

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.



February 9, 2025

February 9, 2025
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
10:00am

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

We joyfully welcome **all** to our worship service, including those on ZOOM!
We invite everyone to Coffee and Community in Fellowship Hall after our
worship service! If you are visiting, please identify yourselves to the ushers.
The First Congregational Church of Wiscasset is an Open and Affirming Church
affiliated with the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ
denomination.

For Your Contemplation:

“We have made ourselves our own favored children. . . . (we have been deluded)
into thinking that there is no voice to be spoken over our lives more significant
than our own voice.” (Erik Erikson, developmental psychologist)

PRELUDE

There Is a Fountain

arr. Mark Hayes

RINGING OF THE BELL

CHORAL INTROIT

My Soul is Thirsting for You, O God

Angrisano/Pierce

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

* INVITATION TO WORSHIP

With different gifts, with a variety of talents, with an array of interests, we
come to worship You, our creating God.

**We are here to unite our spirits, to be made one in Jesus Christ to be
merged in hope as Your children.**

Bless our differences, that the unique gifts and perceptions of each may
strengthen our oneness.

**Drawn into Your Spirit, we give You the thanks of our hearts, in the name
of the living Christ!**

* HYMN

We Are Called

see insert

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

Revive Us Again

arr. Mark Hayes

You are invited to sit for the postlude.

* * * * *

“Our worship ends, let our service begin”

NOTE: Liturgy for today's worship is taken from *Flames of the Spirit: Resources for Worship*. Edited by Ruth C. Duck, The Pilgrim Press, New York, 1985

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We Are Called

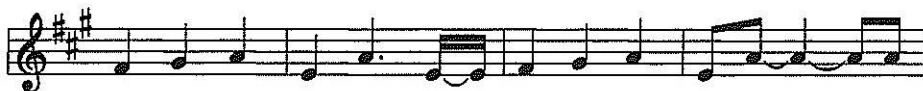
2172



1. Come! Live in the light! _____ Shine with the
 2. Come! O - pen your heart! _____ Show your
 3. Sing! Sing a new song! _____ Sing of that



joy and the love of the Lord! We are called _____ to be
 mer - cy to all those in fear! We are called _____ to be
 great day when all will be one! God will reign, _____ and we'll



light for the king - dom, to live in the free - dom of the
 hope for the hope - less so all ha - tred and blind - ness will
 walk with each oth - er as sis - ters and broth - ers u -



Refrain

cit - y of God! _____
 be no more! _____ We are called to act with
 nit - ed in love! _____



jus - tice, _____ we are called to love ten - der - ly, _____



_____ we are called to serve one an - oth - er, _____ to



walk hum - bly with God! _____

Isaiah 49:1 – 9

Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away!
The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God." And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength— he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you." Thus says the Lord: In a time of favor I have answered you, on a day of salvation I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages; saying to the prisoners, "Come out," to those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves." They shall feed along the ways, on all the bare heights shall be their pasture;

Matthew 3:13 – 17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

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

People: Thanks be to God

355 Lord, You Give the Great Commission

1. Lord, you give the great com - mis - sion: "Heal the sick and
 2. Lord, you call us to your ser - vice: "In my name bap -
 3. Lord, you make the com - mon ho - ly: "This my bod - y,
 4. Lord, you show us love's true mea - sure: "Fa - ther, what they
 5. Lord, you bless with words as - sur - ing: "I am with you

preach the word." Lest the church ne - glect its mis - sion,
 tize and teach." That the world may trust your prom - ise,
 this my blood." Let us all, for earth's true glo - ry,
 do, for - give." Yet we hoard as pri - vate trea - sure
 to the end." Faith and hope and love re - stor - ing,

and the gos - pel go un - heard, help us wit - ness
 life a - bun - dant meant for each, give us all new
 dai - ly lift life heav - en - ward, ask - ing that the
 all that you so free - ly give. May your care and
 may we serve as you in - tend and, a - mid the

to your pur - pose with re - newed in - teg - ri - ty.
 fer - vor, draw us clos - er in com - mu - ni - ty.
 world a - round us share your chil - dren's lib - er - ty.
 mer - cy lead us to a just so - ci - e - ty.
 cares that claim us, hold in mind e - ter - ni - ty.

