line. I was particularly interested in how John Calvin, usually seen as a dour figure, so wonderfully captured this paradox by talking about God’s “double grace” of justification and sanctification. That is: God loves us as sinners; God also inspires us to become more just, more saintly. Really, both are acts of God’s love. Like with any parent’s love, God both receives and embraces us as we are, but also desires us to aspire to be our best selves.

Maybe you’ve heard people lodge this complaint against Christianity: ‘You Christians can go out and sin all you want, and then go to church Sunday and God forgives it all!’ The scoffer is making a perceptive point: sometimes in talking about God’s love and forgiveness, Christians have grasped God’s love in a one-dimensional way.

Usually, this results in pitting God’s love against God’s justice. I have heard this come out in different ways. Some people pit the Judgmental God of the Old Testament against the Loving God of the New Testament. (But last Sunday we saw Jesus wield language of judgment pretty handily. In fact, the idea of eternal punishment in hell is mentioned frequently in the New Testament, hardly at all in the Old Testament.) Here’s another way: so many of our old hymns focus on one thing Jesus did—he died so my sins could be forgiven. God was an Angry, Judging God, but Jesus took away God’s anger and made God loving. Or something like that. And if you are baptized, or if you confess faith in Jesus, then God gives you the forgiveness. If not, you get the anger. Or something like that.

You might gather that I don’t think the church has always succeeded at finding a good explanation of how God’s love and justice go together. Or, like Sandhya put it, how God can love us just the

way we are, but love us too much to let us stay that way. But neither has the world around the church figured out how to unite justice and mercy—take cancel culture, for instance. Some of the best examples of uniting them were in fact inspired by Christian leaders: the Civil Rights movement; South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

If you want to bring love and justice together, try starting here: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4, variously translated). Thomas Aquinas, influential on Protestants and Catholics, concluded that all God’s attributes (like justice and mercy) must therefore be one in God, even if we experience them distinctly. God isn’t two-faced. So, love and justice are not opposites in God. They are the same.

There is no question that love has a certain priority, *both* in the Old Testament (expressed as “steadfast love” and election) *and* in the New Testament (“God is love,” 1 John 4:16). But I think these affirmations of God’s love in Scripture never take God’s love as the opposite of justice, as if God is going to go easy on his favorites. The Israel that God loves most among all the peoples of the world is also held most accountable by God to the demands of Torah. The faithful whom Jesus draws most closely to himself, the disciples, are also the ones he calls into the most self-giving life, in imitation of him. We Christians don’t get more of God’s love and less of God’s justice; we get an *intensification* of both divine love and justice, to the point that they converge in us as they do in God, the more we unite with God. The fire of God’s love-justice, at its most intense, burns me away, so that there’s no more me to love. Or something like that.

That’s only scratching the surface. We haven’t even mentioned Jesus’ role here. But, when I hastily suggested that there is a problem with how Christians talk about God’s love, I wish I had added some of the above explanation. But hey, God loves me too much to let me flounder in my careless statements!

CHURCH COUNCIL NOTES



Church Council Meeting Notes – September 8, 2021

With a quorum being present, the first topic the council discussed was the timeline and theme of our upcoming Stewardship campaign. It was agreed that the Church Council members would again serve as the Stewardship Committee as has been the practice for the last several years. Pastor Bill asked if we could expand the concept to include ways that members can contribute besides pledging money. Debbie recalled that other churches as well as our own have asked members to consider pledging more of their time and talents if they are unable to give as much of their treasure. Stan volunteered to write the pledge letter and create new pledge cards reflecting these ideas. We plan to send the letters out the first week of October and dedicate the pledges received during the Thanksgiving worship service in November.

