



Notes from the Pastor

The prophets of the Old Testament set the stage for how religion speaks to the world. Prophets are what King Ahab called Elijah “Troublers of a Nation.” They are not soothsayers or fortune tellers. They are not comforters in times of individual distress. Their words are intended for a national audience and their subject is the political will of leaders, the organization of society, the ways in which we gather to create just or unjust economies. They are about how we practice religion for the sake of the world. They have been given the job to articulate God’s best hope for Israel and the people of Judah. They are not members of the optimists’ club, and yet they are the deepest purveyors of hope in scripture.

In the call stories of the prophets are great metaphors of burning coals dropped in their tongues, and God’s charge to “eat the scroll.” When they speak in the temple, they are taken over by the presence of the one who calls all of us to attend with burning urgency to the marginal and the hopeless and the suffering of this sad and beautiful world. Sometimes it can be very painful to be a prophet, because it is painful to speak again and again the words no one wants to hear. The stories of Jonah and Elijah are just two examples of the frustration of the biblical prophets.

In this time and in this place in 2020 America is a time to turn over the

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pages and pay attention to the prophets of the Hebrew bible.

One of the things I have learned from them is how evil functions to hide us from our responsibility to this world. We love villains. We love being able to blame some dastardly person for what is wrong. In small communities we fixate on personalities. In nations we blame politicians. Prophets remind us that we make the world we live in – all of us. We are a part of a system and we cannot leave it. “No man (sic) is an island” said John Donne. As much as some of us want to blame Donald Trump for all that is evil in the world we are culpable as well. I can imagine Jeremiah taking him on and Elijah stalking him as he walked up to that balcony, but I can also imagine them turning to us and saying, as John the Baptist does in Luke’s Gospel, “You brood of vipers.”

The prophetic voice speaks from urgency – speaks with a sense of great need and accountability. Trying to call up that urgency and compassion for this moment in history is hard. It’s hard not to be snarky about Donald Trump and his crowd. It’s hard not to feel a “gotcha” moment. But that will not save us. It will only make us snarky and bitter and pessimistic.

I'm not sure that accountability belies compassion or the other way around. Donald Trump is a human being and one of us. The evil he has spawned is reflective of who we are. It is as much about us as it has been about him. We are interconnected...all humans. No, he has not shown one bit of understanding about his own human connection. He is a product of an abusive and racist father, of a society that aided and abetted his narcissism, and of an economic order that gave him carte blanche to lie and con and clown his way to a gold plated toilet. But to wish him ill is to become him. He is not the source of evil. He is its mirror. That’s what prophets do. They hold up the kings and people who mirror us. They hold them up for us to see ourselves. They do this so we might be transformed. So we might see how we have raised up leaders like him.

What we see in the mirror is a nation built on racism, built on genocide, built on greed and conquest. Yet all the while there is within us a great yearning to be something else. How do we find our way so that we might not be reduced to the worst of our history. The prophets would tell us to listen to the pain our past has wrought and mourn deeply. Jeremiah would tell us to call forth the women mourners, those who know what that pain means and he would tell us to let their cries fall over us and to listen.

I think that if we could bring ourselves to do that we might discover something fragile and touching and hopeful about ourselves. Something to unite us in the sinews of our being.

Knit us, O God, again, as in the womb. Re-weave our precious selves into a new whole, a new world, one made over with more colors this time.

“A new world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”

Arundhati Roy

-Rev. Anne Hoffmann

Stewardship

FEELING GOOD ABOUT GIVING

When you are coping with *scarcity*, giving can be particularly painful. When, rich or poor, you are blessed with a sense of abundance, giving can be much easier, unless you've bought the line that 'too much is never enough' – which brings back the pain.

The spiritual dimension of giving suggests that the amount I have and the amount I give is secondary to the connection I feel for the one receiving my gift. Most grandparents *love* to give to their grandchildren – it gives them visceral pleasure. Land-trust donors go to sleep happy that their gift helps preserve precious acres of land in perpetuity. Cancer survivors regularly fund the hospitals whose care provided their survival.

