

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  
DON MILLER, LAY READER  
GENE MARIE CALLAHAN, ORGANIST  
OLD FIRST CHURCH CHOIR

SEPTEMBER 7, 2025

PRELUDE *Tranquilly* - C.H.H. Parry

OPENING WORDS (responsive)

We delight in the word of God.

**The earth is full of God's works.**

Our hope is in the name of the Lord.

**May God's loving kindness light our way.**

\*HYMN *For the Beauty of the Earth* 473

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)

**Lord, let us not dwell in the past,  
nor worry about the future.**

**We cannot undo what is done.**

**We cannot foresee what will come.**

**Let us instead dwell in your peace,**

**love and be loved,**

**heal and be healed.**

**We give the past to you**

**and rest in your forgiveness.**

**We give the future to you**

**and rest in your love.**

**We live in your light,**

**open our eyes that we may see.**

**We live in your love,**

**let your love flow through us,**

**to the fulfillment of your kingdom.**

**In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.**

ASSURANCE OF PARDON AND \*GLORIA PATRI (579)

FIRST LESSON Luke 14:25-33 p. 850

\*HYMN *O Word of God Incarnate* 327

The text was written by William Walsham How. William How (1823-1897) was born in Shrewsbury, England and educated at Wadham College, Oxford and was ordained in 1846. He wrote all his hymns while in the parish of Whittington and was joint editor of several hymnals including *Psalms and Hymns* (1854), *Supplement to Psalms and Hymns* (1867), and *Church Hymns* (1871). He died while on vacation in Ireland.

SECOND LESSON Philemon 1:1-21 p. 970

SERMON *Possessed*

\*HYMN *Now to Your Table Spread* 515

The author is editor and executive secretary of the New Zealand Hymnbook Trust and in addition to being a pianist and organist, has served with Amnesty International, and a research unit of the New Zealand Parliament's Labor party. The tune was composed for the text of hymn #76 in 1918 by John Ireland on the back of a menu, during a lunch when a friend passed him a poem, asking that he write a tune for it. Ireland was an organist and prolific composer in England.

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 *In Remembrance* - Beryl Red arr. Robert F. Douglas

\*DOXOLOGY (592) AND PRAYER OF DEDICATION

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (insert)

The congregation is invited to participate in the service as found in the insert included in this order of service. *(Please note that grape juice is on the outer circle only and wine inside. We partake together after all have been served.)*

COMMUNION VOLUNTARY

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

\*HYMN *You Are Before Me, Lord* 248

This paraphrase of Psalm 139 is by Ian Pitt-Watson. He wrote the text in 1973 and revised it extensively in 1989. The new "authorized version" appears in *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (1990).

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *Ricercare* - Palestrina

\* 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 and ushers, greeters and communion servers for today's service are Joyce Goeke and Mary Elizabeth Groupé.

Please join us after worship today for a church picnic being held at the home of Pat and Larry Ross, 1534 Bluestone Rd Bennington. Directions on the marble table in the foyer.

Flowers for worship are provided by Betsy Ehrenfreund in honor of her daughter Susan Condon's birthday.

A note of thanks to the musicians who filled the sanctuary with beautiful music this summer: Carol Poppe, Mary Elizabeth Groupe, Rob Ellis, Audrey Pietrucha, David Roberts, Jack Shiller, and Surabhee Arjunwadkar. Thank you all!

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

- Choir practice, Sunday mornings, 9:45 AM in the choir loft
- Old First Yoga, Monday afternoons, 3-4 PM, Barn (\$15 per class)
- 9/11: Bible Study, 6:30 PM, Parlor
- 9/16: Deacon's meeting, 4 PM, Barn
- 9/18: Trustee 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!

