

First Congregational Church

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

An Open and Affirming Church

PO Box 350, 28 High Street, Wiscasset, Maine 04578

207-882-7544, www.uccwiscasset.org



We welcome you to the First Congregational Church of Wiscasset.

VISION: We are on a journey to reflect God's love, embracing diversity and affirming the dignity and worth of all.

MISSION: Together we strive to praise God, grow in faith, cultivate love, spread joy, care for all people and God's creation, promote peace, and do justice.



November 10, 2024

November 10, 2024
Stewardship Sunday
10:00am

We joyfully welcome **all** people, including those who are tuning in on Zoom, to our worship Service this morning!

The First congregational Church of Wiscasset is an Open and Affirming Church affiliated with the Mine Conference of the United Church of Christ denomination.

We invite you to join us for Refreshments and Fellowship in Fellowship Hall immediately after our Worship Service.

** Indicates to please stand with your heart or your posture.

For your Contemplation:

“A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines.” . . . Ralph Waldo Emerson

“She was lifted clear out of arithmetic into love, one of the greatest leaps which a life can take.” . . . Halford Luccock

PRELUDE

Prayer

Alexandre Guilmant

RINGING OF THE BELL

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHORAL INTROIT

Christ, Be Our Light

* INVITATION TO WORSHIP

God has issued us an invitation to worship together in this place.

We come as living stones to be used in building a spiritual temple.

We are a chosen people.

God’s own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God.

We have been called from darkness into marvelous light!

We worship to deepen our lives and to love God and neighbor.

* OPENING HYMN

What Gift Can We Bring

No. 377

UNISON PRAYER

Our gracious God, like a loving parent You nurture and encourage and challenge us to grow in grace. Grant that by sensing Your Spirit's presence in our midst we may be enabled to mature in our commitment to You. Quiet the din of our distracted spirits that we may hear Your gentle voice calling us. Transform our very lives that we may go forth from this hour with deeper commitment to doing Your will, with a firm assurance of Your presence. Amen!

CHORAL ANTHEM

God Be In My Head

arr. John Rutter

JOYS AND CONCERNS: After each Joy or Concern please respond:

Pastor: "Lord" Congregation: **"Hear our Prayer"**

MORNING PRAYER

SILENT PRAYER

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

CHORAL RESPONSE

The Cry of the Poor

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

Ecclesiastes 3:1 – 8

Mark 14:3 – 9

Leader: This is the Word of God for the people of God.

People: Thanks be to God.

* HYMN

The Gift of Love (Though I May Speak)

No. 68

SERMON:

"From Arithmetic to Love"

Rev. Myers

Text: "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a great service for Me. For you will always have the poor with you." . . . Mark 14:6-7

OFFERTORY PRAYER

OFFERTORY ANTHEM

Melody in G

Alexandre Guilmant

DOXOLOGY

No. 46

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done;
Creator, Christ, and Spirit One. Amen.**

* HYMN

I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

No. 467

BENEDICTION

BENEDICTORY RESPONSE

***Go now in peace. Never be afraid. God will go with you each hour of every day.
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true. Know God will guide you in all you do.***

***Go now in love, and show you believe. Reach out to others so all the world can see.
God will be there watching from above. Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.***

POSTLUDE

Chorus in Gregorian Tonality

Alexandre Guilmant

You are invited to sit for the postlude.

* * * * *

“Our worship ends, let our service begin”

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What Gift Can We Bring

377

Unison

1. What gift can we bring, what present, what token?
 2. Give thanks for the past, for those who had vision,
 3. Give thanks for to-mor-row, full of surprises,
 4. This gift we now bring, this present, this token,

What words can convey it, the joy of this day?
 who planted and watered so dreams could come true.
 for knowing what-ever to-mor-row may bring,
 these words can convey it, the joy of this day!

When grateful we come, re-calling, re-joicing,
 Give thanks for to-day, for study, for worship,
 The Word is our promise always, for-ever;
 When grateful we come, re-calling, re-joicing,

what song can we offer in honor and praise?
 for mission that bids us turn prayer into deed.
 we rest in God's keeping and live in God's love.
 this song we now offer in honor and praise!

WORDS and MUSIC: Jane Marshall, 1980. alt.

Jane Marshall is a highly-respected composer, educator, conductor and author. This hymn was written for the 25th anniversary of her Northhaven United Methodist Church, Dallas TX.

ANNIVERSARY SONG
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Ecclesiastes 3:1 – 8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

Mark 14:3 - 9

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

Reader: This is the Word of God for the people of God.

