

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
BENNINGTON, VERMONT

*Vermont's Colonial Shrine: Welcoming all to share God's light,
and proclaiming God's embracing love since 1806*

THE REV. KENNETH A. CLARKE, MINISTER
CYNTHIA LOCKLIN, LAY READER
GENE MARIE CALLAHAN, ORGANIST
OLD FIRST CHURCH CHOIR

APRIL 21, 2024

PRELUDE *Pastorella* - J.S. Bach

OPENING WORDS (responsive)

Hear our prayer, O Lord.

Sustain us with your Word.

Be with us in any time of trouble,

Let us know your peace.

***HYMN** *For the Beauty of the Earth* 473
(verses 1-4)

The text's author was briefly a headmaster and literature teacher at a college in England, but an inheritance allowed him to spend the rest of his life traveling and writing. This text was originally written as a communion hymn to infuse a note of joy into the then otherwise solemn service. The tune's original author was choirmaster and organist at Stuttgart, and modified to be the setting of William Dix's "As With Gladness Men of Old."

OPENING PRAYER (unison)

Look to this day!

For it is life, the very life of life.

In its brief course

Lie all the verities and realities of your existence:

The bliss of growth

The glory of action

The splendour of beauty,

For yesterday is but a dream

And tomorrow only a vision,

But today well lived makes every yesterday a dream
of happiness

And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well, therefore, to this day!

ASSURANCE OF PARDON AND *GLORIA PATRI (579)

FIRST LESSON John 10:11-18 p. 872

***HYMN** *To Bless the Earth* 200

This paraphrase of Psalm 65 first appeared in *The Psalter* (1912), a publication of a joint committee of nine churches representing the Reformed tradition in the U.S. and Canada. The tune is an old one, by Melchior Vulpius, in 1609. He was the leading German composer of his day, a schoolmaster and musicologist, composing over 200 motets and 400 hymns for Lutheran worship.

SECOND LESSON 1 John 3:16-24 p. 990

SERMON Abiding

***HYMN** *O Day of God, Draw Nigh* 452

This hymn was written by R.B.Y. Scott, a United Church of Canada pastor and professor of Old Testament at Vancouver, Montreal and Princeton. It was first published in 1939 and then in the 1958 *Pilgrim Hymnal*. The tune by Louis Bourgeois first appeared as a setting for Psalm 101 in the Genevan Psalter (1551). William Crotch (b. 1775), an English child prodigy musician, revived and arranged it in 1836 and named it St. Michael.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE CHURCH (Visitors are kindly requested to fill out one of the visitor's cards in the pew and put it in the offering plate or hand it to an usher after the service.)

OFFERING

OFFERTORY *The Lord's My Shepherd* - Brother James' Air

***DOXOLOGY (592) AND PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

CLOSING PRAYER AND THE LORD'S PRAYER (debts/debtors) p. 16

***HYMN** *Early Spring* insert

This hymn is based on the golden year of Fan Cheng-ta, a Chinese rural sequence rendered into English verse by Gerald Bullett in 1946 and adapted in 1960. Bullett was a British novelist, essayist, short story writer, critic and poet. He wrote both supernatural fiction and some children's literature.

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *Flourish* - Alan Bullard

* Stand if able

We extend a warm welcome to our guests and visitors and we are delighted to have you worship with us. Please fill out a visitor's card found in the pew and be sure to identify yourself so we can present you with a gift bag.

Deacons on call this month are Pat Ross and Wendy Schmitt. Ushers and greeters for today's service are Joyce Goeke and Darlene Munson.

Please join us for fellowship and refreshments in the foyer after the service. Our thanks to Janet Andrea, Joyce Goeke and Wendy Schmitt for providing coffee hour this morning.

Flowers for worship are provided by Joyce Goeke in memory of her husband George.

UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS: *(All meetings are open to members of the church)*

Choir practice, Sunday mornings, 9:45 AM in the choir loft

4/28: Tag Sale meeting following worship

5/10: Adult Ed 6-8 PM: Traditional Shabbat Services and Dinner at Israel Congregation in Manchester, VT (see BLOG insert for more information)

5/11: Open Church Docent meeting, 10 AM at the Barn

If you are interested in discussing matters of faith and want to inquire about Christian membership in the church, please contact Rev. Clarke. We welcome the chance to have you join us in our historic, but active-in-the-world, community of faith!

