

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
CAROL POPPE, LAY READER
GENE MARIE CALLAHAN, ORGANIST

JULY 16, 2023

PRELUDE *Trio* - Josef Rheinberger

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 *Morning Has Broken* 469
Eleanor Farjeon, the author of nursery rhymes and singing games, wrote the text for this tune. It was first published in 1931. A more recent popular recording by Cat Stevens made the song popular in this country. *Bunessan* is a Gaelic melody first published in 1888. The present arrangement was made for the Christian Reformed Church hymnal in 1985.

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 Isaiah 55:10-13 p. 598

*HYMN *To Bless the Earth* 200

This paraphrase of Psalm 65 first appeared in *The Psalter* (1912), a publication of a joint committee of nine churches representing the Reformed tradition in the U.S. and Canada. The tune is an old one, by Melchior Vulpius, in 1609. He was the leading German composer of his day, a schoolmaster and musicologist, composing over 200 motets and 400 hymns for Lutheran worship.

SECOND LESSON Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23 p. 794

SERMON Rain and Snow

*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.)

OFFERING
OFFERTORY *Belmont* - Flor Peeters

*DOXOLOGY (592) AND PRAYER OF DEDICATION

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

*HYMN *Precious Lord, Take My Hand* 404

Thomas A. Dorsey, the most influential figure in the gospel song music, wrote this hymn in 1932 when his first wife died. He was born in Georgia in 1899 and died in Chicago in 1993. He was choir director of the Pilgrim Baptist Church in Chicago for 40 years. The tune by George Allen in 1842 received its popularity through Dorsey's arrangement of it for this text.

*BENEDICTION

*POSTLUDE *Postlude on Darwall's 148th* - Charles Callahan

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 Janet Van Derpoel-Andrea and Mary Elizabeth Groupé. Ushers and greeters for today's service are Amber and Noah Langford.

Please join us for fellowship and refreshments in the foyer after the service. Our thanks to Amber and Noah Langford for providing coffee hour this morning and to Pat and Larry Ross for setting up.

Thank you to Carol Poppe for providing flowers for worship this morning.

UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS: *(All meetings are open to members of the church)*
7/17: Trustee meeting, 5:30 PM in the 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!

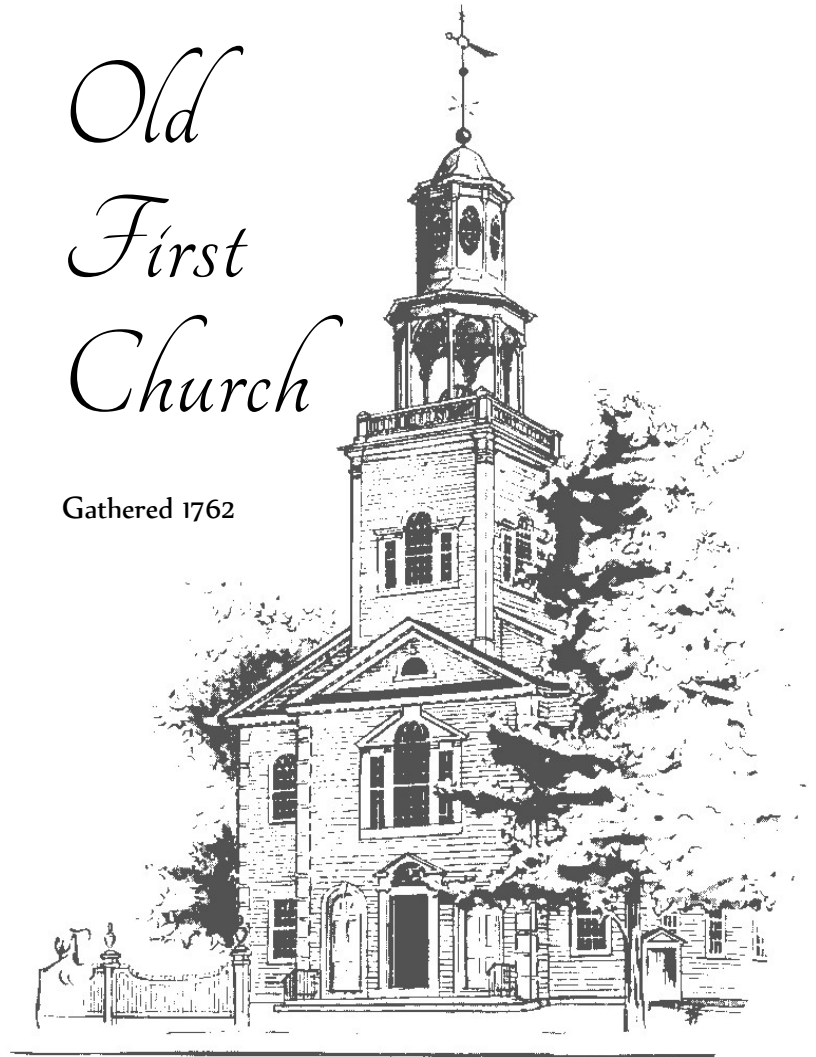
To maintain the healthiest standards for public gathering, indoor air is constantly being exchanged with fresh air with a LifeBreath circulation system operating during the service today.

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

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Old First Church

Gathered 1762



Morning Has Broken

Morning has broken like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!
Praise for them, springing fresh from the Word!

Sweet the rain's new fall sunlit from heaven,
Like the first dew fall on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden,
Sprung in completeness where God's feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight! Mine is the morning
Born of the one light Eden saw play!
Praise with elation, praise every morning,
God's recreation of the new day!

To Bless the Earth

To bless the earth, God sends us
From heaven's abundant store
The waters of the springtime,
Enriching it once more.

The seed by God provided
Is sown o'er hill and plain,
And then come gentle showers
To bless the springing grain.

God crowns the year with goodness,
The earth God's mercy fills,
The wilderness is fruitful,
And joyful are the hills.

With grain the fields are covered,
The flocks in pastures graze;
All nature joins in singing
A joyful song of praise.

FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 55:10-13

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

SECOND LESSON

Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!" "Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

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.

Precious Lord, Take My Hand

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, help me stand;
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light;
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

When my way grows drear,
Precious Lord, linger near;
When my life is almost gone,
Hear my cry, hear my call,
Hold my hand lest I fall;
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.