

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 24, 2024

Thanksgiving Sunday
November 24, 2024
10:00am

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

We joyfully welcome all people here and this on Zoom to our worship this morning!

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

You are invited to Coffee and sharing in Fellowship Hall after worship!

For Your Contemplation:

“Now thank we all our God, with hearts, and hands and voices, Who wondrous things hath done, in Whom this world rejoices; Who from our mother’s arms hath blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.” . . .
. from the Hymn “Now Thank We all Our God,” written by Martin Rinkart.

PRELUDE *Aria from Goldberg Variations* J.S. Bach

RINGING OF THE BELL

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

MUSICAL INTROIT *Prelude in C Major* J.S. Bach

* INVITATION TO WORSHIP

O be joyful in God, all the lands;

Serve the Lord with gladness, and come before God’s presence with singing.

Be sure that the Lord is God; it is God Who made us and not we ourselves;

We are God’s people, the sheep of God’s pasture.

Enter God’s gates with thanksgiving. And go into God’s courts with praise;

Be thankful to God, and speak good of God’s name.

* HYMN

We Gather Together

No. 23

MUSICAL SELECTION

JOYS AND CONCERNS:

After each Joy or Concern please respond:
Pastor: "Lord," Congregation: "Hear our Prayer"

MORNING PRAYER (READ TOGETHER)

Creator and ever-present God; it is in our lives that we become aware of Your life. It is in the rhythms of the world that we hear Your pulse, Your breathing, Your footsteps.

When we hold a newborn in our arms we sense we are embracing God. When we listen to music we sense that we are experiencing the fullness of prayer. It is in our lives and interactions with others that we know You, O God, are alive!

We thank You, O God, for the lives You have given us, for the senses which are ours through which to experience life, and for our human souls which reach out toward You, even now.

We thank You for Your loving presence, as You reveal Yourself in our everyday lives through the presence of others. Amen.

MOMENTS FOR 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.

MUSICAL RESPONSE

SCRIPTURE LESSONS:

Psalm 100
Habakkuk 3:17 – 19a
Liturgist: This is the Word of God.
People: Thanks be to God.

* HYMN *We Plow the Fields and Scatter* No. 528

SERMON: "Can Rotting Broccoli Ever be Holy?" Rev. David C. Myers
Text: "Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no fruit; though the
flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice
in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation." . . . Habakkuk 3:17-18

PREPARING FOR THE OFFERING

OFFERTORY *Adieu to the Piano* L. Beethoven

* 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 *Now Thank We All Our God* No. 27

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 *Prelude in G Major* Sergei Rachmaninoff

You are invited to sit for the postlude.

* * * * *

"Our worship ends, let our service begin"

We Gather Together

1. We gath - er to - geth - er to ask for your bless - ing, you chas - ten and
 2. Be - side us to guide us, O God, with us join - ing, or - dain - ing, main -
 3. We all do ex - tol you, our lead - er tri - um - phant, and pray that you

has - ten your will to make known; the wick - ed op - press - ing now cease from dis -
 tain - ing, re - deem - ing our world; so from the be - gin - ning the fight we were
 still our de - fend - er will be. Let your con - gre - ga - tion es - cape trib - u -

tress - ing. We praise your name, O God; for - get not your own.
 win - ning; Lord, you were at our side; we trust in your word.
 la - tion. Your name be ev - er praised! O Lord, make us free!

WORDS: *Nederlandsche Gedenckclanck*, 1626; tr. Theodore Baker, 1894, alt.
 MUSIC: Dutch melody, 16th century, arr. Edward Kremser, 1877

KREMSEK
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Written by an unknown Dutch patriot to celebrate the Netherlands' freedom from Spanish rule, this text was originally sung to this folk tune, later named for choral director Kremser who rescued it from obscurity.

The First Pilgrim Thanksgiving

Loving and old friend:

We set, last Spring some twenty acres of Indian corn; and sowed some six acres of barley and pease: and, according to the manner of the Indians, we manured our ground with herrings, or rather shads, which we have in great abundance

Our corn did prove well, and, GOD be praised! we had a good increase of Indian corn

Our harvest being gotten in, our Govenor [William Bradford] sent four men on fowling; that so we might, after a more special manner, rejoyce together, after we had gathered the fruit of our labors. They four, in one day, killed as much fowl as, with a little help besides, served the Company almost a week. At which time, amongst other recreations, we exercised our Arms [i.e., drilled]

. . . many of the Indians coming amongst us. And, amongst the rest, their greatest King, Massasoyt, with some ninety men; whom, for three days, we entertained and feasted. And they went out, and killed five deer, which they brought to the Plantation

And although it be not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us: yet, by the goodness of GOD, we are so far from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plenty.

