

# First Congregational Church

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
*An Open and Affirming Church*



We welcome you to the First Congregational Church of Wiscasset.

*VISION: We are on a journey to reflect God's love, embracing diversity and affirming the dignity and worth of all.*

*MISSION: Together we strive to praise God, grow in faith, cultivate love, spread joy, care for all people and God's creation, promote peace, and do justice.*

January 25, 2026

### THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

We welcome all to our worship service, whether present in the sanctuary, joining us on streaming video, or watching our service in the future.

Spiritual Contemplation Quote for the week: “Faith is taking the first step, even when you don’t see the whole path. “– Martin Luther King Jr

PRELUDE

*How Great Thou Art*

RINGING OF THE BELL

WELCOME and ANNOUNCEMENTS

\* CALL TO WORSHIP

L: God is our light and our salvation; whom shall we fear?

**P: God is our shelter and refuge on the days of trouble, and our hope and joy on the days of celebration!**

L: Day after day, we seek God’s face and the assurance of God’s holy love:

**P: God, do not turn from us or hide your face from us! Be our guide and our light instead!**

L: One thing we ask of God:

**P: That we may live in God’s dwelling place all the days of our life, and never cease to behold the beauty of God’s home.**

L: Beloved of God, enter this worship in thanksgiving, for God is among and within us!

**P: Thanks be to God!**

\* OPENING HYMN

*Great is Thy Faithfulness*

INVOCATION TO PRAYER

JOYS AND CONCERNS: After each Joy or Concern, Please respond:

Pastor: “God,” Congregation: **“Hear our prayer.”**

LIGHTING OF THE PEACE CANDLE

Global Mission Partner Prayer this week: Argentina

MORNING PRAYER

SILENT MOMENTS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

DAZZLING BOUQUET (refrain)

**Mine is the church where everybody's welcome.  
I know it's true 'cause I got through the door.  
We are a dazzling bouquet of every kind of flower.  
Jump in the vase, 'cause we've got space for more.**

SPIRITUAL NUGGET

'Trust in Something We Cannot See'

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Matthew 4:12-23

Liturgist: This is the Word of God.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

\* HYMN

*Blessed Assurance*

SERMON

"Do We Trust in God?"

OFFERTORY PRAYER

OFFERTORY

*In the Bleak Midwinter*

\* PRESENTATION WITH THE DOXOLOGY

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures here below;  
Praise God for all that love has done;  
Creator, Christ, and Spirit One. Amen.**

DEDICATION PRAYER

\* CLOSING HYMN

*When Peace Like a River*

BENEDICTION

BENEDICTORY RESPONSE

**Go now in peace. Never be afraid. God will go with you each hour of every day.  
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true. Know God will guide you in all you do.  
Go now in love, and show you believe. Reach out to others so all the world can see.  
God will be there watching from above. Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.**

POSTLUDE

*Variations on the Sevenfold Amen*

*You are invited to sit for the postlude.*

\* \* \* \* \*

**“Our worship ends, let our service begin”**

***Minister and Teacher:*** Rev. John Hogue

***Music Director:*** Joel Pierce

**Those serving you today:**

***Ushers:*** Jan Shaw and Judith Sutter

***Reader:*** Jenny Surgenor

***Flowers:*** Jan Shaw

***Online Streaming:*** Jenny Surgenor

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**We welcome Roger Whitney as our guest accompanist today.**

**Today we are collecting our Noisy Offering, to benefit St. Philip's Help Yourself Shelf Food Pantry.**

**Please join us** for fellowship, coffee or tea, and refreshments in Fellowship Hall following worship.

**Please take note** of the colored paper prayer slips in the pew rack. These are for you to write a word or phrase of prayer or concerns. Fold it and place it in the offering plate. It will only be shared with Rev. John.

**Happy January Birthday** to Susan Attwood, Ken Cooper, Natalie Dunbar, Lisa Hargreaves, Dewey Harris, Mark Light, Deb Myers

**Help Yourself Shelf January Wish List**

\* jarred spaghetti sauce \* 1lb. white rice \* drink mixes \* canned chicken \* tuna \*  
\* cereal \* SPAM \* mayo \* baked beans \* toothpaste \* dish soap \* cat litter \*

## Great Is Thy Faithfulness

1. Great is thy faith-ful-ness, O God my Fa-ther; there is no  
 2. Sum-mer and win-ter and spring-time and har-vest, sun, moon, and  
 3. Par-don for sin and a peace that en - dur-eth, thine own dear

shad - ow of turn - ing with thee; thou chang - est not, thy com -  
 stars in their cours - es a - bove join with all na - ture in  
 pres - ence to cheer and to guide; strength for to - day and bright

pas-sions, they fail not; as thou hast been, thou for - ev - er wilt be.  
 man-i - fold wit-ness to thy great faith-ful-ness, mer-cy, and love.  
 hope for to - mor-row, bless-ings all mine, with ten thou-sand be - side!

*Refrain*

Great is thy faith-ful-ness! Great is thy faith-ful-ness! Morn-ing by

morn-ing new mer - cies I see; all I have need - ed thy

hand hath pro - vid - ed; great is thy faith-ful-ness, Lord, un - to me!

## **Matthew 4:12-23**

### **Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee**

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,  
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles—  
the people who sat in darkness  
have seen a great light,  
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death  
light has dawned.”

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

### **Jesus Calls the First Disciples**

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishers. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

### **Jesus Ministers to Crowds of People**

Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

**This is the Word of God.  
Thanks be to God.**

## Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine!