Pastor Bill talked about the highlights of his monthly report to the council. Originally, his plan was for September to be for things to be back to normal. But things are not normal, and we are still dealing with restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We are still working on getting ready for that normal time in the future. He plans to highlight how activities relate to the congregational goals set forth in his contract. Pastor Bill has huddled with the CE board during the summer. He will be letting the board move forward with their new ideas for the Sunday School program, and he will be concentrating on working with the teens and planning a confirmation program in the spring. He supports the Multi-Generational monthly worship experiences. He will also be looking into reviving the Welcoming and Inclusiveness Committee as there is much work needed to improve our welcome to the community.

Bob Anderson reported on the Deacons activities for the last month. They and Pastor Bill have formed a new Pastor Congregation Relations Committee. There are four members: Mara Breen, Rosalee Oakley, Tom Giles and Bob Anderson. The board is constantly monitoring the Covid-19 situation in our community and are asking the church to comply with the Hadley town mandate to mask indoors. Worship via Zoom link will be continued to be offered for those who wish to remain at home. There are two openings on the Board of Deacons currently. Members are asked to prayerfully consider serving in this way if you feel called to do so. The deacons and Adam Woodrow, moderator, offered an after-church discussion group on Sunday, August 29th, to respond to questions that arose during the workshop offered by Pastor Bill in July. Small groups were formed to discuss three questions: How do we get to know Bill? How can Bill get to know us? And what do we want Bill to know about our church? The discussion was very honest and lively. The ideas generated are being reflected on by all.

Terri Smith reported that pledges are coming in very well. She met with Kara Kapinos, and they came to the conclusion that the Cookie Walk would not be held this year due to the uncertainty of restrictions and risks to the community surrounding the ongoing Covid-19 virus. The Finance Board needs at least one or more new members to assist with preparing the upcoming annual church budget. Anyone interested in serving can contact Stan Brown directly.

Kurt Betchick reported from the Board of Properties that work is being performed on the clock. We need to find out the procedure to receive the money from the Town of Hadley. Members will check on it and report back. There are a number of projects planned, some expensive. They are waiting for quotes but want to get started on some interior painting projects in the entryway and going up the stairs. Debbie will review past minutes to determine policy regarding council authorizing spending beyond what is in the budget.

The council spent the rest of the meeting reviewing a draft of the Church Communication Covenant. Pastor Bill renewed his offer to lead a bible study on the underlying principles of the covenant. This draft will be circulated to the board and committee members for review. A draft will be posted in the Fellowship Hall, and the congregation can indicate phrases that resonate by applying colored dots. A meeting to vote and accept this document is planned before the end of the calendar year.

Respectfully submitted,
Debbie Ward, clerk

CHRISTIAN ED NEWS



Have you checked out the new **CHRISTIAN ED SUITE** upstairs? The new suite includes the Nursery, a large Activity Room for “Break Out” sessions, and a Lounge area. We have “smart” TVs in each room so that we can live-feed the worship service there, too. We have the TVs working from our laptops, but still have to figure out how to “cast” from our phones.

We’re starting October with a **MULTI-GENERATIONAL worship service** themed around **World Communion**. Adults and youngers have teamed up ahead of time to talk about Communion in other Christian denominations as well as our own UCC, and they’ll share what they discovered with all of us. We really don’t know exactly what to expect. On Multi-Gen Sundays, the kids will stay for the full worship service, and on other Sundays, kids and teens can go to **BREAK OUT** sessions in the Activity Room and Lounge.



Christian Ed **BREAK OUT** activities will continue each weekend on Facebook and by email, and also be the basis for the weekly activities in live church. This fall, our lessons, **SPECIAL AGENTS**, are focusing on the classic bible stories of Jonah, Miriam, Martha, Daniel, Samson, and other well known and loved characters.

Everybody – please forward the **BREAK OUT** Facebook posts to everyone and anyone. It’s our “church without a building” for folks. Forward our worship service, too. We know traditional church isn’t for everyone, and this is a chance to keep church in everyone’s lives.



WANT TO JOIN the Christian Ed Team??? It’s pretty lively, and we have room for a couple Board Members, collaborators, lesson writers, video-clip makers, Sunday volunteers, and YOUTH leaders. We work hard, but it’s a GOOD hard work filled with lots of love. Please let Jean know if you are able to join, via her email jeanbbaxter@gmail.com or text or call 413-575-4299.