People: Thanks be to God

Though I May Speak (The Gift of Love)

68



1. Though I may speak with brav - est fire, and have the
2. Though I may give all I pos - sess, and striv - ing
3. Come, Spir - it, come, our hearts con - trol, our spir - its



gift to all in - spire, and have not love, my words are
so my love pro - fess, but not be given by love with -
long to be made whole. Let in - ward love guide ev - ery



vain, as sound - ing brass, and hope - less gain.
in, the prof - it soon turns strange - ly thin.
deed; by this we wor - ship, and are freed.

WORDS: Hal H. Hopson, 1972

MUSIC: Traditional English melody; adapt. Hal H. Hopson, 1971

Hal Hopson's paraphrase of I Corinthians 13 and his setting of a traditional English tune have made this a well-loved hymn in a short twenty-five years.

GIFT OF LOVE
LM

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2024

“From Arithmetic to Love”

Ecclesiastes 3:1 – 8

Mark 14:3 – 9

Text: “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for Me. For you will always have the poor with you, . . .” . . . Mark 14:6-7

We’re in the midst of Stewardship season. It’s not quite like hunting or fishing season, election season, or even the seasons of the year. But those who are around the church long enough know that every year there is a season for stewardship – also known as the pledge drive . . . So what better time to preach on a Scripture that seems to thoroughly confuse – both to the disciples and even us today?

After reading today’s Scripture from Mark it is no wonder the disciples of Jesus had a question or two! No wonder they were confused. If there was anything that came through the teachings of Jesus loudly and clearly, it was the mandate to have compassion for the poor – the expectation to feed the hungry, and clothe the ragged, and shelter the homeless. Those who do those things will know what it means to be a part of the life which Jesus offers. “In as much as you do it unto **the least** of these My brothers and sisters, you have done it unto Me.”

Still vivid in the disciples' memory (and ours as we studied this Scripture just a few weeks ago) is Jesus' conversation with the so-called "Rich Young Ruler" – a person of great wealth who swallowed pride and came to see Jesus to ask what he is missing in his life – "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said, "You know the commandments – keep them." But the young man insisted, "I've always kept the commandments. I live by them, but something is still missing!" And because Jesus loved him, He said, "OK, then! I see you're very serious about it all. Go, sell all you have and give it to the poor, and then come back and you'll be in a great position to talk about eternal life." And that was the last they saw of the rich young ruler! What could have been clearer than Jesus' teaching at that time? We need to give to the poor!

So now the disciples are enjoying dinner with Jesus when in bursts a woman carrying an alabaster jar filled with expensive ointment. This ointment was spikenard and it was very costly – probably the equivalent of a full year's wage – and it was usually saved, bit by bit over a person's lifetime, for the anointing of the body of a person at the time of their burial.

To use even a few drops of this very expensive ointment would have been "conspicuous consumption," but this woman breaks the alabaster jar open and pours the entire flask of ointment over Jesus' head.

The disciples are horrified! They look at Jesus' face, expecting to see Jesus disgusted and horrified.

Instead, they see Jesus is not only receiving the gift graciously – but he's enjoying it!

How could He?

They seethe and mutter with indignation, “Why was this ointment wasted in this way?” “It must have cost almost a year’s wages.” “It could have been sold and the money given to the poor!” Who knows, maybe they even thought they would say it before Jesus said it and win His approval; to let Him know that they finally understood what He was all about.

But Jesus’ response is anything but approval of their action. “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing for Me. For you will always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have Me.”

The disciples must have thought, “There’s just no pleasing Him!” “Why doesn’t He make up His mind?” “Now we’re thoroughly confused!”

And as Jesus’ disciples today we are still confused, aren’t we?

In the 70’s and early 80’s I used to take youth groups on a trip to New York City. Amid the many wonderful sites, I would take them to the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine. That cathedral in the heart of the city is the largest Gothic structure on this continent, maybe the largest Gothic structure in the world. According to the original plans, made 150ish years ago, the design called for two ornate spires to rise above the cathedral. But then money ran out and the neighborhood around the cathedral changed. The cathedral became a Gothic island in a sea of poverty. So, the plans to build these tremendous spires were shelved and the cathedral devoted its resources to serving the poor of the neighborhood. In the 1960’s, there was talk of selling the cathedral using a small

portion of the proceeds to build a very modest structure and dedicating the balance to the cathedral's outreach ministries.

About 55 years ago, however, the Episcopal bishop declared that now more than ever the neighborhood had need of a symbol of the majesty and glory of God. So, the old plans were dusted off, and they began to build the spires, importing the finest Italian stone masons to do the job, a job that would eventually cost millions. First, talk of selling the property and giving the proceeds to the poor, then pouring millions into the building. Are Jesus' disciples still confused?