At our church all sorts of love bring us together as a worshiping community. A variety of pleasures come from watching and helping our church succeed and thrive. It goes deeper. The gifts we give make it possible for us to know and interact with each other, people sharing a passion to heal the world and care for each other. And for our great-grandkids.

That is, giving to First Congregational serves two purposes. One is to stay alive, pay our bills, and thrive during these strange, difficult times. Our pledges and offerings are vitally important to our well-being. The other kind of giving makes us stronger for the long run. In coming weeks we'll explore some long-term ways to support ourselves through wills, trusts, and various financial tools. And we'll share some personal stories about why we care enough to give to this congregation we love so much.



Advice For Burned Out Victims

Jill Richardson, a Tubbs fire survivor, posted the following on the Facebook group "Sonoma County Firestorm Update." I shared it with Kathy Millon who walked closely with Earl and Dot through their rebuilding story, and she found it to be a good list. Kathy reminds us that everything doesn't need to be done immediately. She tells us to breathe and to get someone to go with you to the adjuster meetings. People will want to move quickly and that may not be to your benefit.

Jill Richardson writes:

ADVICE FOR BURNED OUT VICTIMS

I lost all in Tubbs. Wanted to share what I learned.
You may be now learning your home is gone. What do you do to survive? Accept you are experiencing trauma. You will have symptoms of PTSD. Look them up. Be kind to yourself. I found being organized was essential to keeping myself sane.
Get to work.

*Request a complete copy of insurance policy when you file your claim, not just a coverage breakdown. You will need it, United Policy Holders organization will help if needed.

*Get an email address just for fire related communications.

**Get a notebook and make lists of what needs to be done, then make notes of contact info, and what your communications were. Your memory will not suffice right now.*

*Get at least 2 big accordion files, one for fire related paper, the other for personal papers that will start accumulating. If you have a family you may want to get one for each kid. You will probably be moving around a lot in the short term, these files helped me greatly.

*Keep receipts for everything, insurance covers living expenses while displaced. Believe me, they add up.

*Get a post office box.

*Turn off your utilities

*Start looking for a place to live.

Next week there will be a new set of challenges and tasks, at least you will now have the tools to get it done while keeping your stress levels a little bit lower.

I hope this helps.

P.S. it's NOT just stuff, it's YOUR stuff.

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People want to make you feel better. But go ahead, be sad or mad about losing your stuff.

Hang in there, know you are not alone.

None of us is alone, not really. We human beings have a great capacity for resilience and that begins with sharing our feelings and experiences. Whoever Jill Richardson is, Thank you!

She has shared from her experience a window into the daunting and difficult work that fire survivors must accomplish in the next months. Lillian Rhinehart has this list and is surrounded by your care and support. MAKE LOVE VISIBLE!

-Anne

In worship a few weeks ago Jean Davis offered these words of gratitude and remembrance:

I have a shadow of a memory.....I believe I was 1962 and during the closing moments of our Denomination's national meeting, the President of the UCC, Robert Moss, brought forth his gift, the offering of a Statement of Faith as a pronouncement for the newly formed United Church of Christ. I am told that the words were read with a growing intensity as the hundreds of delegates immersed themselves in the depth of the proclamation and vision. With one voice they were declaring that God Calls the worlds into Being and sets Before us the Ways of Life and Death, ...and gives us the mandate to Choose Life! I believe it was as if the cover was pulled away from a devout heaviness of thought and spirit nurtured by centuries of scholars and followed by faithful laity....and the Statement of Faith appeared, and in every way said "Let There be Light"!



Thank you Jean for memory and thanksgiving!

Council Highlights

September 2020

Note: Meetings take place via Zoom

September

- **New Website!** The Council appreciated the Herculean work of Judy Adams, and contributors, reviewers, and editor. The host is Ministry Designs. Check it out at <https://www.fccsr.org/>
- **PPP Loan forgiveness:** Treasurer **Mark Adams**, Financial Secretary **Rebecca Allington**, and Moderator **Virginia Greenwald** are working with our accountant to complete the application process for forgiveness of the Federal Paycheck Protection Program loan we received last spring, allowing us to continue to pay the staff for eight weeks.
- The **Stewardship theme** is: “**Making God’s Love Visible,**” based on 1 John 4:7— “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” The theme will be introduced on Sunday, October 25. **Volunteers are needed** to speak at a service or write for a Mail Chimp on “How the church is helping me make God’s love visible.”
- The **Outreach Team** focus is on the upcoming election, with the creation of handmade signs for our parking lot. COVID has increased our visibility in the neighborhood!
- **Fundraising:** **Evelyn Smith** announced that the committee (with **Judy Cramer and Kathy Beltz**) is planning two fundraisers. One is a Dine & Donate event, and the other is a COVID-friendly Pick-a-Party. More information is forthcoming.
- Next **Council meeting** is Friday, October 16, at 11:00, via Zoom. If you would like to attend, contact Moderator Virginia Greenwald at dvgreenw@comcast.net

New Members to Join October 25!

Michael and Tiffany Macias have just recently returned to their native California from South Carolina. On their way back they discovered the First Congregational Church online and have been attending Zoom services. Michael is a student at Starr King School for Ministry. He's planning to go into ministry and eventually be ordained in the United Church of Christ.



Tiffany is a dancer. She teaches at The Performing Arts Academy in Mill Valley. Her students are as young as 5 and as old as 18. Michael has spent his work life in the non-profit world. He currently works on behalf of victims of violent crime through a trauma center in Stockton. He's particularly interested in blending different cultural and indigenous healing processes for trauma victims.

Welcome them. Send them a card. Send them an email.

Michael and Tiffany Macias

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Whose done it?

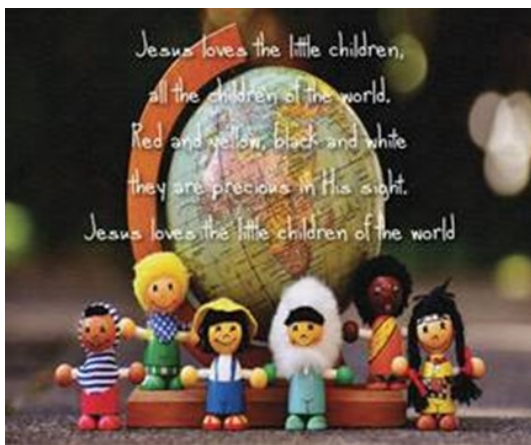


Will you do it?

Have you put the church in your will? If every member who had died over the last 30 years had left 500 dollars to the church we would have over 250,000 dollars in an endowment. That would be enough to generate income that could offset much of our current rental income loss, or support the salary of a part time youth associate, or fund a full time pastor. Why don't you consider helping us to make love visible well into the 21st century? Do it and we'll put your picture here to say thank you!

Making Gods Love More Visible

Guess What? Our new church website is now up and running! You can check it out for yourself at fccsr.org.



Just For Families

There's now a new feature on our website. During the pandemic we will use a designated space to regularly share a Family Faith Activity. The activity will be simple and can be used with various ages of children. The first one is called "We Stick Together." Just click on the link and you can check it out. Please let us know what you think. We'll let you know whenever we've added a new one, too. BTW a special thanks to Maureen Taber who is reviewing these activities!

Gifts to Our Younger Church Family Members

Do we love and miss seeing our children and teens during this pandemic? Absolutely! Especially missed are their dear smiles, friendly hugs and touching or humorous insights during Children's Time. To help remind them of our congregation's care, we're delivering small gifts to them in the coming days.



October Birthdays

10/9 Jeff Wilson

10/20 Jonathan Kendall

10/10 David Lamb

10/24 Gretchen Van Tassel

10/13 Judy Cramer

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