



First Church in Jaffrey

Weathervane

May - June

2020

“One Day at a Time”

from David Felton

In the middle of this pandemic it is almost impossible to talk about the future. Next week and next month seem far away. In my meditation for this week (April 24-25) I'm looking back at the Exodus and reminding us that God provides us manna one day at a time. Give us this day our daily bread. God promises us that God will be with us one day at a time. Take no thought for tomorrow. For the first time in our lives we have to take this quite literally. We have no idea what tomorrow will be but we must trust God today.

One of the things that has helped me the most during this time has been the opportunity to prepare these meditations. I have heard from many of you that they have been helpful to you as well. One of the things I've learned about The First Church in Jaffrey is that it is filled with amazingly talented people. The meditations are a TEAM EFFORT. They are a demonstration of how, when we work together, we can produce something far better than what any one of us could do on our own.

CAROL HESS is our producer photographer. GENE FAXON, our Minister of Music, provides music for all the videos. BETSY FEIKER and JANET GRANT have been our soloists. LISA BOSTNAR has been reading the scriptures. GEOFF FRANK has been downloading all the

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One Day At A Time (cont'd)

videos onto our web page, and JUDY LESSARD our church administrator, has been sending them out by e-mail.

Thank you to this extraordinary group of people – each bringing very different talents to the table, but each person's talents making a difference. This seems to me to be church at its best. Incidentally you can watch all seven meditations on the First Church in Jaffrey web page or you can get the most current videos in e-mail from Judy. You can go directly to the church's YouTube channel, too. The link is: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCM5KozoemuNodHkhVpEhxoA>

Speaking of the many talents of this church, John Van Ness sent me an essay he had written about the coronavirus. It's a very thoughtful piece (as you would expect from John) so I asked him if I could share it with the congregation. He agreed. So, it's included in this newsletter. It also occurs to me that others in the congregation may be inspired by John and feel moved to write something, either poetry or prose, that we could include in future newsletters. This is your invitation to share with us.

Thank you for the opportunity to be your pastor and stay safe and healthy.

God be with you.

David

**Mt. Monadnock
on a snowy
spring morning**



JOY Comes in Unexpected Places

Dealing with COVID-19 has brought many, many surprises – not all of them pleasant or kind. But unexpectedly I've been encountering significant benefits.

One has been working with David, Gene, Betsy F. and Janet in ways new to us all. The weekly videos emerging as an online means to share with members and friends have been a lot of work. At the same time, finding old photographs to illustrate whatever theme we've chosen has brought back such rich memories of times here in Jaffrey and experiences living in other parts of the world. There are instances when I haven't had images at hand, and friends have provided material to fill the gaps.

In search of a particular sort of image for an upcoming video, I ventured out to visit the Marlborough, NH farm owned by George and Mary Iselin. A small flock of sheep was eating in a pen behind the house. Navigating mud puddles and ruts, I was relieved to find the animals were far more interested in lunch than in some stranger. I took some pictures. Curiosity got the better of one black fellow; he came over to check me out. His name is BYRON. The clip in his ear discloses that Byron was born January 4, 2019. I find him irresistible. (See photo)



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Joy Comes in Unexpected Places (cont'd)

The point I'd like to share with you is that instead of doggedly pursuing a task, I found a joy in these times full of sad and depressing news. Do take a look at the small things right there in front of you, be it glowing beech leaves in the spring sun or an unexpected someone/something that comes across your path. The big picture has many moments of discouragement. But here, right in front of you and me, is life I would not have encountered without the changes and opportunities associated with this spring 2020.

One of my friends is going through a box of photographs inherited from now deceased parents. Instead of finding sorting out the pictures emotionally exhausting, she tells me that she treasures seeing familiar faces shining in their joy-filled experiences of decades ago.

What treasures are in front of you, right under your nose, to explore with fresh eyes now that you have time?

Carol B. Hess
Moderator, The First Church in Jaffrey



Saturday, April 25 was a beautiful day and Gwen Gundlach weeded the Parsonage - Parish House flower beds.

Thank you, Gwen!

Reflections on COVID-19 from John Van Ness

Although we've never experienced anything like it, a plague like the COVID-19 pandemic is hardly unique on this planet. Woolly mammoths grew and died. Dinosaurs ruled the planet, then were wiped out. Since the last ice age, we humans have covered the earth, and fought innumerable life-threatening disasters.

During our domination of the world, we humans have spun tales of our beginning, sung of calamities that nearly destroyed us, and illustrated in caves and cathedrals our struggles to survive. This massive artistic outpouring always includes non-physical forces and beings interacting with human saints and scoundrels.

