

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
NOAH LANGFORD, LAY READER
GENE MARIE CALLAHAN, ORGANIST
OLD FIRST CHURCH CHOIR

MARCH 19, 2023

PRELUDE *Slane* - arr. Charles Callahan

OPENING WORDS (responsive)

The Lord has done great things.
Restore our health and faith.
God's love and mercy abide.
Revive our spirits this day.

***HYMN** *Be Thou My Vision* 339

The text dates from an ancient Irish poem from ca. 700 A.D. The tune is an ancient Irish ballad named for the hill (Slane) where the first fires of Easter were lighted by St. Patrick as a challenge to King Laoghaire.

OPENING PRAYER (unison)

Christ be with me
Christ before me
Christ behind me
Christ in me
Christ beneath me
Christ above me
Christ on my right
Christ on my left
Christ where I lie
Christ where I sit
Christ where I arise
Christ in the heart of every one
who thinks of me
Christ in the mouth of every one
who speaks of me
Christ in every eye that sees me
Christ in every ear that hears me
Salvation is of the Lord.
O Lord hear our prayer. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON AND *GLORIA PATRI (579)

FIRST LESSON Ephesians 5:8-14 p. 951

***HYMN** *The King of Love My Shepherd Is* 171

The author, Henry Baker, was ordained in the Church of England and was involved in several hymnal publications and books, including, *Daily Prayers for the Use of Those Who Work Hard*. His last words as he lay dying were the third stanza of this hymn. The tune was first published in 1866 as an Irish tune. It's named for St. Columba, who brought Christianity to Ireland and, incidentally, was the first person to report seeing the Loch Ness monster.

SECOND LESSON John 9:1-41 p. 871

SERMON Astonishing Things

***HYMN** *The Day of the Lord Is at Hand* insert

Kingsley, Charles, M.A., son of Charles Kingsley, of Battramsley, in the New Forest, was born June 12, 1819 at Home Vicarage, Devon. In 1838 he entered Magdalene College in Cambridge, and graduated as first class in classics, and senior optime. Subsequently Rector of Eversley 1814-1875; Canon of Chester 1869-1873; and Canon of Westminster 1873-1875. He held also other important appointments. He died at Eversley, Jan. 23, 1875. Canon Kingsley's prose works are too well known to be enumerated here, and his poetical productions have little in common with hymnology.

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.)

RECEPTION OF NEW MEMBERS (see insert)

OFFERING

OFFERTORY *Christ Be in My Waking*
- Townend and Brading arr. Larry Shackley

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

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

***HYMN** *Londonderry Air* insert

The Londonderry Air is an air that originated from County Londonderry in Ireland (now Northern Ireland). It is popular among the Irish diaspora and is very well known throughout the world. The tune is played as the victory anthem of Northern Ireland at the Commonwealth Games. The song "Danny Boy" uses the tune, with a set of lyrics written in the early 20th century.

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *St. Columba* - arr. Charles Callahan

* 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 Sandy Bechtel and Marsha Pilachowski. Ushers and greeters for today's service are Karen Dane and Jonathan Filkins.

Please join us at the Barn following worship today for the annual St. Patrick's Pot Luck Luncheon. All are welcome!

Thank you to Gene Marie Callahan for providing flowers for worship this morning.

We continue to collect new or gently used blankets for the homeless. Used blankets must be clean and no electric blankets please.

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

Choir practice, Sunday mornings, 9:30 AM in the choir loft

3/21: Trustee meeting, 5:30 PM, church parlor

3/26: Monumental Tag Sale organizational meeting, following worship

4/6: Maundy Thursday service, 6:30 PM at the Barn

4/6: Tenebrae service, 8:00 PM at the Church

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!

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.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

(OLD FIRST CHURCH)

