

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 VARKER, LAY READER
GENE MARIE CALLAHAN, ORGANIST

AUGUST 14, 2022

PRELUDE *My Ain Countrie* - arr. Lani Smith

OPENING WORDS (responsive)

The Lord is gracious and full of compassion.

The Lord is good to all.

O Lord, open thou our lips.

And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.

***HYMN** *God of the Ages, Whose Almighty Hand* 262

The author of the text was vicar of St. Paul's Church, Concord, New Hampshire. He wrote it for a Fourth of July, 1876 Centennial celebration in Brandon, Vermont to the tune called "Russian Hymn." But soon after that (for the Constitution's centennial) it was set to the present tune written for it by George Warren, an acclaimed organist in Albany and New York City, at whose funeral no music was played to indicate there was no longer anyone to lead the music at his church.

OPENING PRAYER (unison)

God of all creation,
our chief end is to glorify you,
and enjoy you forever.

Our deep delight is in your presence,
our fondest thoughts are of you,
our strongest longing is for your house.

In this hour of worship,
help us to become who we are meant to be--
a community that breathes thankfulness,
voicing your praise in all we do.
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON AND *GLORIA PATRI (579)

FIRST LESSON Luke 12:49-56 p. 848

***HYMN** *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past* 210

Isaac Watts, the "father of English hymnody" based this hymn on Psalm 90:1-5. He wrote his first hymn at 15, and thus began a revolution in Reformed worship using contemporary words or loosely translated Psalms. The tune, *St. Anne*, is named for St. Anne's Church, Soho, England, where composer William Croft was organist, and was used by Handel and Bach.

SECOND LESSON Hebrews 11:29-12:2 p. 978

SERMON A Cloud of Witnesses

***HYMN** *Gone Are Those Great and Good* insert

The author of this hymn, John Pierpont, (1785-1866) was born in Litchfield, CT. He attended Yale College and was admitted to the Bar in 1812. After he retired, he attended Harvard College as a student in theology and became a Unitarian pastor and served in churches in Boston, Troy (NY) and Medford (MA). At age 55 he published his *Poems & Hymns*, including his anti-slavery and temperance poems and songs. After the age of 70 he became Chaplain in the US Army and was finally a government clerk in the Treasury Dept at Washington. He died suddenly at Medford, August 27, 1966.

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 *I Have a Silent Sorrow* - Reinagle

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

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

***HYMN** *O Beautiful for Spacious Skies* 564

Katherine Lee Bates, Wellesley College professor of literature, was inspired to write the text after an 1893 visit to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where she felt a patriotic feeling, and afterwards wrote, "We went on, my New England eyes delighting in the wind-waved gold of the vast wheat fields." It was after seeing amber skies from Pikes Peak that she then wrote the hymn in Colorado Springs. Samuel Augustus Ward, a Newark, NJ music supply, piano and organ salesperson, wrote the tune in 1882. First used for the hymn, *O Mother Dear, Jerusalem*, his widow gave permission for it to be used with Bates' text in 1912.

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *Postlude on God of Our Fathers* - Phil Lebenbauer

We welcome all visitors and hope you will return! 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 Sandy Bechtel and Bill Gordon. Ushers and greeters for today's service are Marie and Lou Guariniello.