Indigenous peoples of the distant past as well as the present day, whose cultures rely on the specific land on which they live, all include such stories. The ones many of us know best come from the Hebrew Bible – Noah and the flood, Moses and the Egyptian plagues. Since the Greek, Roman and, especially in the last two centuries, Western cultures have covered the world with rational science, the non-physical forces and beings have often been ignored.

Our word "spirit" describes those forces, and our word "soul" refers to that within ourselves which responds to spirit. Today it seems that our fear of COVID-19 is crowding out our awareness of spirit, to the peril of our soul.

Certainly, we need every precaution to avoid the virus and to treat those who have been afflicted with it as well as other conditions.

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Reflections on COVID-19 (cont'd)

But we also need to deepen spiritual practices – to bolster our resistance to the virus, to reduce our depression and anxiety which make us more vulnerable to the virus, to live through the disease if we get it, and to cross the threshold to the next world if we do not survive – a crossing we all will make eventually.

Spiritual practice resembles the physical practice that we do by walking, running, working out in the gym, etc. It involves silence or music, paying attention to our bodily sensations, noticing our minds' busyness, focusing on a single word or image, watching the rhythm of breath as a carrier of spirit as we draw it in through our nose, and let it out through our mouth. "Breath" and "spirit" are the same word in both Hebrew and Greek languages, suggesting that conscious breathing directly blows that primal force throughout our whole being.

May you find health and peace as you strengthen your physical and spiritual practice, and as we all look forward to a transformed world as this pandemic recedes.

*So follow the road that you hear in your
Heart
When you're standing alone and you're
filled with that spark
Don't become fooled by the voices you'll hear
That surround you and drown you and get
you to act out of fear*

From the song, *Choices*
by Tim Van Ness © 1996



OUR LABYRINTH

A labyrinth is a walking meditation, a path of prayer, a sacred space, a non-denominational, cross-cultural practice in which walking integrates the body with the mind, and the mind with the spirit. We at First Church are blessed to have one right behind the church! Have you walked it lately? If not, you might want to consider it!!

In a reflective piece he wrote several years ago John Van Ness responded to the question, "What is this?" from someone unfamiliar with a labyrinth: "This" he said, "is the walk of life." Unlike in life, you cannot get lost on a labyrinth, but the path turns on itself many times, making it difficult to know how close one is to the center. This makes a powerful metaphor for life, and other journeys—both inner and outer.

Jeff Saward, a labyrinth historian, writes: "Throughout the long history of labyrinths whenever and wherever society is going through rapid change and development, the labyrinth has blossomed. Now humanity is seeking the sure path of the labyrinth in an

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Our Labyrinth (con't'd)

uncertain and confusing world.” I am not sure when exactly, he wrote this, but if ever there was an “uncertain time,” today would be near the top of the list!

There is no “one and only way” to walk a labyrinth; there is no “right” or “wrong.” For me walking “our labyrinth” has on several occasions brought a response to the intent I set when beginning...in other words, an answer to a prayer. One time I so needed to release anger which was boiling over when I started; at the end it was gone. I was amazed! Other times I simply came away with a sense of gratitude...you just never know. So, set out. Set an intention, walk your walk, be silent, relax, allow thoughts/feelings to come and go, spend a bit of time in the center (your own and the labyrinth’s) and make your way back. You may feel an immediate sense of relief or not notice anything for a while; you may have a revelation or insight or a sense of peace; you may simply have a nice, quiet walk which may be just what was needed. Comments people have made about their labyrinth experience include:

“It connects me to that which is greater than me.”

“It opens my heart.”

“It revitalizes me to take on the rest of my life.”

“It balances my energy.”

“It gives me hope.”

Ah, all are gifts of the spirit we can always use, especially today! Visit our labyrinth and walk...and be prepared to be surprised!

Ilona Kwiecien

First Church has finger labyrinths for people who are unable to walk the outdoor one. If you would like one, please contact Ilona at 603-532-6358.



The Summer Fair Dilemma?

Greetings from Florida, where the virus is hot, but the weather is comfortable and we are healthy and safe so far.

A few weeks ago Suze Campbell started some conversations about the Fair, and we have followed up with some inquiries and discussions, and considered medical advice. We now believe it would be prudent to cancel the Fair for August 5th.

Many factors led us to recommend this action: the absence of most if not all of the Wa-Klo campers, uncertainty about the summer tourist season, the nature of contact and interaction required before and during the Fair, and the 60 plus age of most workers. The critical issue now is the lack of confident projections that would deem it safe (or legal) to hold a public event by early August.

