

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
DAVID PILACHOWSKI, LAY READER
GENE MARIE CALLAHAN, ORGANIST
OLD FIRST CHURCH CHOIR

JANUARY 12, 2025

PRELUDE *Simple Gifts* - Russell Schulz-Widmar

OPENING WORDS (responsive)

This is the day which the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

May God bless us with peace.

And may our hearts be joyful.

*HYMN *O God, Our Faithful God* 277

This hymn originally in German was written by Johann Heermann and titled "A Daily Prayer." It was published in *Devoti Musica Hordis, Hauss- und Hertz-Musica* (1630). Heermann (1585-1647) was born in Raudten, Silesia, the youngest and only surviving child of five born to his parents. As a child, Heermann was quite ill and his mother vowed if God would spare him, she would dedicate the child's life to the ministry.

OPENING PRAYER (unison)

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON AND *GLORIA PATRI (579)

FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 43:1-7

p. 585

*HYMN

The God of Heaven

180

The paraphrase of Psalm 29 was written by Michael A. Perry in 1973. Initially studying mathematics and physics at Dulwich College, Perry (1942-1996) was headed for a career in the sciences. However, after one year of study in physics, he transferred to Oak Hill College to study theology. It was during his student days at Oak Hill in 1964 that he wrote his best-known hymn, the Calypso Carol, the first line of which is "See him lying on a bed of straw". He wrote this for a college concert, and it only became famous by accident when Cliff Richard substituted it for a missing recording in a radio show.

SECOND LESSON

Luke 3:15-17; 21-22

p. 834

SERMON

Expectation Again

*HYMN

The Lone, Wild Bird

320

The text of this hymn was written by Henry Richard McFadyen when he was a field worker for the Presbytery of Nashville. He wrote it for a national hymn-writing contest *The Homiletic and Pastoral Review*. In a letter to William Chalmers Covert in 1934, McFadyen wrote, "The hymn was written on a quiet Sunday afternoon in the fall or winter of 1925 and sent to the *Review*. It was forgotten until I was surprised with an announcement that I had been awarded the third prize in the contest."

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 *You Are Salt for the Earth, O People* - Marty Haugen

*DOXOLOGY (592) AND PRAYER OF DEDICATION

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

*HYMN

Come Down, O Love Divine

313

Bianco da Siena wrote the words in the 15th century. He lived in Venice and was a member of an unordained order that followed the rule of St. Augustine. The translation was made by Richard Littledale, an Irish priest, for his 1867 *People's Hymnal*. Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote the tune for this text for the 1906 *The English Hymnal*, which he edited. Vaughan Williams was the most important English composer of his generation.

*BENEDICTION

*POSTLUDE

Fuga

- P. Czernohorshy

* 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 Kate Musso and Marsha Pilachowski. Ushers for today's service are Anastasia and Fischer Gauthier.

Please join us for fellowship and refreshments in the foyer after the service. Our thanks to Marsha Pilachowski.

Flowers for worship have been provided by Kate Musso.

Offering envelopes for 2025 contributions can be picked up in the foyer. Please be sure to indicate the box number and your name on the sign-out sheet.

The Church's Annual Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, February 9th. If you are a Chair or Advocate on the Church Council, please prepare a 2024 year-end report and get it to the church office by January 24.

The blanket drive continues during the winter months. Donations of new and gently used blankets are greatly appreciated. Please know that we cannot accept electric blankets. Donations can be left in the foyer of the church or downstairs in the parlor. For more information, speak with Jeannette Lesser.

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

Choir practice, Sunday mornings, 9:45 AM in the choir loft
1/16, 1/23, 1/30: Bible Study, 7:00 PM, Church parlor
1/15: Deacon's meeting, 4:00 PM, Barn
1/22: Trustee's meeting, 5:30 PM, Parlor

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!