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

8/21: Council meeting following worship, Parlor

8/22: Trustee meeting, 5:30 PM, Parlor

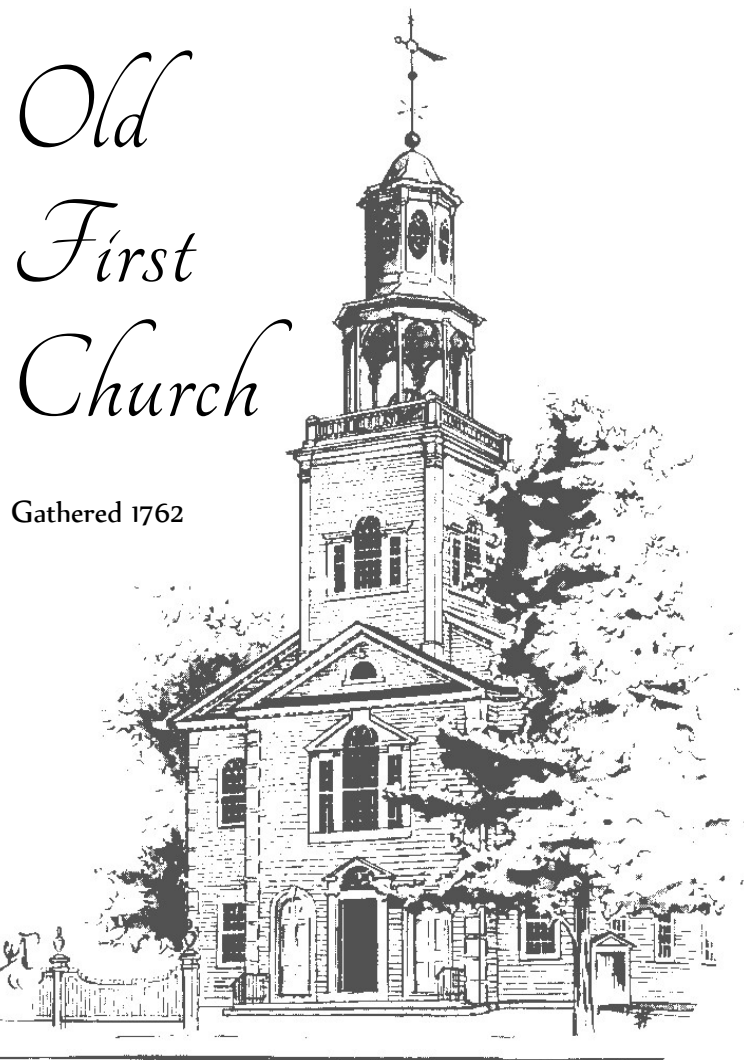
OPEN CHURCH NEEDS YOUR HELP! Old First Church is currently positioned at #4 of 15 "Things to Do in Bennington" on the Trip Advisor website. Just a few years ago, we were at the top of that list! While #4 is not a bad place to be in, it tells us that visitors are finding our doors closed and are not writing about their experience of walking into the church, meeting a welcoming guide and learning about the history. They are also not given the chance to buy something from our little gift shop, nor give a donation which helps maintain our magnificent building and programs. Open Church is a type of outreach that is much needed and we can't do it without the help of many. If you would like to be that welcoming face at the door and have a couple hours to spare on a certain day each week or fill in here and there, we encourage you to contact Betsy Ehrenfreund, Vicky Printz, Jane Radocchia or the church office.

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!

Health note: Indoor air is constantly exchanged with fresh air with a LifeBreath circulation system operating during the service to maintain the healthiest standards for public gathering.

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(OLD FIRST CHURCH)
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OLD BENNINGTON, VERMONT

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God of the Ages, Whose Almighty Hand

God of the ages, whose almighty hand
leads forth in beauty all the starry band
of shining worlds in splendor through the skies,
our grateful songs before thy throne arise.

Thy love divine hath led us in the past;
in this free land with thee our lot is cast;
be thou our ruler, guardian, guide, and stay,
Thy word our law, Thy paths our chosen way.

From war's alarms, from deadly pestilence,
be Thy strong arm our ever sure defense;
Thy true religion in our hearts increase;
Thy bounteous goodness nourish us in peace.

Refresh Thy people on their toilsome way;
lead us from night to never-ending day;
fill all our lives with love and grace divine,
and glory, laud, and praise be ever Thine.

Our God, Our Help in Ages Past

Our God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home:

Before the hills in order stood,
or earth received its frame,
from everlasting Thou art God,
to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in Thy sight
are like an evening gone;
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
soon bears us all away;
We fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.

Our God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
be Thou our guard while life shall last,
and our eternal home.

FIRST LESSON

Luke 12:49-56

“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

SECOND LESSON

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and

imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Gone Are Those Great and Good

Gone are those great and good
Who here, in peril, stood
And rais'd their hymn.
Peace to the rev'rend dead!
The light that on their head
The passing years have shed
Shall ne'er grow dim.

Ye temples, that to God
Rise where our fathers trod,
Guard well your trust, --
The faith that dared the sea,
The truth that made them free,
Their cherished purity,
Their garnered dust.

Thou high and holy One,
Whose care for sire and son
All nature fills, --
While day shall break and close,
While night her crescent shows,
O let thy light repose
On these our hills!

O Beautiful for Spacious Skies

Oh, beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea.

Oh, beautiful for pilgrim feet,
Whose stern, impassioned stress
A thoroughfare of freedom beat
Across the wilderness!
America! America!
God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law.

Oh, beautiful for heroes proved
In liberating strife,
Who more than self their country loved,
And mercy more than life!
America! America!
May God thy gold refine,
Till all success be nobleness,
And every gain divine.

Oh, beautiful for patriot dream
That sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam,
Undimmed by human tears!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea.