

April 2024

The Spire's Reflection

Dear Friends,

In just seven more weeks I will be on sabbatical from May 20 returning on Sunday, September 8. I can hardly believe that when I come back in the fall we will be celebrating six years of shared ministry!

*“Sabbath is a gift from God, because rest is as important as work for the health of all of creation” (A Sure Foundation, UCC). We hear in the creation story that the seventh day was consecrated as a day of rest, and we are called to take Sabbath. Jesus would often leave his followers to spend time alone to reflect and pray. As described in *A Sure Foundation*, “a sabbatical is a significant time of rest, renewal and refreshment. For pastors, the sabbatical is time to nourish their relationship with God, recommit to their call, and provide renewed vision and focus for ministry. A sabbatical is not a vacation, but it does provide time away from the daily work of ministry. Sabbatical leave may include study or a project, but its first goal is reconnecting with one’s sense of vocation through rest, reflection, and prayer.”*

During my sabbatical time I will be focusing on spiritual practices. In June, Tracy and I will be traveling out to Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota to volunteer for a week. This reservation is among the largest in the U.S. While there we will be immersed in the Oglala Lakota people’s culture while working on various projects which aim to improve the living conditions for families on the reservation. (To learn more about Pine Ridge visit re-member.org/volunteering). I am excited to learn about the indigenous spiritual practices while being disconnected and fully present.

Then in July my spiritual practice quest continues with a week long hike on the Appalachian Trail. Neither Tracy or I have backpacked over night so this will be a great experience! I am looking forward to being in nature and challenging myself in a new way.

One of my ongoing spiritual practices has been running. This practice will continue through my sabbatical time with an opportunity to run the famous Falmouth Road Race in August! The Falmouth Road Race is a bucket list race. Like most road races it is held on Sunday so I don't often have the opportunity to participate. This summer both Tracy and I will be running the race while raising funds for Habitat of Humanity, Cape Cod (if you would like to donate visit bit.ly/TinaHabitat or bit.ly/TracyHabitat).

Finally, through the entire time I hope to write a draft of a book on the Spiritual Practice of Running. The writing itself will be a spiritual practice for me during this time away and the dedicated time to reflect on why I keep running and what it does for me spiritually will be fun to discover.

While I am away you will be in great hands. Rev. Jennie Valentine and Rev. Pam Wannie will be leading worship and providing pastoral care. I will have an out of office message up on both my email and office phone and I will not be taking any calls or texts during the sabbatical. All needs should be directed to the office where Holly can

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assist you and connect you with either Rev. Jennie or Rev. Pam.

Thank you for supporting this sabbatical time. May we all dive deep into spiritual practices this summer and be renewed in the Spirit.

With gratitude,

Rev. Tina



When Real Life Meets Bible Study by Diane Ranney

It is rare that “Real Life” intersects so completely with Bible Study. It is rare that it intersects in the same week! Most times, for me, Bible Study is more reflective, bringing me to examine what it is that the writers of the Bible had in common with **my** life, what they may have been thinking when they wrote about “signs and portents”, using imagery that at best can be barely deciphered in today’s language; at worst, leaves me puzzling and thinking of taking up the study of Greek.

However, the first week of March, our Lenten study took us to a passage about the Israelites complaining (a common theme and one that gave me pause, as I examined my own whining that week). In the passage from Numbers (21: 4-9) the Israelites who had followed Moses into the Wilderness had no food, no water, and were “impatient” with Moses and God about their journey. When they complain, God sends poisonous serpents among them that make them sick (even die). At this point, I was wondering just where this was going, but kept reading and saw that (as always) God had a plan. When the people repented of their sins (read whining!) God then told Moses to build a bronze serpent and put it on a pole so that the people could look upon it and be cured. It seems an odd way to get someone’s attention I thought but noted it and went to Bible Study.

