

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
GENE MARIE CALLAHAN, ORGANIST

SEPTEMBER 13, 2020

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PRELUDE *Prelude in Plainsong Style* - Charles Callahan

OPENING WORDS (responsive)

Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Let all that is in me bless God's name.

Mercy and justice are the Lord's.

May God's presence seen in love and peace.

HYMN *Sing Praise to God, Who Reigns Above* 483

(LYRICS REPRINTED AT THE END OF THE ORDER OF SERVICE)

This hymn was originally titled, "Hymn of Thanksgiving." Johann Schütz was a lawyer in Frankfurt who sympathized with the pietist movement in the Lutheran Church. The translator, Frances Elizabeth Cox, was one of the foremost translators into English of German hymns. The tune is from the 1566 Bohemian Brethren's *Kirchengeseng*.

OPENING PRAYER (unison)

God of all ages,
who from generation to generation
has heard the cries of your children
humbly seeking forgiveness,
and has welcomed sinners
back into your embrace,
hear the thoughts of our hearts,
examine our motives,
forgive us our faults,
of word and action.

We ask this through your Son,
who died that we might know
the true cost of forgiveness.

This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON AND GLORIA PATRI (579)

FIRST LESSON Romans 14:1-12 p. 916

HYMN *Psalm 103* 222

(LYRICS REPRINTED AT THE END OF THE ORDER OF SERVICE)

Richard Proulx set the Psalm tone and Refrain to this hymn. Proulx (born April 3, 1937, St. Paul, Minnesota — died February 18, 2010, Chicago, Illinois) was an American composer and editor of church music, including anthems, service music, hymn concertos, organ music and music for handbell choir. He was organist at one of the big Catholic Churches in Chicago near the original Pizzeria Uno and its fierce local competitor Gino's. Our organist, Gene Marie Callahan sang for him many times while she lived in Chicago.

SECOND LESSON Matthew 18:21-35 p. 800

SERMON Each of Us

HYMN *We Are Your People* 436
(verses 1, 2 and 5)

(LYRICS REPRINTED AT THE END OF THE ORDER OF SERVICE)

The author, Brian Wren, was ordained in the English Congregational Church, now the United Reformed Church. He was described by hymnologist Eric Routley as the most successful English hymn writer since Charles Wesley. He wrote this text in 1973. John Wilson composed the tune for this text and named it for his wife's maiden name. He is a hymnal editor, and began in 1970 the "Come and Sing" hymn-singing festivals at Westminster Abbey, now an annual event.

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.)

OFFERING

OFFERTORY *Celebration of Tranquility* - Daniel Pinkham

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

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

HYMN *The World Abounds with God's Free Grace* 556

(LYRICS REPRINTED AT THE END OF THE ORDER OF SERVICE)

The author, David Mehrrens, was a researcher for DuPont in Waynesboro, Virginia. This was the first publication of his 1980 hymn. The tune is from G. F. Handel's oratorio *Susanna* (1748) where it was the setting for the aria, "Ask if yon damask rose be sweet." C Winfred Douglas wrote the present harmony for *The Hymnal 1940*. He was an Episcopal priest and editor of two Protestant Episcopal hymnals in 1916 and 1940.

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *Fugue in F Major* - Georg Philipp Telemann

Deacons on call this month are Pat Guerrero and Marsha Pilachowski.

FREE SUNDAY SUPPER, SEPTEMBER 13: Our church will be hosting the Free Sunday Supper this Sunday. Thank you to Janet Andrea, Jim Dilley, Bill Hartz and Susan Katz for volunteering to host and to Janet Andrea, Nancy Andrews, Claudia Dalton, Jim Dilley, Bill Hartz, Susan Katz, Marsha Pilachowski and Pat Ross for providing the food for the meal. Food donations should be brought “ready to be packaged” (casseroles hot) to Second Congregational Church at 4:00 PM September 13th and hosts should plan to arrive around 4:15 PM.

CHURCH PICNIC, SEPTEMBER 20, NOON, WEATHER PERMITTING: Pencil in the third Sunday of September for an informal picnic gathering outside of the church. Those who wish and are comfortable to be gathered outside in one area should bring everything needed for your own picnic which includes your own packed lunch, drinks, and a chair or blanket to sit on. The church--including parlor and bathroom--will be closed. We will expect everyone who chooses to be there to have their mask on, we will make a record of those who attend and we will expect safe distancing outside of family groups. Bring hand sanitizer as well--though there won't be shaking of hand greetings you might have need for it at some point.

Worship and life at Old First is changing in response to the need to reduce activity as we work to get through the challenge of the COVID-19 presence in our life. Our prayers and thoughts go to everyone immediately affected and thanks go to all people who work to provide care and supply our needs in this time. An audio version of our weekly worship services can be found on the church's website by clicking on the “Worship” tab and selecting “Worship Here and Now”. Or simply paste the following into your computer's browser at the top of the page: <http://oldfirstchurchbenn.org/worship/worship-here-and-now/> If this link appears in blue on the device you are using to read this, you can also just “click on the link” and you will be there! The church office has been temporarily moved to the home of our office administrator. Please use email, phone or U.S. Mail for correspondence.

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!

