

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
WAYNE KACHMAR, LAY READER
GENE MARIE CALLAHAN, ORGANIST

JULY 30, 2023

PRELUDE *Psalm Prelude* - Carol Hager

OPENING WORDS (responsive)

Let us recall things of joy and gladness.

May God open our hearts this season.

Renew our spirit and lift us from any darkness.

In the beauty of the morning may God's truth shine.

***HYMN** *Come, Thou Font of Every Blessing* 356

This text was written by Robert Robinson (1735-1790) about 1758 and was included in *A Collection of Hymns Used by the Church of Christ in Angel-Alley, Bishopsgate* (1759). It was later included with the tune NETTLETON in John Wyeth's *Repository of Sacred Music, Part Second* (1813).

OPENING PRAYER (unison)

O Lord our God,

you know us better than we know ourselves.

As we come before you now,

believers and doubters alike,

we all share a deep need,

for we are all lost without your grace.

Search us, O God, and know our hearts,

test us and know our troubled thoughts.

Give us true repentance.

Forgive us all our wrongs.

Transform us by your Spirit to live for you each day,

to learn to serve each other

and, through the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord, to come at last to heaven.

This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON AND *GLORIA PATRI (579)

FIRST LESSON Matthew 13:31-33; 44-52 p. 795

***HYMN** *How Happy Is Each Child of God* 239

The text is a paraphrase of Psalm 128 by Dwyn M. Mounger. While a pastor in Valdosta, Georgia, Mounger tried to remain faithful to the Common Lectionary's choice of Psalms and scripture lessons for Sundays. There were psalms that *The Hymnbook* (1955) did not have either to be read responsively or to be sung. He and his associate began to paraphrase the psalms and set them to familiar tunes. This text was one of those paraphrases. It became a favorite of the congregation and was sung on Christian Family Sunday every year.

SECOND LESSON Romans 8:26-39 p. 919

SERMON Who, Indeed?

***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.

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

On Eagle's Wings

- Michal Joncas arr. Mark Hayes, Carol Poppe, soprano

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

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

***HYMN** *God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending* 422

The text by Robert Edwards was one of the ten winners of the 1961 Hymn Society of America's competition for stewardship hymns. The tune first appeared in the 1844 Philadelphia publication, *Sacred Harp*, by B.F. White and Elisha King; the 1958 harmony is by James Wood.

***BENEDICTION**

***POSTLUDE** *Laudation* - Gilbert Martin

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

Please join us for fellowship and refreshments in the foyer after the service. Our thanks to Janet Van Derpoel-Andrea, Joyce Goeke, Mary Elizabeth Groupé, and Audrey Pietrucha.

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.

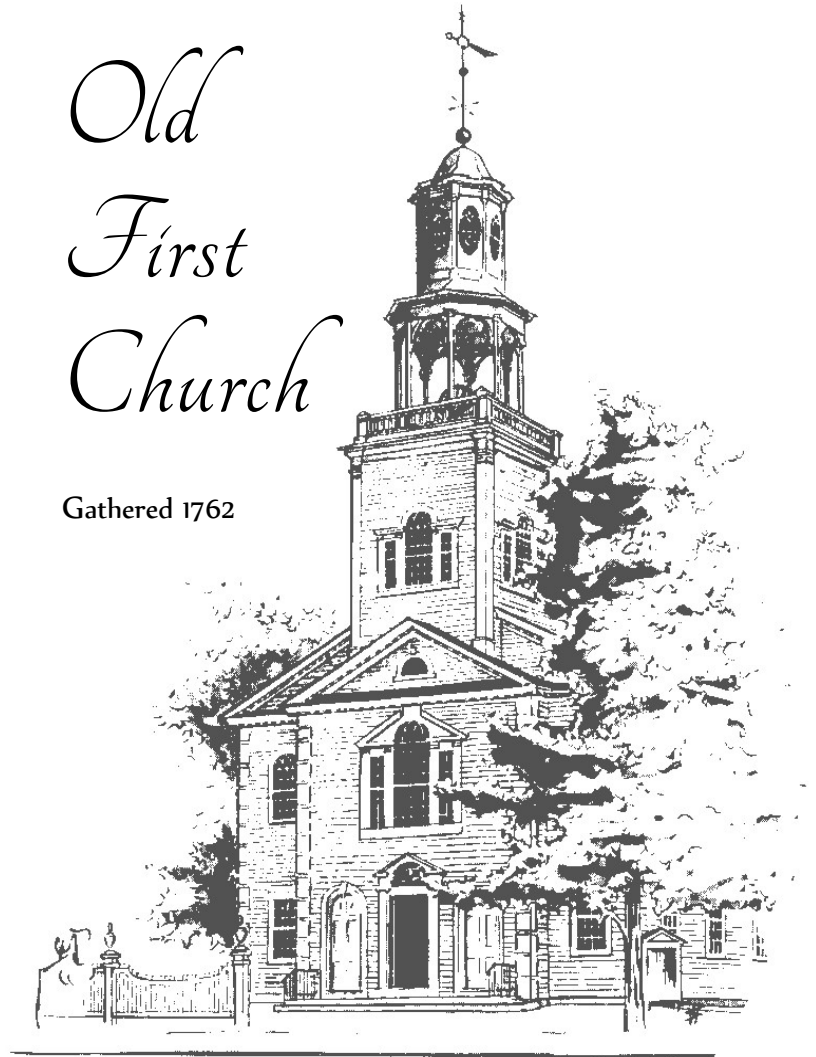
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*Old
First
Church*

Gathered 1762



Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

1. Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
sung by flaming tongues above;
praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
mount of God's unchanging love!
2. Here I raise my Ebenezer,
hither by Thy help I'm come;
and I hope, by Thy good pleasure,
safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood.
3. O to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace now, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to Thee:
prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it;
seal it for Thy courts above.

FIRST LESSON

Matthew 13:31-33; 44-52

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

How Happy Is Each Child of God

How happy is each child of God
Who walks within God's ways!
You'll reap good fruit from honest work,
And joy in life always.

With fruitful spouse you'll parent now
Your children strong, adored;
Like olive shoots they shall surround
Your laden table board!

How happy is the family
Who honors God above!
The Lord shall send all help and grace
To bless your home with love.

May God's great peace, good health and joy
Forever fill your home;
May you and your descendants know
Forever God's shalom!

SECOND LESSON

Romans 8:26-39

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or

sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Be Thou My Vision

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.

God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending

God, whose giving knows no ending,
from Your rich and endless store,
Nature's wonder, Jesus' wisdom,
Costly cross, grave's shattered door:
Gifted by You, we turn to You,
Offering up ourselves in praise;
Thankful song shall rise forever,
Gracious donor of our days.

Skills and time are ours for pressing
Toward the goals of Christ, your Son:
All at peace in health and freedom,
Races joined, the church made one.
Now direct our daily labor,
Lest we strive for self alone;
Born with talents, make us servants
Fit to answer at Your throne.

Treasure too You have entrusted,
Gain through powers Your grace conferred;
Ours to use for home and kindred,
And to spread the gospel Word.
Open wide our hands, in sharing,
As we heed Christ's ageless call,
Healing, teaching, and reclaiming,
Serving You by loving all.