Refrain

With the Spir - it's gifts em - pow'r us for the work of min - is - try.

David C. Myers

February 9, 2025

“Call, Choice, or Fate?”

Isaiah 49:1 – 7

I Corinthians 1:1 – 3

John 1:29 – 34

Text: “I, Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.”

. . . I Corinthians 1:1

One of the hats I used to wear in my former life as a minister in another denomination was to be Chair of the Enlistment and Recruitment Committee for new ministers. Part of that job was to help coordinate the Bishop’s Convocation on Ministry. About 60 persons of all ages would gather to explore their call to serve the Lord as minister, missionary, or in a dorm of ministry for laity. A frequently asked question would go like this: “How did you know that you were supposed to be a minister? Was there some voice, some word out of the blue? Did you take an aptitude test that told you?”

And due to the nature of this gathering, we knew that behind the question wasn’t so much a deep sense of curiosity in how we – the staff – were called, but rather whether the one asking the question was called – as in “called by God”.

Now, while that is especially relevant to people contemplating a life of service to the church, *it is just as relevant* to each person here today.

How do you know what you are supposed to do with your life? Do you feel that your gifts and talents are being used for the benefit of humanity as a part of God's **total** ministry – the priesthood of all believers? What is your calling?, and does it have anything to do with what you are doing now?

We may envy the claims made by all three people featured in the Scripture Lessons this morning. Isaiah's claim that he knew what God wanted him to do, "from the womb, from the body of my mother God called my name." We wonder how Paul could say that he was, "called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus", or how John the Baptist knew for sure that he was "sent to baptize with water."

"Even before I was born, God knew my name. . . ." God said, "Joel, and all choir members, study your lessons well, and then go forth and help others how to make music and learn about the Lord for the Lord." God says to Beth and Deb, "I will show you how your financial knowledge can help the church." "Martha, your ability to organize people and get them to try new ideas, can move this church forward." "Ron, your designing and decorating skills brings smile and welcomeness to this church!"

Let's look at the three possibilities suggested by my sermon title – call, choice or fate – to see how we live out our lives.

1.) The first is that of **choice**. But that comes with the question, whose choice? For most us, the notion of call, the sense of vocation, has been

reduced to something you do because you choose to do it – a sort of, “I am here because I decided to here.” This is choice, not call.

The contemporary understanding of vocation is the result of our modern infatuation with autonomy – do your own thing, self-actualize, self-fulfill. In other words, society attempts to elevate the uncalled life, a life which is not referred to any purpose beyond one’s self. “I gotta be me.” “Have it your way.” In today’s time often there is no “call” other than the one originating within myself. “We have,” says Erik Erikson, “made ourselves our own favored children. . . . (we have been deluded) into thinking that there is no voice to be spoken over our lives more significant than our own voice.”

The issue here is to whom and to what we listen.

It’s hard to hear the voice of another, whispering over our lives when we are so busy speaking to ourselves. Isaiah, before he responded to God’s call to be a prophet – when he talked to himself – heard only the voice of despair. “I have labored in vain.” “I have spent myself for nothing.”

When I have based my life, my choice of direction, my expenditure of myself solely upon “what I want to do with my life,” I am setting up myself for despair. My wants are fickle and twist and turn with the changing wind. I usually choose what want based on my assessment of possibilities for happiness or financial reward within a given path. But no path insures continual happiness. So, then I say, “Did I choose wrong? Did I have all the facts? Is this really what I want to do?” When we base what we do with our lives solely on our own choice, we may find ourselves echoing Isaiah’s words, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing.”