Stay tuned.

Christian Ed Director – Jean Baxter
Board of Christian Ed – Diana West, Mary Wholley, Lila West, Terri Smith, Emma Dragon

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEACONS



A friend recently brought me old newspaper clippings that her brother had saved. They were poems that my aunt had written and shared with him long ago. Memories of my Aunt Connie flooded back to me as I read the poems and realized how blessed I am to have had Aunt Connie in my life. My aunt was the embodiment of what it meant to be a Christian. The kind that makes you wish you knew more people like her and reminds you that you should aspire to be more like her. She truly believed and knew that God and Jesus loved her. She was exceptionally forgiving, always giving others another chance. You knew she would always love you. She might not like what you did, but she still loved you.

She was involved with missions' ministries and a prison ministry. She ran a business with her husband, raised four children, helped raise grandchildren, and was very active in her church and community organizations. She was truly a person who would "give you the shirt off her back." You might come home and find the couch or your brother's bed gone because "someone needed them." You might come home and smell a delicious supper cooking only to find out you were helping to load it into the car to take to a family in need. She was quick to laugh and offer a word of encouragement or praise. She was always smiling and humming. She memorized her poems and you could ask her to recite a poem at any time.

And so, for this copy of the Rooster, I am sharing a few of Aunt Connie's "simple but beautiful" or "simply beautiful poems."

For the Deacons, Lisa West

Grateful

Dear God, I am so grateful
for little things each day.
My heart keeps saying, "thank you!"
for blessings on life's way,
the glory of a sunset,
the beauty of a flower,
Your love is there for me to see,
in every passing hour.
And when I sometimes stumble,
feel hurt, or grief, or pain,
Your comfort and your healing come
like rainbows after rain.
Because I love you Father,
and know that You love me,
there are no chains to bind me
from bondage I'm set free!
Please bless my friends, dear Father,
and fill their hearts anew
with the joy that comes from loving
and being loved by you.

Golden Thread of Love that We Share

Oh, thank you, Lord, that You are there
each time we turn to you in prayer.
Give us strength for each day's need,
of hope in every seeking heart.
May each of us do our small part
to help our fellow man to know,
we have a God that loves us so.
"Love one another," the Good Lord said.
Brothers and Sisters, this golden thread
of love that we share
when we show that we care
strengthens and comforts and heals and lifts!
What a blessing it is to receive these gifts!
Our sorrows are lightened, our joys multiplied
when a brother or a sister is close by our side.
And the Good Lord smiles, as the angels hover –
"See how these Christians love one another."

Treasure Chest

I have a treasure chest of the memories
that bless the time that we must be apart.
I keep it in my heart.
So many times each day
my thoughts return to you
then eagerly I look into my treasure chest
and there I find the lovely hours
by your dear presence, blest.
I live them all again,
I feel so happy then
for in my reverie you seem so near.
My love for you dear,
is the key
that always will keep safe for me
my glowing store of golden memories.
Dear God, my deepest thanks to Thee
for this most precious treasury.
And Lord, I pray that others too
will know this gift that comes from you -
this healing love that's found so real in memory.

Rick Ward 413-374-0849

Lisa West 413-586-1812

Donna Brewer 413-364-6463

Bob Andersen 413-687-3121

Jonathan Morel 413-549-3958

Ken Parker 413-549-3530

The Tie That Binds

Dear Sister, dear Brother,
God loves us through each other.
A helping hand, cheery smile
Helps so much in any trial.
A kindly thought, a little prayer
lets others know we really care.
Be quick to say, "I'm sorry"
and to say, "I Forgive."
Be instruments of healing in
this precious life we live.
May God our father always be
the warm and deep reality,
the tie that binds our family
Three in One and One in three.

MISSION NEWS



Thank you to all who donated to the school bag project! We assembled 21 kits which will be shipped to Church World Service for use as needed.