However, we are open to considering a smaller scale event, later in August or September, if the threats and distancing requirements have abated. Maybe just a limited church and community sale outdoors, reducing the heavy expenses we typically pay for rent. The revenue

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The Summer Fair Dilemma (cont'd)

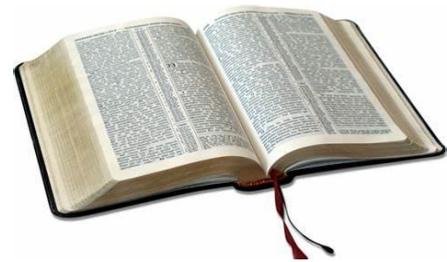
would be minimal but the opportunity to engage with others, if safe to do so, could be rewarding. Detailed planning, which would be easier than a full Fair, would not have to begin until July, and we should have a better feel for feasibility by then. Others may have ideas for fundraisers that support First Church's mission to serve its community.

These are our thoughts. The Church leadership, with input from its members and friends, should make the final decision.

Bruce & Pam Hill

your buddy needed something, you could encourage each other to call David Felton who has recruited volunteers willing to pick up grocery orders or prescriptions. Knowing that we are in this difficult time together and that we will get through it together seems very important during this period of isolation.

Almost everyone contacted liked the idea and wanted to participate. If for any reason you don't have a church phone buddy and would like one, call Bobbie Gilbert at 784-5562. May it be well with you.



COPING WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING AND COVID-19



Are you part of the First Church Telephone Buddy System?

When COVID-19 hit, it was critical that we all stay in our homes and social distance to prevent the virus's spread. At the same time, we wanted to be sure that all our church community had regular contact with another church friend. We called as many people as we could, and if an individual wanted to participate, we set up a phone buddy.

The aim was to have a person to talk to each day or however often the two of you decided to be in touch. We hoped that friendships might deepen. Also, if you or

Bible Study Correspondence Style

The Bible Study got off to a great start early this year as we read and talked while enjoying coffee in the Parish House or Parsonage. Then COVID-19 reared its ugly head.

In response to the social distancing restrictions imposed in March, the Bible Study group turned to a different approach. Pastor David selects the scripture, writes an introduction, and asks a few questions about the text which he distributes via e-mail. The Bible Study participants respond, usually by email or by calling a "scribe" to write comments down. These comments are shared with all participants which can stimulate another round of e-mail conversation. In this time of enforced isolation and even fear, it is valuable to have a way of focusing on spiritual issues and expanding our understanding of the Good News.

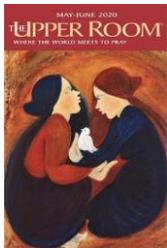
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Bible Study (cont'd)

Pastor David has focused on the Gospel according to John, his favorite Gospel. It is very different from the other three Gospels. John is painting a picture rather than relating history; thus, his text is complex and contains many layers of meaning.

This COVID-19 Bible Study is very different from the fellowship of the face-to-face sessions, but we are learning from the readings, from responding to the questions, and from reading others' responses. We are dialoging during the second and fourth weeks of the month. After the Lenten and Easter focus on the Gospel according to John, we will be following the lectionary more closely. Text, comments, and questions will be distributed during the weeks of May 11, May 25, June 8 and June 22.

If you are interested in joining, please contact Pastor David at 603-532-7979. We hope to encourage more interaction, which is hard in this "correspondence course" format. One option would be to adopt Bobbie's buddy system format.



The Upper Room

First Church receives several copies of The Upper Room daily devotional magazine that members can take home.

During the COVID-19 time, they are languishing on a table in the Parish Hall. If you would like one, please call Janet Grant at 603-532-5731 and she will mail it to you. FYI, the Upper Room is available in 35 languages and distributed in more than 100 countries. It began publication in 1935.



It's Official – Our Library Has a Name

A long, long, time ago in a galaxy.....!! Well, maybe not that long ago nor far away, (for you Star Wars fans!), but before we all began "hunkering down," we definitely started a contest to come up with a name for our "new" library.

The nominations, please. Actually, there was but one suggestion which, in our humble opinion, is a pretty good one. It comes from Anne Marie and Tom Warren, who put quite a bit of thought into it. Their proposal: **Laban's Loft.** And, not only did they come up with the name, but also have in mind a design consisting of a trillium with three inspiring words: Enlightenment, Enjoyment, Knowledge. Anne Marie, artist extraordinaire, has offered to make a sign capturing it all.

How can you beat that??? So, unless there is an outcry of opposition, we are ending the contest and will commission the sign to be installed...hopefully, not far, far into the future.

In the meantime, please do use the library... keeping a safe distance there is not a problem!

Ilona and Bobbie



BOOK NOTE

We are fortunate to have at our disposal a series of reviews written by Cassius Webb in the past which he is graciously allowing us to re-use, (with some slight editing in consideration of space!) Thank you, Cassius! This first review is on:

***Strength for the Journey: A Guide to Spiritual Practice* by Renee Miller (Moorehouse Publishing, 2011).**

To say it is appropriate for today is an understatement. It is available in the First Church Library.