2.) Or perhaps worse, let's look at the possibility of fate as the controller of our lives. With fate we admit that we are here because we were placed here. There really isn't vocation, it's all a matter of sociological, economic, racial or gender determination. You are where you are because you were stuck here – an accident of birth, if you will.

Deb and I had an amazing thing happen a few years ago. Out of the clear blue I got an Email from Russ Carmichael – he had been an usher in our wedding. We hadn't heard from him in about 30 years. Periodically I worried about Russ; he was an ex-offender, had spent 5 years in prison before I met him. But when I met him, he was leading a Ministerial Intern Program at Boston University School of Theology on prison ministry. Later he was the Executive Director of Emergency Adjustment Services for Ex-Offenders, until the Federal Funding dried up. Then he disappeared. For a 5-year period, Russ and I were very close friends. He always said, "I can be good today, but I can't promise tomorrow." Had he gone back into a life of crime?? The Email answered that question. Now he is Father Russell Carmichael, an Oblate Father serving a prison and homeless ministry in New London, Connecticut. I also reflect on the time he told me that in the neighborhood he grew up in boys either grew-up and worked for the post-office, became police men, or went to jail. Was that vocation? Hardly. Instead, "I was born in Watts. I was born in Waltham, MA. From my mother's womb I was nothing."

Choice or fate, that's what vocation has become for us. Isaiah listened to his own voice and was unfulfilled. Saul's fate was to be a Pharisee par excellence, but to no avail. Russ started out as a thief, a prisoner. Their true vocations still awaited them. Because, you see, we can be called at any time, from any circumstance in life.

3.) *This is my third point. Called to what? and, what is the nature of this call?* I would like to suggest that call means that one's life is somehow caught up in the larger purposes of God, is attached to divine work which has greater significance than you yourself. Call is rarely an event, a phone call, the result of an interview, or completion of a questionnaire. Call – a biblical call – is a process of referring to yourself to the workings of God before you decide and choose where to go next. The “called life” is a life underway, . . . a life at risk, . . . in process, . . . as Isaiah's own struggle with his call testifies.

When Isaiah says that he was called from the womb of his mother, he's not speaking of some dateable event. What Isaiah is saying is that he somehow had the courage and freedom to march to a different drummer because, somehow, his life was claimed, defined, and shaped by One greater than himself, even before he decided or chose anything.

Our call from God may be like that of Isaiah, to be a “mouth like a sharp sword” in a world of co-opted speech and smooth talk. God needs people who turn their backs on the world's definitions of success and power, to care for people rather than money, or to take the time to have and care for children.

God – and this world – need people who have a clear sense that what they do is more important than their own wants and desires.

Think back on how bleak your life would be if you had not met a coach who thought there was nothing more important in life than learning the fundamentals of that sport well. Or perhaps a teacher who had been totally absorbed by the beauty of geometry. Maybe you had a parent who really believed that she was loving God when she was putting up with raising you! Such people point to something beyond the teaching, the coaching, and the parenting.

John, the one presented in John's Gospel to bear witness to Christ is such an example. In John's Gospel; John the Baptist appears and disappears with but one reason to be on stage: he is a witness to Christ. He does not speak of end times of the chopping axe, the cleansing wind or the consuming fire; rather he points to Christ: "Behold the Lamb of God." In short, John the Baptist is a witness. As such he is the perfect prototype of the Christian leader: sent of God to witness.

This is not to say there was no struggle, no temptation to use his gifts to elevate himself. On the contrary, such a battle must have raged within him at times. Since temptation is commensurate with strength, the unusually gifted face tests the rest of us do not. As the late George Buttrick once observed, "There is no seastorm in a roadside puddle." But even with the wrestling, the great can and do turn all their gifts to the service of the Gospel, and in so doing discover that their powers are not diminished but increased.

Harry Emerson Fosdick titled a chapter in his autobiography, “Ideas That Have Used Me.” A used life is a meaningful life, provided that the ideas which use us, the call to which we respond is true, rooted in the purpose of the true God rather than a false idol.

