



June 16, 2024

*Morning Worship and Children's Programs at 10:00*

***United Church of Strafford***

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***Our Church Covenant***

*We gather together with freedom of conscience  
in a community of love and inquiry.  
All are welcome, without exception.*

*We practice Christianity with faith and compassion.  
We covenant with one another to embody the love of Christ,  
to nurture contemplation and action,  
and to offer our gifts, talents and energies as we are able.*

***United Church of Strafford, Vermont***

June 16, 2024

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

*MH=Methodist Hymnal; PH=Pilgrim Hymnal*

“From Moses to Jesus, the Bible tells us that those who fought for justice—those who spoke truth to power, those who refused to accept that injustice and inequality had to exist and that there was no better way—always found themselves hated, hounded, and heaped upon with false accusations simply because they believed in the necessity of speaking and working for the cause of righteousness and building a more just community. This lack of majority support is why the just must live by faith and must know exactly who we are.” *William J. Barber II, Co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign, from Forward Together: A Moral Message for the Nation*

**Gathering Music**

Annemieke McLane

**Silent Prayer of Invocation**

Pastor Tom Kinder

**Prelude** Arietta Opus 12 No. 1 E. Grieg

**Blessing and Lighting the Candles**

**Leader:** In Christ was life, and the life was the light of the world.

**People:** **The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness does not overcome it.**

**Leader:** Let us pray for peace and the things that make for peace  
as we light the peace candle.

**Introit** “For the Love” C. Lockwood-Pitkin

**Welcome and Announcements**

**Call to Worship**

**Responsive Reading** *from Psalm 92* Debby Richie

**Leader:** It is good to give thanks to God,  
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;

**People:** **To declare your steadfast love in the morning,  
and your faithfulness by night,**

**Leader:** To the music of the lute and the harp,  
to the melody of the lyre.

**People:** **For you, O God, have made us glad by your work;  
at the works of your hands we sing for joy.**

**Leader:** The righteous flourish like the palm tree,  
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

**People:** **They are planted in the house of God;  
they flourish in your courts, O God.**

**Leader:** In old age they still produce fruit;  
they are always green and full of sap,

**People:** **Showing that you are upright;  
you are our rock,  
and there is no unrighteousness in you.**

**\*Hymn** How Lovely Is Your Dwelling *hymn folder*

**Unison Reading of Our Open and Affirming Covenant**

**Anthem** “Still There Is Love” E. N. Chase/M. A. Amidon,  
arr. Peter Amidon

**Scripture** Ezekiel 17:22-24; Mark 4:26-32

**Sermon** The Smallest of Seeds: Making High the Low Tree

**\*Hymn** The Spirit’s Realm Is Like a Seed *hymn folder*

*page two*

**Sharing of Joys, Concerns, Prayer Requests and Reflections**

*Reflection Questions:* Can you think of small seeds that grew into great and good trees? Can you think of times when the humblest of loving actions produced surprisingly large results? Can you think of times when the meek or weak overcame far greater forces and changed a community or society for the better?

**Time of Prayer**

**Call to Offering**

**\*Hymn** PH #460 We Plow the Fields and Scatter

**\*Benediction**

**Silent Prayer** *We invite you to end the service in a spirit of prayer.*

**Postlude** “Unser Vater” Arvo Pärt

*\* Those who are comfortably able may stand.*

***Please stay for refreshments and neighborliness in the Parish Hall.***

***We are an Open and Affirming Congregation.***

***Whoever you are, wherever you are on life’s journey,  
you are welcome here!***

**Past sermons** are available on the back table.

**Video recorded services, sermon texts and bulletins**  
are available on our website [unitedchurchofstrafford.com](http://unitedchurchofstrafford.com).

See us on **Facebook** at United Church of Strafford

Sign up for **weekly emails** about upcoming worship and other news  
at [unitedchurchofstrafford@gmail.com](mailto:unitedchurchofstrafford@gmail.com)

**Pastoral Care: Pastor Tom Kinder is available and eager** to talk with you. Please speak with him after worship to set up a time, or email [rev.thomas.cary.kinder@gmail.com](mailto:rev.thomas.cary.kinder@gmail.com) or call him at 333-9967.

*page three*

### **Open and Affirming Celebration and Seeking Spirit Sunday July 14<sup>th</sup>**

We will have three big events on Sunday, July 14<sup>th</sup>. We will **celebrate our standing** in the national church as a certified Open and Affirming Congregation during the service and refreshments (a Susan Hodges rainbow cake!). The 14<sup>th</sup> is also **our next Seeking Spirit Sunday**. It will feature guest speaker Wendy Teller-Elsberg whose talk is entitled, “The Need to Be Known as Ourselves: How parenting a non-binary child taught me we all have a gender identity.” Wendy will help us reflect on gender and misgendering. Then after celebratory refreshments we will have the third event of the 14<sup>th</sup>: **an important circle conversation** for the whole congregation about the future world we foresee and the role of the church within it. See the next announcement for more details.