To maintain the healthiest standards for public gathering, indoor air is constantly being exchanged with fresh air with a LifeBreath circulation system operating during the service today.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

(OLD FIRST CHURCH)

VT RTE. 9 AND MONUMENT AVENUE

OLD BENNINGTON, VERMONT

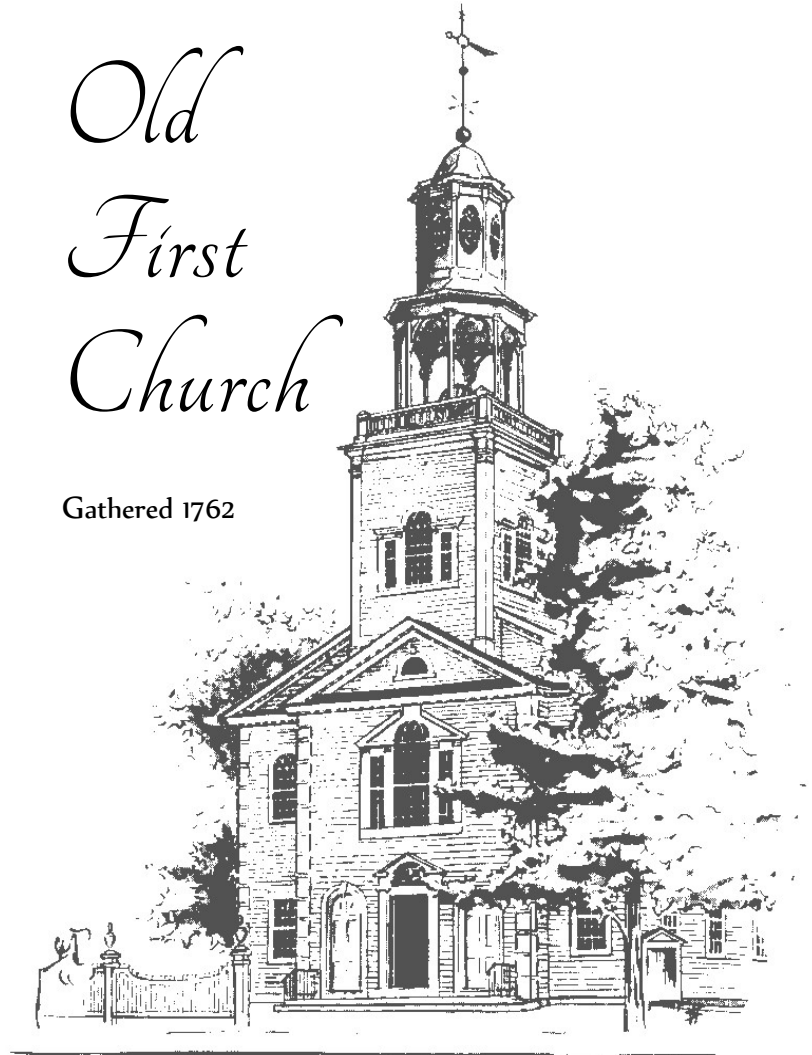
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*Old
First
Church*

Gathered 1762



For the Beauty of the Earth

For the beauty of the earth,
For the glory of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies.

Refrain: Lord of all to Thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.

For the wonder of each hour,
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,
Sun and moon, and stars of light. *(Refrain)*

For the joy of ear and eye,
For the heart and mind's delight,
For the mystic harmony
Linking sense to sound and sight, *(Refrain)*

For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth and friends above,
For all gentle thoughts and mild. *(Refrain)*

To Bless the Earth

To bless the earth, God sends us
From heaven's abundant store
The waters of the springtime,
Enriching it once more.

The seed by God provided
Is sown o'er hill and plain,
And then come gentle showers
To bless the springing grain.

God crowns the year with goodness,
The earth God's mercy fills,
The wilderness is fruitful,
And joyful are the hills.

With grain the fields are covered,
The flocks in pastures graze;
All nature joins in singing
A joyful song of praise.

FIRST LESSON

John 10:11-18

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

SECOND LESSON

1 John 3:16-24

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him

whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

O Day of God, Draw Nigh

O day of God, draw nigh
in beauty and in power;
come with thy timeless judgment now
to match our present hour.

Bring to our troubled minds,
uncertain and afraid,
the quiet of a steadfast faith,
calm of a call obeyed.

Bring justice to our land,
that all may dwell secure,
and finely build for days to come
foundations that endure.

Bring to our world of strife
Your sovereign word of peace,
that war may haunt the earth no more
and desolation cease.

O day of God, draw nigh
as at creation's birth;
let there be light again, and set
Your judgments in the earth.

Early Spring

But for the cockerel calling the noon hour,
No voice is heard in lanes of willow flower.
The leaves of mulberry, young and half uncurled,
Are showing their green tips to the warm world.

Under the silver lash of the small rain
The quickened earth is bringing forth again;
Ten thousand spears of grass and sudden flowers
Spring up to meet the welcome of the showers.

In the high fields the green of the wheat runs
To join the mountain curve in green and bronze;
The river meadows, not yet under plow,
A darker, more luxuriant green-ness show.

The village, flowered with almond and with peach,
Looks like a picture drawn with silver stitch;
And there the folk, with song and dance and drum,
Make festival because the spring has come.