The same tension that we feel in church, many of us would admit to feeling in other areas of life as well. A colleague of mine expressed it pretty well I believe with these questions: "How can I squander \$7.00 for a Haagen-Dazs ice cream cone when little children are starving in Africa and Latin America – or, gosh, even in our own cities? How can a church justify a \$500,000 pipe organ when there are villages without sewers in many parts of the world? How can a city support a symphony orchestra when slums seethe with disease? How can a nation endow the arts while turning the mentally ill out on the street?"

What are we to do? What does God expect? And why couldn't Jesus be a little more consistent so we would know what is expected of us as disciples; whether we are willing to do it or not? Did Jesus agree with Ralph Waldo Emerson who said, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency, a soul simply has nothing to do."? (Well, I'm one little "divine" who will own up to wanting a little more consistency!)

One would think that the key would be moderation in all things – the “middle way”, or Aristotle’s “Golden Mean”. Does the Cathedral of St. John the Divine really need two spires? Wouldn’t one be adequate? Or, do they have to be so towering? Would stubby spires give sufficient glory to God? And does one have to splurge on Haagen-Dazs? How about generic non-fat frozen yogurt? And does a city need a whole orchestra? Maybe a string quartet would do?

Or maybe the key is to serve the poor, but don’t get too involved. Enjoy the concert, but don’t get too “carried away!” After all, shouldn’t all things be done in moderation?

Then this woman bursts in on our dinner party and pours the whole jar of ointment on Jesus’ head. She could have taken a measuring cup and carefully measured out half of the ointment for anointing Jesus and half to be sold and given to the poor. But her expression of devotion was not smothered with caution or prudence.

It was the great, classic preacher, Halford Luccock who speaks of her by noting, “She was lifted clear out of arithmetic and into love – one of the greatest leaps which a life can take.” “Out of arithmetic and into love.” Out of the arithmetic of value to love. Because of her extravagant gesture that Jesus said, “She has done a beautiful thing.” Could it be that Jesus thinks we’re at our best when we’re carried away?

In fact, if Jesus is consistent on this issue, it is that He consistently does not praise moderation. At least, I don’t see it. Moderation is the virtue of the Greek

philosophers, but I don't see it in the Gospels. It seems to be that Jesus reserves His praise for:

- A woman in the temple, a widow, who gives her two copper coins – everything she has. There is no moderation there.
- And when Jesus turns water into wine at the wedding feast, it's not only the best wine ever tasted; but its 180 gallons – well, that must have been quite a wedding reception! And, a rather extravagant gesture.
- Or for a so-called “prodigal” son that was lost and squandered all his money. When he returns the father gives him the family ring and a party with the fatted calf – much to his elder brother's consternation.

There is no such thing as moderate extravagance; and Jesus seems to promote extravagant devotion, extravagant celebration, and extravagant forgiveness. Jesus gives us examples of extravagant service, extravagant giving and extravagant receiving, because only extravagance is an appropriate response to a God who pours upon us extravagant love!

But we can't do all things with extravagance at all times, so there must be a rhythm to life. Or as Ecclesiastes would have it, there must be “seasons” to life.

There is a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to keep and a time to cast away, a time to give and a time to receive, and a time to give again.

And it is only as inconsistent as doing the “two-step” on the dance floor. If you ever observed a couple doing “the two-step” with the eyes of strict objectivity, you'd conclude that they were getting nowhere – they're going backwards as much as they are going forward. But if you've ever been in love – about as

unobjective as you can get – you wouldn't look at it that way. You know they're getting somewhere all right! And life has that same dynamic rhythm.

And getting stuck on one side only of the rhythm is as dangerous as only inhaling or only exhaling. For most of us, frankly, the greater danger is getting stuck on the inhaling side – with lives characterized by consistently extravagant self-indulgence and not really living.

Perhaps we are less likely to recognize the danger also of always being the giver and never the receiver. It may indeed be more blessed to give than to receive, but sometimes giving is a lot easier. Constant giving puts us in a superior position. It means, among other things, that we never have to say “thank you”, and there is a certain arrogance in that. To receive a gift graciously – especially an extravagant gift – like being able to walk in the woods on a spring morning (with or without your golf clubs), or have a double scoop of Ben and Jerry's *Pistachio Pistachio* – can well be in itself an expression of our devotion to the God from Whom all good gifts come.

You see, my suspicion is that up until the time she anoints Jesus, this woman's life had probably been mostly about duty. So, Jesus encourages her beautiful moment of extravagance. But to the rich young ruler, whose life had been mostly self-indulgence, to him Jesus said, “Go, sell what you have and give to the poor.”

Well, there's method in my madness this morning. This is, after all, our annual stewardship drive!