Resting in him
Your loving friend,
Edward Winslow,
11 December 1621

— from Winslow's letter, the only existing description of the first Pilgrim Thanksgiving harvest festival

Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the
earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

Habakkuk 3:17 – 19a

Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the
produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off
from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will
exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet
like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights. To the choirmaster:
with stringed instruments.

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

People: Thanks be to God

“Can Rotting Broccoli Ever Be Holy?”

Habakkuk 3:17 – 19a

Text: “Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.” . . . Habakkuk 3:17 – 19a

I understand that a much beloved tradition of the many communities was to have an ecumenical service during the Thanksgiving week. I am not unfamiliar with them. I recall one year in the first church I served in Lowell, Massachusetts – at the bequest of one of the other Protestant Pastors, the clergy association decided to bring in a “ringer”, a silver-tongued orator from a renowned pulpit about 75 miles away. After about 15 minutes of introductory remarks, he began a pilgrimage through the letters of the entire alphabet, using each letter to remind us of something for which we ought to be thankful! And he just didn’t say “A” is for apples – he had a full-blown commentary on the letter, and the object of thanks.

In one sense the sermon was a success, for we all were profoundly thankful when he got to Zebras and then sat down!

But in another sense, it was such a shallow understanding of Thanksgiving, but one very prevalent in our culture. How many of us have been raised with the “count your blessings” notion of gratitude? You know the church-school “ditty”,

Count your blessings; name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see what God has done.

There is no doubt that it's a good exercise to count our blessings, but the implication is that after you've listed them all, you draw a line and add them all up and that's how thankful you should be this coming Thursday!

But . . . what about the tragedies in your life this year? Do you subtract them from your blessings? And what happens if you come up with a negative score? Do you ignore Thanksgiving and just watch the football games?

What about your failures? What about the job loss? What about the divorce? What about the failing health? What about the cancer? What about the grief – the awful, awful grief?

In Mary Gordon's novel, *Final Payments*, the main character, Isabel Moore, begins making breakfast the morning after the death of her father. She has spent the last eleven years caring for her father up until his death. Let her tell it:

“I hadn't shopped for days, since before the wake, and I had hardly been home enough even to open the refrigerator door. When I did, I was greeted by the defeating stench of rotting food. I tried to find the source of the odor; I smelled the milk and looked carefully at the hardening yellow block of cheddar. Then I bent down and opened the vegetable bin. The sight of the broccoli liquefying at the bottom made me want to run away and set a match to the whole house. I lifted up the cold slime of the vegetable. I could hardly endure the horror against my hands. I began shaking the cloggy leaves into the garbage bin frantically, but I could not get them off my fingers.

I began to cry.

The phone rang. ‘Isabel? It's Liz. What's wrong, dear? Is it your father?’ ‘No, it's the broccoli,’ I said, and then I began to laugh. I could hear Liz laugh in relief on the other end. ‘There's

this broccoli in the vegetable bin, rotting. You have no idea how it defeated me!’

‘I do’, said Liz. ‘Of course I do.’”

And, “of course” we do too, don’t we? Because the rotting broccoli is symbolic of all that threatens to defeat us and rob us of the joy of living. If it isn’t our father’s death, it’s the life we missed in those eleven years of care, or a violated marriage vow, or an anger-wadded letter in the wastebasket. For the rotting broccoli in the vegetable bin is symbolic of all that dies in us and around us and threatens to rob us of vitality.

So, when we’ve counted our blessings, A through Z, shouldn’t the “rotting broccoli” experiences be subtracted from our sense of gratitude from our Thanksgiving?

Maybe not.

My parents, who lived through the depression, never tired of the saying: “I complained because I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet.” That really worked with my generation, but I think it is less effective with this generation. I remember a Kudzu comic strip in which the preacher, Will B. Dunn, quotes that saying to Kudzu who responds, “Heavy.” Then, after a reflective moment says, “I complained because I had no call-waiting until I met a man who had no iPhone.” The preacher responds, “I weep for this generation.” But the paradox of Thanksgiving is that the “short-on-feet” people are often the very ones who are most grateful, while the “long-on-shoes” people are so often short on gratitude. Have you ever noticed that? It is statistically well-established that the poorer of this country are more generous in charitable giving than the wealthy.