This is a small book with a great deal to say, and clearly. There are many books on spirituality; on the whole, they think that spirituality is a Good Thing, and that some particular flavor of spiritual practice, or outlook on life, is especially good and useful. This is not one of those books.

In a masterful introduction, Brian C. Taylor confronts us with the question: what is the point? What are we looking for when we pick up a book on spiritual practice? He challenges us to confront the fact that the longing in us is a longing for relationship—with God, surely, but also with others, the world around us, and with ourselves. Spiritual practice is for fostering those relationships, doing something in particular rather than just hoping vaguely that we will become more spiritual in time. When we have the time, in fact.

The rest of the book is a series of chapters on various kinds of spiritual practice (introduced by evocative photographs). Some of these practices you will expect, some may surprise. “Centering Prayer” and “Discursive Meditation,” even “Praying with Beads” are among the Usual Suspects; but “Hospitality”? “Technology”? “Walking”? Do not think this is some New Age-y, chaotic burbling of vague intentions. It is highly organized; of course, how to use it is up to you. The chapters are grouped in five sections: Meditative Practice, Ministry Practice, Media Practice, Mind Practice, and Movement Practice. Each section has four chapters, each describing a specific practice, and then suggesting what kinds of people might find it naturally appealing or challenging. It is written in an easy, informal style with a persistent vein of pastoral concern for the reader as one whose journey is seen as precious and unique.

This book was handed to me by its author, the coordinator of a conference for retired clergy I was attending. She is an Episcopal priest who has been a bishop’s assistant in two dioceses, an entrepreneur with several small businesses, and who is currently learning to drive an eighteen-wheeler. It is perhaps to be expected that this little book on what is often seen as a subject for the cloistered, in mind if not in body, should breathe adventure and good humor into the quest of our lives.

Cassius Webb

First Church's Financial Mission during COVID-19

First Church has three channels for financial outreach: the 5 for 5 Special Offerings under the UCC mission umbrella; money raised by the Summer Fair that is earmarked for scholarships and local social service agencies; and funds in the operating budget for other worthy causes.

This year things are different, largely due to COVID-19. By the Governor's order, all churches and social service organizations are closed due to social distancing rules; most, including First Church, are relying on internet-based technology to provide services and keep the church community functioning. As with so many virus-related events and programs, we are in a "wait and see" mode.

This is frustrating, but Bishop Oscar Romero's words from 1980 when his charitable works in South America were in peril are helpful to consider today.

"We cannot do everything but there is a sense of liberation in realizing that awareness enables us to do something...it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest. We are workers, not master builders: ministers not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own." (excerpt from his poem "A Future Not Our Own")

The Benevolence Circle met on April 26, and here are our beginning steps:

- ▶ We have committed \$1,000 to two scholarship for Conant High School graduates.
- ▶ We are contacting organizations that First Church has supported in the past to determine their needs and viability. A donation to the Food Pantry might be important now, since they have been overwhelmed with requests. If members or friends have any suggestions, they should contact Marcia Breckenridge at 603-899-6973.

Special Offerings

Thanks to all who contributed to the **One Great Hour of Sharing**, which normally would have been collected at a pre-Easter worship service, but was done via e-blast and mail. We will be sending \$710, close to the same amount collected last year. Congratulations to the First Church community!

Strengthen the Church: this special offering is usually received on Pentecost Sunday, which is May 31, 2020. It supports new UCC ministries and practices that meet the emerging needs of local communities. We will send an e-blast in mid-May; you can also check it out on the UCC website.

Marcia Breckenridge, Chair Benevolence Circle



A LOOK at the BUDGET

Update from the Trustees

Thank you for continuing to pay your pledge to First Church through monthly or weekly checks (if you have not already prepaid). Such payments are greatly appreciated, since our operating expenses – salaries, utilities, some supplies – remain roughly the same even though we cannot hold worship services or events under the COVID-19 restrictions..

Our 2020 budget is \$179,580, or about \$15,000 a month. The trustees are monitoring expenses closely, while drawing the usual monthly income permitted from our endowment. Like everyone else, we're keeping an eye on the stock market, on projections re reopening the economy and our communities, and hoping for the best.

Stay Safe! *Ken Campbell, Chair of Trustees*



Thank you to our many contributors for the May-June Weathervane! We couldn't do it without you!

Mary Jo Marvin, Geoff Frank, Bobbie Gilbert, Ilona Kwiecien, Pam & Bruce Hill, David Felton, Carol Hess, Ken Campbell, Janet Grant, Cassius Webb, John VanNess and Marcia Breckenridge