And this is one of the great joys of working with people who have been called to music. A woman I dated in college was part of the Chapel choir and one evening she offered to me as an excuse as to why she was late for a date. She said that the conductor wouldn’t let them go. When I inquired further, she said that they were learning Handel’s *Messiah* – but apparently not very well. She said finally the director said in a characteristic pique of perfection, “For God’s sake, this is Handel, and we’re going to stay here until we do it the way Handel deserves!”

For God’s sake indeed, not for our own sakes do we find ourselves caught up, lost, given over, absorbed in our vocation, be it making music, healing, computing, nursing, administering, teaching, raising families, or whatever God has called you to do.

I didn’t say God would hit you over the head with a call. I didn’t say that your call would be spoken in some definitive way or be some dateable moment. Nothing in Isaiah’s text would indicate that. John the Baptist was totally consumed to be a forerunner to point beyond himself to the coming of Christ. And while Paul had a remarkable experience it was a mid-course

correction, for he was called to God in his new beliefs in God's Son with as even more conviction and passion than he had in his old beliefs.

What we can say is that someone listening more for the expression of God's purposes rather than merely listening to the voice of one's own ego is someone whose life has a purpose. We can say that someone who expects to be used by God for important work, the person who clings, through thick and thin, to the conviction that God knows his or her name, has purposes for his or her life, will not be disappointed.

After all, you are part of a great priesthood – the priesthood of all believers!



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

me

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
QR QR

Those serving you today:
Interim Pastor: Rev. David Myers
Music Director/Organist: Joel Pierce
Ushers: Becky & David Lenz
Reader: Libby Mooney
Flowers: Beth Maxwell

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Worship & Music team will meet today after church, 11:15am

Council Meeting, Wednesday, February 12, 6:30pm via Zoom. Request a link from Cindy Clement to join.

The Outreach Team held their first meeting after worship on Sunday, February 2. A complete summary of the meeting will be in the March Chimes.

One of the tasks that is included on all of the Team lists of duties is to

“coordinate with other teamsin raising funds.” This is up to all of us, team members and all members of the Congregation.

To begin that task, **there will be a joint meeting after worship on Sunday, February 16** to begin brainstorming fundraising ideas. Hopefully, we will be able to raise funds equal to what Summerfest provided for us to give to others.

We need everyone’s input and ideas! **Please plan to attend** Sunday, February 16!

Maine School of Ministry Special Offering will be collected on Sunday, February 23

“Lost and Found” Looking for your favorite baking dish? Maybe it is in the kitchen "Lost and Found" on the shelf over the stoves. Over time pans and plates are left behind when people bring coffee hour goodies. Please put your name on the pans and dishes you bring so they can be returned to you in a timely manner. There is a roll of blue painter's tape and a marker in the kitchen that you can use to identify your dishes when you bring them in. These items will not be kept indefinitely.

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, February 9:	Choir Practice, 8:10am Sunday Worship – 10:00am Worship & Music team will meet today after church, 11:15am <i>Shop Organ Society</i> , each Sunday and every day, has Jigsaw Puzzles for sale. Youth Group, 11:45am
Monday, February 10:	Mah Jongg, 6:00pm – 8:30pm
Tuesday, February 11:	Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm
Wednesday, February 12:	Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm Organ Society Meets, 9:30am Feed Our Scholars(FOS), 11:00am Council Meeting , 6:30pm via Zoom. Request a link from Cindy Clement to join.
Thursday, February 13:	Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm Garden Club Wiscasset, 11:30-2:00pm
Sunday, February 16:	Choir Practice, 8:10am Sunday Worship – 10:00am The Outreach Team will host a joint meeting for Fundraising ideas for 2025 after church. Youth Group, 11:45am

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.

Volunteer Opportunity at St. Philip’s Church

St. Philip's is looking for volunteers to in the Bargain Basement thrift shop. Contact Sharman Ballantine at sharman1738@gmail.com or 207 481 1043 for more info.