**Important Conversation on July 14<sup>th</sup> after Refreshments** The Church Council invites you to a conversation on July 14<sup>th</sup> about the world we foresee 25 years from now and the role of the church within it. The Council has been discussing launching a planning process, and this conversation will allow the congregation to participate in the **pre-planning** discussion. Our goals are to get a sense of the importance of planning at this time, and the scope of planning we may need. We will ask four questions: 1. Given the way things are going today, what do you think our society and world will look like in 25 years socially, environmentally, economically, culturally, politically or any other way? 2. What kind of support will the people of that time need, either of a kind that a church traditionally has offered or support that goes beyond past practices? 3. If there is a spiritual community in Strafford serving the people of that time, what would that spiritual community ideally be and do? 4. Churches, like most institutions, go through life cycles of rising anew, reaching a plateau and then descending. Different kinds of planning are appropriate at each stage. Where would you say we are in our lifecycle now? The meeting will end at or before 1:30 PM. Please speak with Tom if you have questions.

*page four*

### **Election 2024: What Is at Stake? A Talk on Constitutional Democracy and the Rule of Law Here on Monday, June 24<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM**

The policy positions of the two principal presidential candidates, and more broadly, the two principal political parties, span a wide variety of issues, foreign and domestic.

As the November election approaches, we will hear competing positions on issues such as social equity, the economy, social security, tax policy, climate and the environment, immigration, women’s reproductive rights, gender identity, and other LGBTQ+ matters and foreign policy, among others.

Cutting across all these specific topics, however, are larger themes conjuring two different visions of what it means to live in a “constitutional democracy” respecting the “rule of law.”

Presidents wield great power and influence, to be sure. Yet that power and influence is divided and checked at the federal level by the Senate, the House of Representatives, and the Supreme Court. It is also shared in our federal system with the powers allocated to state and local governments, and to lower state and federal courts.

The two presidential candidates, and their respective parties, are animated by quite different notions concerning the proper distribution of powers among the various institutions that comprise our constitutional democracy. They also embrace differing views of what it means to live in a society that respects the rule of law. It is no exaggeration to characterize the contrasts as embracing starkly different visions of the fundamental character of the nation.

**Rod Smolla, President of the Vermont Law and Graduate School** and a lifelong constitutional law scholar, teacher, and litigator, will seek to articulate, objectively and fairly, these contrasting visions, and then lead an open discussion with attendees on the issues posed.

**The talk will be available to livestream** on Zoom and we hope to post a recording afterward. See the Welcome Page of our website for more about this.

*page five*

**Why Have an Election Speaker Series in Our Church?** Our Fulfilling Our Vision committee looks for ways to fulfill our Future Directions Vision which says in part: “We want to be **a center for questioning and discussing....** We hope to **consider seemingly insurmountable world problems** [and find a path to action].... We want to **create a safe forum** where we can consider big questions and controversial issues..., where we can disagree and still get along.” We feel the choices we make in this election will shape our future and are extremely important to discuss. By IRS rules, a church cannot endorse or oppose any candidate, directly or indirectly, but it can offer education on issues that will be affected by an election. Our speaker series is designed to do that, entitled “Election 2024: What Is at Stake?” Our two goals are: 1) to educate people about what is at stake in the election in a variety of issue areas; and, 2) to inspire people to become active and devote time and resources to help elect candidates who are more aligned with the nation and world they want to create, whoever those candidates may be. We will ask each speaker to make clear the difference between the two major parties and their candidates on one particular issue or set of issues. We hope people will come away with a good overview and specific examples of the starkly contrasting worlds the two different approaches to the issue would create.

**Upcoming Speakers on “Election 2024: What Is at Stake?”**

The speaker series that begins on Monday, June 24<sup>th</sup> with Rod Smolla’s presentation on “Democracy and the Rule of Law” will continue with at least three other presentations on: climate and the environment; domestic economic issues including social equity, taxes and social security; and individual rights including reproductive rights and rights of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ people. The Rev. Jim Antal will speak on climate and the environment on Wednesday, July 24<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM. We will announce other dates shortly. Please spread the word about these events!

*page six*

**Community Nurse Sheila Keating Here Sunday June 23<sup>rd</sup> after Worship** If you would like to meet Sheila, or know more about what she does and can do, please come to an informal Meet and Greet here from 11:00 - 1:00 on Sunday, June 23. Sheila will be in the parish hall during refreshments to get to know you and answer your questions. For more information, please speak with Debby Richie.

**Fulfilling Our Vision Committee** You can find the Future Directions Vision and the Open and Affirming Covenant we are working to fulfill on our website and pew cards. FOV usually meets the first Tuesday of every month. Contact: Kate Reimanis.

**Daily Meditation Sessions** Our **Heartfulness Circle** offers an informal meditation gathering on Zoom every evening from 7:30 to 8:10 PM. On Thursdays we have an extended session starting at 7:00 PM. See our website Welcome page for the Zoom link and details.

**Next Concerts** here by pianist Annemieke McLane. Admission by donation, 20% goes to the church’s Manheim Fund for the Arts.

*Friday evening at 7:00 PM:*

June 21 “Summertime”

**Church Calendar:**

Sun. June 16	New Members Group after refreshments*
Thurs. June 20	Heartfulness Circle 7:00 PM Meditation*
Fri. June 21	Annemieke McLane piano concert 7:00PM*
Sun. June 23	Community Nurse here during refreshments*
Mon. June 24	Election 2024 Rod Smolla Talk 7:00 PM*
Sun. July 14	Open and Affirming Celebration 10:00 AM* Future Vision Conversation 11:45 AM-1:15 PM*
Wed. July 24	Election 2024 Jim Antal Talk 7:00 PM*

*\*see the announcement about this*

**Haiku by Mel Goertz**

A chipmunk sat beside me.  
Together we gazed at  
the blue mountains.

*page seven*