There is a change for Cathedral in the Night plans as we were double booked with another area church. We now will be preparing the meal for them on **November 28th**. They have had to return to more strict protocols. We must bring the meal items and only two or three persons are allowed to stay and dish them into containers to be distributed to participants. We will still be collecting gently used warm clothing and socks for that as well.

Warm clothing and sock donations needed!



MUSIC NOTES



Welcome back for our fall worship season! We held a wonderful, multigenerational service for Homecoming Sunday and are excited to witness our newly crafted Christian Education program in action.

Our **Choir** has begun Thursday night rehearsals from 7:00 to 8:15 p.m. to prepare anthems and offertory songs that support the Scriptures and sermons from Pastor Bill. If you can't make it on Thursday night, aim to arrive at church by 9:15 a.m. on Sunday morning to join us for our pre-church run through. The more voices we have, the more "Joyful Noise" will fill the sanctuary!

Maybe singing isn't your thing – but you play an **instrument**? Bring it! We welcome you into our volunteer group to enrich our worship experiences.

Our **Handbell Choir** has started meeting on Tuesdays from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. We have been reviewing our forgotten technique and are slowly getting back into the swing (yes, pun intended) of ringing. Ruth Morse has come up with several interesting warmup drills to help us with our eye/hand coordination. This is the perfect time to try your hand – hands and get involved!

Hope to see you soon. Happy Fall!

Toni



Join the choir...
You'll Be Glad
You Did!

*Sing with the Choir
Play your Instrument
Try the Handbell Choir*

October

1	Friday	4:00 p.m.	Take and Eat preparation
2	Saturday	8:00 a.m.	Take and Eat
3	Sunday	10:00 a.m.	WORSHIP SERVICE AND CHRISTIAN ED
3	Sunday	3:00 p.m.	Girl Scout Troup 11914 Meeting
4	Monday	7:00 p.m.	Prayer Shawl Knitting Group
5	Tuesday	6:00 p.m.	HANDBELL CHOIR REHEARSAL
6	Wednesday	6:30 p.m.	Hadley Women's Group AA Meeting
7	Thursday	7:00 p.m.	CHOIR REHEARSAL
7	Thursday	7:30 p.m.	Hampshire County Farm Bureau Meeting
10	Sunday	10:00 a.m.	WORSHIP SERVICE AND CHRISTIAN ED
11	Monday	6:00 p.m.	Hope Grange Meeting
12	Tuesday	6:00 p.m.	HANDBELL CHOIR REHEARSAL
12	Tuesday	7:00 p.m.	BOARD OF PROPERTIES MEETING
13	Wednesday	6:30 p.m.	Hadley Women's Group AA Meeting
13	Wednesday	7:00 p.m.	CHURCH COUNCIL MEETING
14	Thursday	6:00 p.m.	Men's Club
14	Thursday	7:00 p.m.	CHOIR REHEARSAL
17	Sunday	10:00 a.m.	WORSHIP SERVICE AND CHRISTIAN ED
17	Sunday	2:00 p.m.	Girl Scout Troup 65107 Meeting
17	Sunday	3:00 p.m.	Girl Scout Troup 64645 Meeting
17	Sunday	3:00 p.m.	Girl Scout Troup 12652 Meeting
19	Tuesday	6:00 p.m.	HANDBELL CHOIR REHEARSAL
20	Wednesday	6:30 p.m.	Hadley Women's Group AA Meeting
21	Thursday	7:00 p.m.	CHOIR REHEARSAL
24	Sunday	10:00 a.m.	WORSHIP SERVICE AND CHRISTIAN ED
26	Tuesday	6:00 p.m.	HANDBELL CHOIR REHEARSAL
27	Wednesday	6:30 p.m.	Hadley Women's Group AA Meeting
28	Thursday	7:00 p.m.	CHOIR REHEARSAL
31	Sunday	10:00 a.m.	WORSHIP SERVICE AND CHRISTIAN ED

Events listed in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS are church-related events.