No doubt you will have decisions to make as you decide what kind of support – prayers, presence, service, and your financial gifts – you will be able to provide for the church in the coming year. Some of these decisions have to do with priorities as to who you are and what we are about as a church. Are you primarily about “inhaling” or “exhaling”? And where are we as a church in that dynamic rhythm of the Christian life?

Now, if you hear this morning’s sermon as simply a confirmation of your own prejudice and position in that discussion then it will have failed. If it confuses you a little, then it will have succeeded. For I believe this to be one of those situations of which someone has said, “If you are not confused, you don’t understand the situation.”

To try to add a little more to the confusion, let me say this in conclusion: It is telling that the Cathedral of St. John the Divine ***did not*** in fact have to cut back its ministry to the poor after construction began on those magnificent spires. They’ve created so much excitement and brought in so many resources that they have actually been able to increase their ministry to the poor of the community around the church. A deep inhale, a deep exhale; an extravagant gesture in one direction and then in another.

Any time you think stewardship and then quickly move to church budgets, you will hear a lot about arithmetic. But any significant accomplishment, whether in dealing with budgets or in dealing with life, happens only as we are “lifted clear out of arithmetic and into love – one of the greatest leaps which a life can take.”

I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me 467

I'm gon-na live so God can use me

1. I'm gon-na live (I'm gon-na live so) God can use (God can

use me) an - y - time, Lord, and an - y - where. (yes, an - y -
yes, an - y - time,

I'm gon-na live so God can use me

where.) I'm gon-na live (I'm gon-na live so) God can use me

an - y - time, Lord, and an - y - where. (yes an - y - where.)

Stanza 2. I'm gonna work 3. I'm gonna pray 4. I'm gonna sing

WORDS: African-American spiritual
MUSIC: African-American spiritual; harm. FCC. 1997. © 1998

I'M GONNA LIVE
OR OR

Those serving you today:
Interim Pastor: Rev. David Myers
Music Director/Organist: Joel Pierce
Ushers: Judith Sutter & Mary McKinney
Reader: Becky Lenz
***Flowers:** Carol & George Peck
**In honor of our 6th Anniversary on November 11th.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Stewardship Season is Upon Us. This year our Stewardship emphasis rests on four faithful responses to Gods love. Prayers, Presence, Gifts and Service. Our church provides or helps enable many missions and ministries, both local and worldwide. This Annual Stewardship Mailing complete with pledge cards was sent out last week. Please give prayerful consideration for your pledge for the coming year 2025. **Please try to have your pledge card completed and back to the church by Wednesday, November 20!**

CHRISTMAS WREATH SALE 2024

It's time for the Annual Organ Society Wreath Sale. Wreaths will be available for pick-up on Tuesday, November 26th, or on Sunday, December 1st. **Please order by Thursday, November 21st.** Prepayment is appreciated! Forms and payments, **(Make out checks to the Organ Society)**, can go to the church office or to Libby Mooney libbymooney1954@gmail.com.

Volunteer Opportunity at St. Philip's Church

St. Philip's is looking for individuals to work 3 or more hours on Saturdays in the Bargain Basement thrift shop. Volunteers can work behind the scenes, or out front helping. Contact Sharman Ballantine at sharman1738@gmail.com or 207 481 1043 for more info.

Please take note of the colored paper prayer slips in the pew rack. These are for you to write a word or phrase of prayer or concerns and place it on the plate of offering. It will only be shared with the pastor.

Coming Up:

Sunday, November 10:	Sunday Worship – 10:00am Stewardship Sunday Diaconate will meet today after church, 11:20am. Trustees Meeting, 4:00pm via ZOOM. Youth Group Meet, 4:00pm. Trustees meeting, Tuesday, November 19, 4:30pm via ZOOM. “The Chosen” 5:30pm, Watch Season 4 and Pot-Luck Supper and Discussion.
Monday, November 11:	Mah Jongg, 6:00 – 8:30pm
Tuesday, November 12:	Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm Church in Society, 12:30pm
Wednesday, November 13:	Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm Organ Society, 9:30am Feed Our Scholars, 11:00am Council Meeting, 6:30pm via Zoom. (*All are Welcome, please request a zoom link from Cindy Clement.)
Thursday, November 14:	Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm
Saturday, November 16:	Sheepscot Chorus Rehearsal, 9:30 – 11:30am
Sunday, November 17:	Sunday Worship – 10:00am Youth Group Meet, 4:00pm “The Chosen” 5:30pm, Watch Season 4 and Pot-Luck Supper.
Sunday, November 24:	Thanksgiving Sunday and dedication of pledges.

Need a ride or Can you provide a ride?

If you need or would be willing to provide a ride to and from church on Sundays for those unable to drive themselves, please call Lisa Hargreaves at 207.315.0802.