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

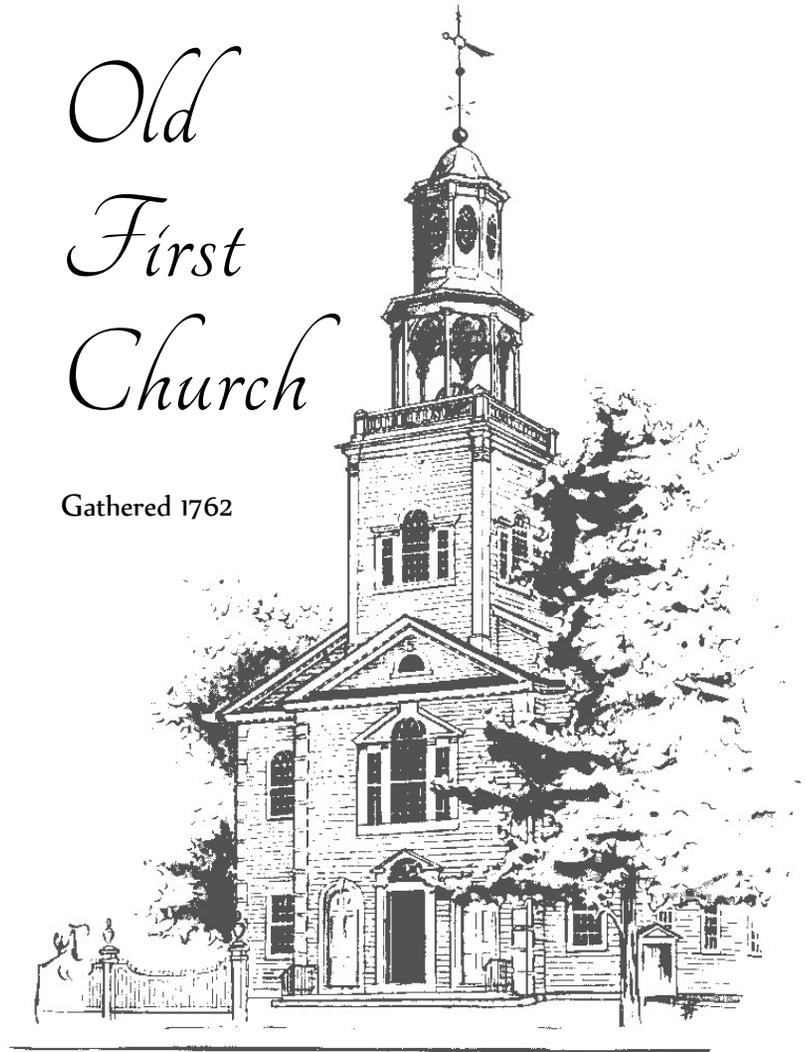
(OLD FIRST CHURCH)

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Old First Church

Gathered 1762



Sing Praise to God, Who Reigns Above

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) Sing praise to God, who reigns above,
the God of all creation,
the God of power, the God of love,
the God of our salvation;
With healing balm my soul is filled,
and every faithless murmur stilled:
To God all praise and glory! | 3) The Lord is never far away,
but through all grief distressing,
an ever present help and stay,
our peace, and joy, and blessing;
As with a mother's tender hand,
God gently leads the chosen band:
To God all praise and glory! |
| 2) What God's almighty power hath made,
God's gracious mercy keepeth;
by morning glow or evening shade
God's watchful eye ne'er sleepeth;
Within the kingdom of God's might,
Lo! All is just and all is right:
To God all praise and glory! | 4) Thus all my gladsome way along,
I sing aloud Thy praises,
that all may hear the grateful song
my voice unwearied raises.
Be joyful in the Lord, my heart,
both soul and body take your part:
To God all praise and glory! |

Psalm 103

Refrain: My soul, give thanks to the Lord, and bless God's holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name. **Refrain**

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. **Refrain**

The Lord works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known His ways to Moses,
His acts to the people of Israel.
The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities. **Refrain**

Continued in next column

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far He removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear Him. **Refrain**

We Are Your People (verses 1, 2 and 5)

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) We are Your people:
Lord, by Your grace,
You dare to make us
Christ to our neighbors
of every nation and race. | 2) Called to portray You,
help us to live
closer than neighbors,
open to strangers,
able to clash and forgive. |
| 5) Lord, as we minister
in different ways,
may all we're doing
show that You're living,
meeting Your love with our praise. | |

The World Abounds with God's Free Grace

The world abounds with God's free grace;
What wonders bless the land!
And on through boundless starry space,
God's matchless works expand.

Refrain:

**Lord, teach us an attitude that thanks You all our days,
A love that shows our gratitude through deeds that live our praise.**

Give thanks for plains and valleys spaced
By mountains thrusting high;
Give thanks by fighting greed and waste
That drain their treasures dry. **Refrain**

In full thanksgiving for God's love,
From which earth's blessings flow,
Protect the precious air above,
The waters spread below. **Refrain**

Give thanks in hope, rejoice, repent,
And practice all you prayed;
True thanks can never be content
To foul the world God made. **Refrain**

ROMANS 14:1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

MATTHEW 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."