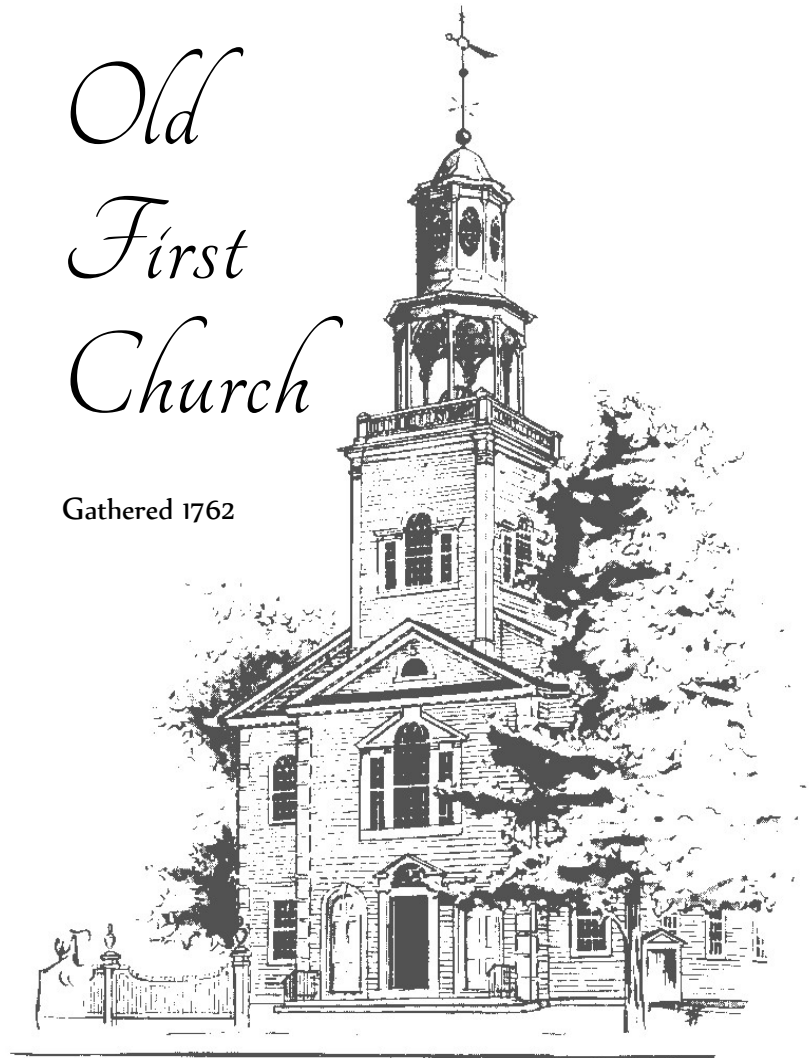
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(OLD FIRST CHURCH)
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Old First Church

Gathered 1762



O God, Our Faithful God

O God, our faithful God,
O fountain ever flowing,
without whom nothing is,
all perfect gifts bestowing,
grant us a faithful life,
and give us, Lord, within
commitment free from strife,
a soul unhurt by sin.

God, grant us strength to do
with ready heart and willing,
whatever You command,
our calling here fulfilling;
And do it when we ought,
with zeal and joyfulness;
And bless the work we've wrought,
for You must give success.

If dangers gather round,
still keep us calm and fearless;
Help us to bear the cross
when life is bleak and cheerless,
to overcome our foes
with words and actions kind;
O God, Your will disclose,
Your counsel let us find.

FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 43:1-7

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth— everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

The God of Heaven

The God of heaven thunders,
Whose voice in cadent echoes
Resounds above the waters,
And all the world sings,
Glory, glory, glory!

The desert writhes in tempest,
Wind whips the trees to fury,
The lightning splits the forest
And flame diffuses
Glory, glory, glory!

The mighty God eternal
Is to the throne ascended,
And we who are God's people,
Within these walls cry,
Glory, glory, glory!

SECOND LESSON

Luke 3:15-17; 21-22

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The Lone, Wild Bird

The lone, wild bird in lofty flight
Is still with Thee, nor leaves Thy sight.
And I am Thine! I rest in Thee
Great Spirit, come, and rest in me.

The ends of earth are in Thy hand,
The sea's dark deep and far-off land.
And I am Thine! I rest in Thee
Great Spirit, come, and rest in me.

Come Down, O Love Divine

Come down, O Love divine, Seek out this soul of mine
And visit it with Your own ardor glowing;
O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear,
And kindle it, Your holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn, till earthly passions turn
To dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
And let Your glorious light shine ever on my sight,
And clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

And so the yearning strong with which the soul will long
Shall far out-pass the power of human telling;
For none can guess God's grace, till love creates a place
Where in the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling.