

**United Church of Christ, First Congregational
Norwich, New York
February 21, 2021**

A TIME OF GATHERING AS WE PREPARE TO WORSHIP GOD

PRELUDE Meditation on "He Leadeth Me"
Bob Oehme, organ

Lani Smith
Tune by William B. Bradbury

WELCOME (Pastor John)

ANNOUNCEMENTS (Linda Oehme)

PRAYER OF THE DAY (Meena Conant)

Loving God,
you have made covenant with us
and with every living creature.
We give thanks for the sign of the rainbow,
for it reminds you and us of your promise:
that the flood of destruction will not be the last word.
We thank you, too, for the waters of baptism,
the sign that we are raised as children of the covenant;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
And we thank you for the sign of the dove,
the promise of your Holy Spirit.
Hovering over the dawn of creation,
descending upon your beloved Son,
your Spirit also
hovers over
and descends upon us.
With the whole creation,
we give you all glory and honor.
In your triune name we pray. **Amen.**

CALL TO WORSHIP (Gary Gray)

People of the covenant:
God does not remember us according to our sins and transgressions.
God remembers us according to God's own steadfast love!
The God of our salvation teaches us right paths and leads us in truth.
**All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness;
we put our trust in God.**

HYMN In the Midst of New Dimensions #391

CHILDREN'S TIME (Linda Oehme)
The Lord's Prayer

CONGREGATIONAL GREETING OF PEACE

ONE: May the peace of Christ be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD

SCRIPTURE (Meena Conant)

Genesis 9:8-17

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹"As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹²God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you

and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." ¹⁷ God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

SCRIPTURE (Gary Gray)

1 Peter 3:18-22

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. ²¹ And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

ANTHEM 'Twas In The Moon of Wintertime
Hand Bells

by William Ringham

Tune: UNE JEUNE PUCELLE

SCRIPTURE (Gary Gray)

Mark 1:9-15

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

SERMON (Pastor John)

INTERLUDE *Two Anthems: No. 1*
Bob Oehme, organ

Alexandre Guilmant

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION (Pastor John)

Steadfast God,
thank you for sheltering us in the storms of life.
Thank you for ministering to us through angels
seen and unseen
in times that test us.

Thank you for claiming us as a people beloved forever.
Because of your great love and care for us,
we trust you in our brightest joys and deepest needs.

We rejoice when dark clouds of trouble are overtaken
by the light of your presence and new possibilities,
when things settle down after a time of tossing about,
when the great storm is over,
and when the promise of resurrection life takes hold in us
with sure and certain hope.

Hear our prayers, we ask, for the deep needs of the world.
In places of violence and warfare,
give us the courage to lay down our weapons of death
and promote life and well-being instead.
In places of drought and fire,
bring rains that make the earth colorful and verdant again.
In places where the waters overtake their boundaries,
allow the overflowing chaos to recede.

Loving God,
in life and in death, we belong to you.
So in the midst of life, we entrust ourselves to your care.
We are bold to ask for help
when we are confused, lost, or afraid.
We are eager to ask for healing for our bodies and minds,
whether wounded, ill, or recovering.
And we are unceasing in our prayers for those we love
who are far from us physically, emotionally, or spiritually.
In the midst of death and grief,
even though we are weary,
we return again and again, praying for comfort,
for an easing of the pain that comes from loss,
and for the light of your presence to pierce
the present darkness.

As the heavens were torn open at Jesus' baptism,
and the curtain in the temple was torn
at his crucifixion,
so now tear open anything that divides us from you
or hides your presence in our lives or in the church.

We desire to hear your voice of love,
to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,
and to see you clearly.
Lead us to serve others faithfully as disciples of Jesus Christ,
in whose name we pray. **Amen.**

BLESSING (Pastor John)

May the God of covenant faithfulness enfold you;
the beloved Son encourage you;
and the Holy Spirit descend upon you in blessing;
this day and forever.

POSTLUDE *March*
Bob Oehme, organ

G. F. Handel
Arranged by George Blake

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