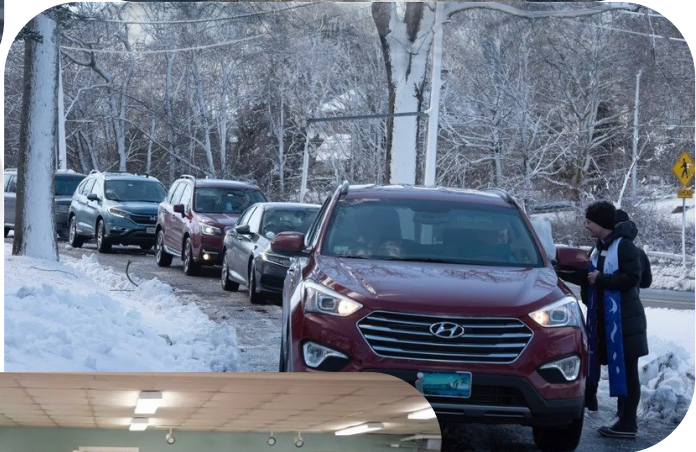
We had our usual small but ready to talk group. The question Rev. Tina posed was: “Why would God ask Moses to do this?” The best answer (from Chris and Dave) seemed to be “to act as a distraction”. Almost everyone agreed that this made sense—when one perceives an imagined injustice or hurt, or just plain “blame it on someone else syndrome”, a distraction can give one pause. I thought (rather sarcastically trying to put myself in the mind of the Israelite) sure—I’m hungry and thirsty and the only thing I can eat is that tasteless bread that falls from the sky every night, no one is paying attention to my needs, God has deserted me—but oh, look, a bronze serpent! Hmmm—I wonder what that does and I (as the Israelite) realize that I am not sick anymore or dead as were those who had faced the serpents before. It sure took the attention away from complaining! (And where is *this endless dialogue going, you ask?*)
This is where Real Life and Bible Study meet!

That week, we had our First Church Friday Fun Night. Chris and I had planned to go. That was before I had a very rough week between hearing about 3 friends dying and my own health issues with a leg that didn’t want to work and was painning me something fierce. I complained to him that I wasn’t sure about going as I was too tired, my leg hurt, and I was lousy at Trivia anyway. He looked at me and said “*Distraction. Bronze serpent, Let’s go*” *It took me a minute to recognize the Bible Study over which we had labored the previous day, but then I laughed. Of course, I was truly the Israelite in the Wilderness—complaining and not trusting that God would take care of me. We talked about it on the way to church and I was grateful that we had listened and questioned that passage and that yes, I was distracted. My leg still hurt, but I brought a pillow upon which to sit, the team that I joined was fun and raucous and we almost won. And, I learned a valuable lesson about Bible Study—no matter how obscure, how difficult to decipher or how out of touch with today’s life it may seem, God is STILL speaking to us through the words of the Bible. So, the next time someone asks me “Why do you bother studying that stuff?”, I’m going to respond “Bronze serpent, Moses, Wilderness” – Let me explain!*

Soup Lunch: Year 9 in the Books!

Congratulations First Church on another great soup lunch season! Over 1,200 cups of soup were served by committed and loving volunteers. Once again this year, led by Chris Ranney, we offered drive thru and indoor dining. People who came through the drive thru loved being able to take a cup to a friend or neighbor who was unable to get out while those who dined indoors enjoyed the great company and the wonderful smiling faces from our Joyful Noise Preschool!

Thank you to Chris for coordinating everything and to everyone who made soup, served, baked cookies and stood outside! You are truly ***Caring People Sharing God's Love!***



First Friday Fun Night Success

During the February Council meeting, the members of Council committed to holding special fundraising events and doing other fundraising to raise an additional \$20,000 for this year's annual budget. One of the ideas which came out of this initiative was the "First Friday Fun Night". Each month on the first Friday of the month, a different person will host a themed gathering at church. Everyone is invited to come, bring a favorite finger food and donate to the church what you would have spent on a dinner out.

On March 8, Rev. Tina hosted our very first "First Friday Fun Night". The theme of the night was Trivia. Five teams competed through two rounds. After the final question there was a two way tie for first place! The "Call us Doctor" and "Wash Ashores" were all tied up. The kids at the gathering ran to the office with Rev. Tina to think up another final question. After three more tough questions and both teams answering the same (correct or incorrect) the game was concluded with a TIE!

The evening was so much fun and together we raised \$450! Be sure to catch the next "First Friday Fun Night" on April 5. Betsy Pottey will be leading Family Feud. Which "family" (you can create your own family with friends) will win?...And will we raise more than \$450????