VT RTE. 9 AND MONUMENT AVENUE

OLD BENNINGTON, VERMONT

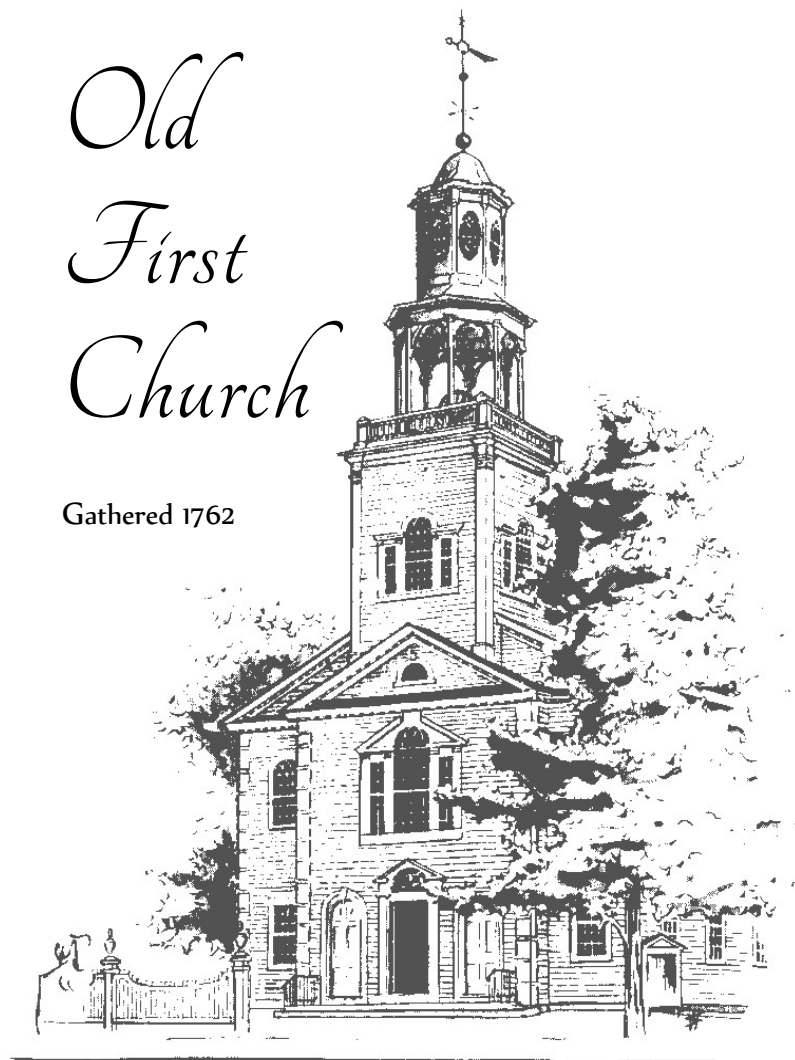
MAILING ADDRESS & CONTACT INFORMATION

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*Old
First
Church*

Gathered 1762



Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art—
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise,
Thou mine inheritance, now and always:
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High God of heaven, my treasure Thou art.

Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

FIRST LESSON

Ephesians 5:8-14

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

The King of Love My Shepherd Is

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1. The King of love my Shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am His
and He is mine forever.</p> | <p>4. In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with Thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.</p> |
| <p>2. Where streams of living water flow
My ransomed soul He leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow,
With food celestial feedeth.</p> | <p>5. Thou spreadest a table in my sight;
Thy unction, grace bestoweth;
and O what transport of delight
From Thy pure chalice floweth!</p> |
| <p>3. Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love He sought me,
and on His shoulder gently laid,
and home, rejoicing, brought me.</p> | <p>6. And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise
Within Thy house for ever.</p> |

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.” The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to

Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

Londonderry Air

I would be true, for there are those who trust me;
I would be pure, for there are those who care;
I would be strong, for there is much to suffer;
I would be brave, for there is much to dare,
I would be friend of all, the foe, the friendless;
I would be giving, and forget the gift;
I would be humble, for I know my weakness;
I would look up, and laugh, and love, and lift. Amen

The Day of the Lord is at Hand

The day of the Lord is at hand, at hand;
Its storms roll up the sky;
The nations sleep starving on heaps of gold;
All dreamers toss and sigh;
The night is darkest before the morn;
When the pain is sorest the child is born,
And the day of the Lord at hand, at hand,
The day of the Lord at hand.

Who would sit down and sigh for a lost age of gold,
While the Lord of all ages is here?
True hearts then will leap at the trumpet of God,
And those who can suffer can dare.
Each old age of gold was an iron age too,
And the meekest of saints may find stern work to do
In the day of the Lord at hand, at hand,
In the day of the Lord at hand.

MEMBERSHIP RECEPTION

We prepare to welcome into our membership today, **Karen Dane** by affirmation of faith; **Jonathan Filkins, Muriel Rice, Audrey Pietrucha** and **Larry Pietrucha** by reaffirmation of faith and **David Roberts and Deborah Turner** by letter of transfer.

THE CONFIRMATION OF FAITH

In presenting yourself for membership in the First Congregational Church of Bennington, do you affirm your trust in God as the creative source of life and power?

I DO

Are you willing to accept the example and teachings of Jesus Christ and seek to make them the guiding principles of your life?

I AM

Will you be loyal to this Church and support it by your prayer, your presence, and your service?

I WILL

THE WELCOME OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH

We, the members of the First Congregational Church, hereby affirm your reception, *Karen, Jonathan, Muriel, Audrey, Larry, David and Deborah* into the full membership of our communion. We pledge to you our mutual care, support, and prayers. God grant that loving and being loved, serving, and being served, blessing and being blessed, we may prepare ourselves, while we dwell together on earth, for the age that is to come.

READING OF THE CHURCH COVENANT

COVENANT

We covenant with the Lord and with one another and do bind ourselves in the presence of God, to walk together in all His ways, according as He is pleased to reveal Himself unto us in our diversity of mind and spirit.

We declare, and intend, and with dependence upon His powerful grace we engage, to walk together as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ in the faith and order of the Gospel so far as we shall have the same revealed to us, conscientiously attending the public worship of God, the sacraments of the New Testament, the discipline of His Kingdom, and all His holy institutions in communion with one another, and watchfully avoiding all sinful stumbling-blocks, as become a people whom the Lord hath bound up together in the bundle of eternal life.

Depending, as did our forebears, upon the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, we work and pray for the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God, and we look with faith for the triumph of righteousness and the life everlasting.

Adopted by the Old First Church, at the Annual Meeting, May 1980.

Our covenant exemplifies the history of our Congregational tradition. The first paragraph is, with a minor modification, one of the original New England Church covenants, used by the Salem Church in 1629. The second paragraph is taken from what appears to be the original covenant of our own church, from the late 18th century. The third paragraph is an excerpt from a Modern Congregational confession, the Kansas City Statement of Faith, of 1913. Like many traditional confessions of faith, our covenant is triune in character, the three paragraphs speaking, respectively, of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.