So let us consider the original Day of Thanksgiving. That day was birthed by a group of “illegal immigrants,” refugees fleeing their own country (Pilgrims) who, on the face of it, had very little for which to be thankful. The little group of religious refugees, whom we call Pilgrims, landed on Cape Cod and then moved to Plymouth, Massachusetts after the Mayflower was blown off course and missed the warmer climate of

Virginia. In the next five months, over one half of the hundred and one settlers would be in their graves. Famine and disease that first terrible winter took such a toll that at times there were only six or seven people well enough to care for the others and bury the dead. None would have survived but for the help of the well-established residents already here – the Native Americans.

The first Thanksgiving Observance was on July 30, 1623, to celebrate the first rain after a two-month drought. Believing that “God helps those who help themselves” (by the way, a nice saying, but I defy you to find it anywhere in the Bible) the Pilgrims “helped themselves to the Indian’s seed corn, assuring their uneasy consciences that “the theft was God’s good providence.” And Elder Brewster led the Pilgrims in raising their voices in the ancient Psalm: “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein.”

For at its deepest level, their Thanksgiving was not so much for the bounty of the harvest as for the love of God Whose grace had sustained them even as they lowered their loved ones and their children into the watery grave in such a strange land.

And Thanksgiving as a national holiday was first established not during a time of peace and prosperity, but in 1863 – during the darkest hours of the Civil War, when the country was torn apart and the “valley of the shadow of death” extended across the entire land. It was then that Abraham Lincoln issued the first national Thanksgiving proclamation calling for a national day of praise, because in his words: “Intoxicated by unbroken successes, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.”

You probably haven’t heard many sermons from the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. It’s only three chapters and it doesn’t make it into “prime time” often, but I believe its author offers a profound correction to the “add up your blessing” notion of thanksgiving. He writes:

“Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the

stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.” . . . Habakkuk 3:17 - 19a

Thanksgiving; the wonder is – the mystery is – that God is with us in the “rotting broccoli” as nowhere else! The heart of God is laid bare precisely in the rotten – from a dangerous manger birth to a crucifixion at “the place of the skull.” For the gospel truth is not that we can ever be so wonderfully secure, or nobly good, or that life will be so syrupy smooth. The gospel truth is that we are so terribly loved – so terribly, fiercely loved by the very Heart of the Universe, even as we struggle most with the valleys of our lives. Life is either about that Love or it is about nothing much at all. Held in that love, rotting broccoli, in all its forms, becomes the compost for new life. It is, indeed, “Holy broccoli!”

In the New Testament, the Greek word, *charis* can be translated, “thanks” and also translated, “grace.” And that carries over into the English as well. As we gather around tables this Thursday, some of us will “express thanks” and others will “say grace.” I believe there is nothing more important to authentic life than a true sense of grace expressed in gratitude. But that gratitude is like a piece of cloth woven from threads of humility and generosity and most of all, grace – the grace to receive God’s extravagant love for us in Jesus Christ. That grace sustains us in the very worst circumstances of life.

The truth of the Gospel is that belief in God does not prevent bad things from happening to us, but rather, God goes with us and sees us through our darkest and deepest valleys

The great Thanksgiving hymn we will sing as our final hymn, “Now Thank We All Our God” was written by a pastor, Martin Rinkart in seventeenth century Germany, following the disastrous thirty-year-war in Europe and the severe plague of 1637. At the beginning of 1637, the year of the Great Pestilence, there were four ministers in Eilenburg, Germany. But one abandoned his post for healthier areas and could not be persuaded to return. Pastor Rinkart officiated at the funerals of the other two. As the only pastor left, he often conducted services for as many as 40 to 50 persons a day—some 4,480 in all. In May of that year, his own wife died. By the end of the year, the refugees who fled the battlefields of the 30-year-war had to be buried in trenches without services. Nevertheless, Rinkart penned the words to that hymn. Will you join me in singing that first verse?

“Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, in whom this rejoices,
Who from our mothers arms has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

“And still is ours today” – that’s the enduring source of our Thanksgiving and our reason to offer grace for our Thanksgiving!