Lenten Faith for All Ages

On an early March Sunday evening we gathered in the Gates Room and the newly renovated church school classroom upstairs for an exploration of our Lenten theme using the labyrinth as a guide. We looked at how we use the labyrinth as a spiritual practice in ways large and small, and how it helps us Rise Up and Get Up 2 Something Good. We shared a delicious meal coordinated by Betsy Pottey (including her famous mac and cheese!) and the Faith Formation Ministries team, and then we moved through activities that grounded us in preparation for getting up to some good things. We created beautiful hot air balloons with Karen Landry. We built the communal hot air balloon puzzle. We worked together to begin coloring the lovely hot air balloon mandala created by Janet Lemee. And then we created finger and hand labyrinths and walked the full size labyrinth in the classroom. Together we were up 2 creating community and connecting to God. Thanks to everyone who attended and helped to make the evening a success!



Blessed to Be a Blessing

Our classroom is newly renovated and beautiful thanks to Tracy Morin and Rev. Tina.

Every Sunday, the church school meets at 9am with me and a church school assistant. Each week we gather and pray, and play with the scripture through drama, music, art, reading, conversation, and more. This season we have been focusing on spiritual practices that help us connect to God. We practiced listening with instruments and unexpectedly identifying voices of people we knew. Did you know that embracing simplicity is a spiritual practice? It's great to be able to identify what we want vs. what we need. We looked at when unplugging is a spiritual practice and how to use our devices as a spiritual practice.

While learning is the core of our faith formation program for kids, one of the favorite parts of church school comes at the end of every class. One day our children organically began lining up at the door, and I offered a blessing over each one as they departed the classroom. Since then, we bless each child and adult in the classroom individually each time we finish our lesson. It wasn't a coordinated effort. It isn't a forced practice. It is a time of connection and care that offers a reminder of our belovedness. Our hearts join, eyes gaze, and the love of God is shared. Thanks be to God for the warmth of that encounter that continues each week!

-Rev. Jennie



Joyful Noise Preschool

The children at Joyful Noise have been very busy playing and learning. We also had a visit from the very tricky leprechaun. The kids made a leprechaun trap to see if they could trap them. No luck this year!!

We also hosted a day to have a special friend visit our classroom. We had so much fun showing them around our room and they were able to stay for circle time. The kids sang some special songs. We also had a visit from the Easter Bunny and he surprised us with an Easter egg hunt.





5 for 5

Do you know what it means to be a 5 for 5 church?

In the United Church of Christ (our denomination) we have four special offerings every year. We as members of the church donate to these offerings throughout the year which support the United Church of Christ's national ministries. The four offerings are: One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS), Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need (NIN), and The Christmas Fund. Additionally there is Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) which we as a community designate funds for in our budget.

Last month we did the first of the 5 for 5, OGHS and together gave \$275. This Lenten Offering supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ with-in Love of Neighbor.





Blessings of the Pandemic

In many ways it feels like yesterday we were going through the pandemic and in other ways it feels like a lifetime ago. What remains true is that blessings did come out of that time.

Our beloved Bill and Judith Page passed away last fall. Judith first and then Bill just ten weeks after. Their family decided to hold off on Bill's memorial service until this March, arranging for the gathering to be on his birthday (March 16). As the date grew closer I began coordinating with Bill's family and with our music director, Roy to create a meaningful service. When speaking to Roy I mentioned remembering during the pandemic a song Roy had recorded with the choir where Bill had a little solo. Roy immediately knew which song I was speaking about, *I'll Fly Away*. *To my surprise Roy said I have it right here. Not only did Roy recall the song right away and had access to the recording but it also was the song the family wished to sing at his service! – A true God Moment!*

I mentioned to Bill's family about the idea Roy and I had to play the video and invite the congregation to sing along. They were beyond excited at the possibility. The day of the service came and the video was played. The Page's daughter Alison, who not only lost both her parents in the fall but also her husband, was moved from tears to a smile while her father Bill with a smile on his face as he sang, "Just a few more weary days and then, I'll fly away, to a land where joys shall never end, I'll fly away."

All that work by the online choir to record the songs individually, all the work by Roy to put the piece together once again brought joy and comfort to a grieving family and community. What a blessing indeed.

Easter Fun



STAY INFORMED



4 ways to keep up with all the First Church Happenings

1 **Friday Weekly email**

sent to your inbox every week!

3 **Council & Committee Minutes**

accessible to all church members at www.bit.ly/committeeminutes

2 **411 Webpage**

visit www.firstchurchsandwich.org/411

4 **Worship Service Announcements**

every Sunday during worship, hear and see what is happening

www.firstchurchsandwich.org

First Church Sandwich,
UCC
PO Box 810
Sandwich, MA 02563