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

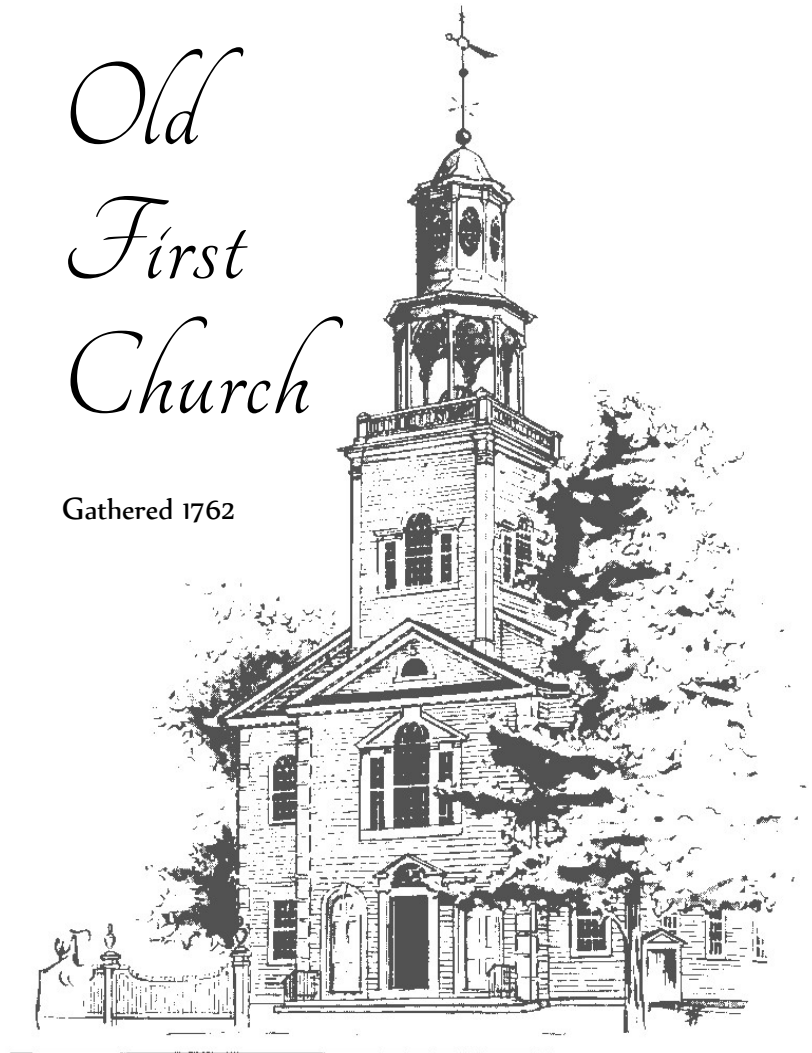
(OLD FIRST CHURCH)  
VT RTE. 9 AND MONUMENT AVENUE  
OLD BENNINGTON, VERMONT

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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*)

For Thy church that evermore  
Lifeth holy hands above,  
Offering up on every shore  
Her pure sacrifice of love, (*Refrain*)

### ***O Word of God Incarnate***

O Word of God incarnate,  
O Wisdom from on high,  
O Truth unchanged, unchanging,  
O Light of our dark sky:  
We praise You for the radiance  
That from the hallowed page,  
A lantern to our footsteps,  
Shines on from age to age.

The church from You, dear Savior,  
Received this Gift divine,  
And still that light is lifted  
On all the earth to shine.  
It is the chart and compass  
That, all life's voyage through,  
Amid the rocks and quick-sands,  
Still guides, O Christ, to You.

O make Your church, dear Savior,  
A lamp of purest gold  
To bear before the nations  
Your true light, as of old;  
O teach Your wandering pilgrims  
By this our path to trace,  
Till, clouds and storms thus ended,  
We see You face to face.

### **FIRST LESSON**

#### **Luke 14:25-33**

Now large crowds were traveling with him, and he turned and said to them, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

### **SECOND LESSON**

#### **Philemon 1-21**

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,  
To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

### *Now to Your Table Spread*

Now to Your table spread  
we come, each one in faith  
that You alone provide the words of life or death:  
in wine and bread,  
in promised food  
we find Your loving heart, O God.

Hands of the world stretch out  
Your mystery to touch  
in longing to believe a truth beyond our reach,  
to sing in joy,  
to cry in grief,  
to know Your meaning for our life.

Here is our common wealth  
in sharing what is good,  
as though all humankind around one table stood,  
this bread to break,  
this wine to taste:  
one people in the name of Christ.

### *You Are Before Me, Lord*

You are before me, Lord, You are behind,  
And over me You have spread out Your hand;  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
Too high to grasp, too great to understand.

Then from Your Spirit where, Lord, shall I go;  
And from Your presence where, Lord, shall I fly?  
If I ascend to heaven You are there,  
And still are with me if in hell I lie.

If I should take my flight into the dawn,  
If I should dwell on ocean's farthest shore,  
Your mighty hand will rest upon me still,  
And Your right hand will guard me evermore.

If I should say, "Let darkness cover me,  
And I shall hide within the veil of night,"  
Surely the darkness is not dark to You:  
The night is as the day, the darkness light.

Search me, O God, search me and know my heart;  
Try me, O God, my mind and spirit try;  
Keep me from any path that gives You pain,  
And lead me in the everlasting way.

**Order of Service for  
The Lord's Supper or Communion  
At the First Congregational Church  
Bennington, Vermont**

**Scripture Sentences**

**Opening Words and Invocation**

**Prayer of Confession** (read by the Minister and People in Unison)

*We come not into thy presence, most holy Lord God, trusting in our own righteousness but in thy manifold and abiding mercies. Remembering this day the great heart and passion of a son of man of long ago, we are conscious of our shortcomings. We would here be turned to the way of his brave and tender spirit, and find that wholeness of life which shall be at once a divine blessing for us and a divine ministry from us. Forgive our failures and shortcomings, and by thy grace strengthen our desire for goodness, that we may henceforth serve thee without fear and without shame, all the days of our lives. Amen.*

**Responsive Reading**

Let us hear the words of Jesus which speak of the way of blessedness.

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN; FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED.**

Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.

**BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH DO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS; FOR THEY SHALL BE FILLED.**

Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.

**BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART; FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD.**

Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.

**BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE; FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.**

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

**THIS IS THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT.**

And the second is like unto it, namely this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

**ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS HANG ALL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.**

**Offertory and Communion Prayer**

The Lord be with you.

**AND ALSO WITH YOU.**

Lift up your hearts

**WE LIFT THEM TO THE LORD.**

It is right to give our thanks and praise

**LET US GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD OUR GOD**

**Words of Institution**

The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; and, when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said: This is my body which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of me.

After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood. This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

*Take and eat this in remembrance of Christ.*

*Take and drink this in remembrance of Christ.*

**Silent Prayer**

The service continues and concludes as found in today's order of service.