We Plow the Fields and Scatter

528

1. We plow the fields and scat-ter the good seed on the land, but it is
 2. A - lone God is the mak-er of all things near and far; who paints the
 3. We thank thee, our Cre - a - tor, for all things bright and good: the seed-time

fed and wa - tered by God's all - lov - ing hand. God sends the snow in
 way-side flow - er, and lights the eve - ning star. Whom winds and waves do
 and the har - vest, our life, our health, our food. Ac - cept the gifts we

win-ter, the warmth to swell the grain, the breez - es and the sun - shine, and
 fol - low, by whom the birds are fed; who gives to us, the chil - dren, such
 of - fer, for all thy love im - parts, and, what thou most de - sir - est, our

Refrain

soft, re - fresh - ing rain.
 boun - teous dai - ly bread. All good gifts a - round us re - veal the heav'n - ly
 hum - ble, thank - ful hearts.

face; Now praise our God, O praise our God for bound - less grace.

Now Thank We All Our God

27

1. Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voic - es,
 2. O may this boun-teous God through all our life be near us,
 3. All praise and thanks to God al - might - y now be giv - en;

who won-drous things hath done, in whom this world re - joic - es,
 with ev - er joy - ful hearts and bless - ed peace to cheer us,
 to God, the three - in - one, who reigns in high - est heav - en,

who, from our moth - ers' arms, hath blessed us on our way
 and keep us in all grace, and guide us when per - plexed,
 the one e - ter - nal God, whom earth and heaven a - dore,

with count-less gifts of love, and still is ours to - day.
 and free us from all ills in this world and the next.
 for thus it was, is now, and shall be ev - er - more.

WORDS: Martin Rinkart, 1636; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1858, alt.
 MUSIC: Melody, Johann Crüger, 1647

NUN DANKET
 67.67.66.66

Those serving you today:
Interim Minister: Rev. David Myers
Pianist: Sarah Oeste
Ushers: Libby Mooney & Martha Speed
Reader: Deb Olson
Flowers:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Please return your pledge card to the church as soon as possible! You may also place them on the offering plate. Your pledge cards are important to help us plan a budget projection for the coming year. If needed, more cards are in the pews.

Hanging of the Greens service on December 1! We will be having a special service to kick off the Advent Season – which is a time for preparing for the birth of the Christ-child.

Sunday December 8: Our worship time and fellowship time on this Sunday will be altered.

The worship service will feature as a sermon “An Annotated Genealogy of Jesus” Mathew 1:1 – 18. This is a congregation participation sermon, in which the congregation (and choir) will be asked to make responses to all the names from Adam to Jesus.

Then after church you are invited to a Potluck after Church!! Please bring your favorite dish.

As a result of watching “**The Chosen**”, and the interest that developed in the land and conditions of Jesus’ ministry, Rev. Myers will share slides from his 2011 trip to Jordan and Israel that will give you an idea of Jesus’ travels, the terrain, and topography, and many of the commemorative sites.

Poinsettia Order Form. Deadline: Sunday, December 8.

They will be displayed in the sanctuary on Dec. 15, 22, and 29.

You are welcome to pick them up after worship on the 29th. Any remaining flowers will be delivered to individuals who serve our community, homebound members of the congregation or anyone else in need of some Christmas cheer. Checks should be made payable to “First Congregational Church” with memo “poinsettias.”



There is a drop off box in Fellowship Hall for new unopened toys. The mission of the U. S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program is to collect new, unwrapped toys during October, November and December each year, and distribute those toys as Christmas gifts to less fortunate children in the community. **The box will be available until December 15.**

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 24:	Sunday Worship – 10:00am. Coffee & Snacks in Fellowship Hall after worship! Youth Group, 4:00pm
Monday, November 25:	Mah Jongg, 6:00pm – 8:30pm Organ Society Wreath Prepping in Fellowship Hall
Tuesday, November 26:	Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm Organ Society Wreath Making in Fellowship Hall
Wednesday, November 27:	Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm Organ Society, 9:30am Feed Our Scholars (FOS), 11:00am
Thursday, November 28:	Happy Thanksgiving!
Sunday, December 1:	Choir Practice, 8:10am First Sunday of Advent – 10:00am Hanging of the Greens. Coffee & Snacks in Fellowship Hall after worship! No Youth Group. Shop Organ Society opens after church. This Sunday S. O. S. will have various Christmas items for sale.

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.

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