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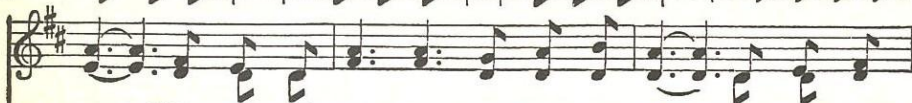
ASSURANCE. 9. 10. 9. 9. with Refrain

FANNY J. CROSBY, 1823-1915  
*Joyously*

MRS. JOSEPH F. KNAPP, 1839-1908



1. Bless-ed as-sur-ance, Je-sus is mine! O what a fore-taste of glo-ry di-  
 2. Per-fect sub-mis-sion, per-fect de-light, Vi-sions of rap-ture now burst on my  
 3. Per-fect sub-mis-sion, all is at rest, I in my Sav-iour am hap-py and



vine! Heir of sal-va-tion, pur-chase of God, Born of His  
 sight; An-gels de-scend-ing, bring from a-bove, Ech-oes of  
 blest, Watch-ing and wait-ing, look-ing a-bove, Filled with His



## REFRAIN

Spir-it, washed in His blood. This is my sto-ry, this is my  
 mer-cy, whis-pers of love.  
 good-ness, lost in His love.



song, Prais-ing my Sav-iour all the day long; This is my



sto-ry, this is my song, Praising my Sav-iour all the day long. A - MEN.





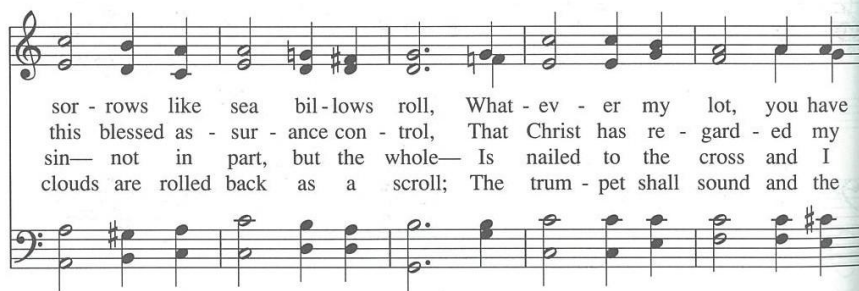
# When Peace, Like a River (It Is Well with My Soul)

Ps. 146; Col. 1:19-23; 2:13-14; 3 John 1:2

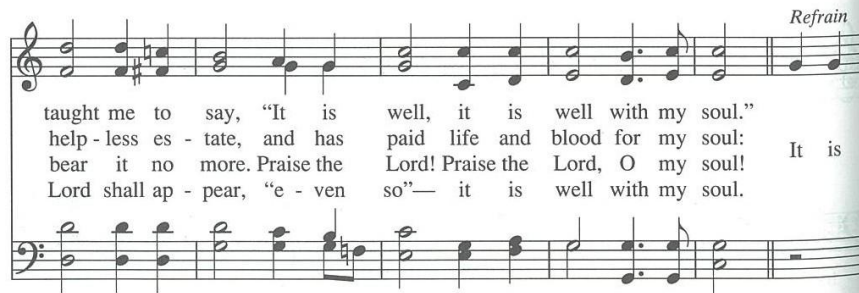
Horatio G. Spafford, 1873; alt.



1 When peace, like a riv - er, up - holds me each day, when  
 2 Though e - vil should tempt me, though tri - als should come, let  
 3 My sin— oh, the bliss of this glo - ri - ous thought— my  
 4 O God, speed the day that is filled with your light, when



sor - rows like sea bil - lows roll, What - ev - er my lot, you have  
 this blessed as - sur - ance con - trol, That Christ has re - gard - ed my  
 sin— not in part, but the whole— Is nailed to the cross and I  
 clouds are rolled back as a scroll; The trum - pet shall sound and the



*Refrain*

taught me to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul."  
 help - less es - tate, and has paid life and blood for my soul: It is  
 bear it no more. Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!  
 Lord shall ap - pear, "e - ven so"— it is well with my soul.



well with my soul, it is well, it is well with my soul.  
 It is well with my soul.

*This hymn was written out of grief over the loss of the author's four daughters in the sinking of the SS Ville du Havre. After leaving his Chicago law practice, Horatio G. Spafford and his wife settled in Jerusalem.*

Tune: VILLE DU HAVRE 11.8.11.9. with refrain  
 Philip P. Bliss, 1876



## **January 25, 2026   Matthew 4:12-23   ‘Do We Trust in God?’**

I like to fish when I have spare time. I remember one particular day as I went fishing early one morning. Real early. It's dark outside. Fog on the water. Very biblical. I had my coffee, my rod, my worms, and my confidence. I cast my line... and immediately caught something. I thought, “Wow! I am a fishing legend.” The rod bent. The reel screamed. The fish fought like it had a PhD in escape tactics. People on shore started watching. I said, “This is a big one. I can feel it.” Five minutes go by. Ten minutes go by. I’m sweating. The fish is winning.

Finally, with one last heroic pull, I yanked it out of the water. I discovered I had caught: Someone else’s fishing line. With their lure. With their sinker. With their bobber. Somewhere out there was a very confused fisherman still telling people: “I swear I had a fish... and then it just stole my entire rod setup and joined another line.”

So our scripture reveals that one morning on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus walks along the shore and sees four men doing what they’ve done their whole lives. They’re mending nets. Smelling like fish. Hands rough from rope. Thinking about the next catch and the next meal.

I would like to step back now and look at how these disciples lived their lives. In 1986 a boat thought to be some 2,000 years old was found buried in the sand along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. This wooden vessel from the first century was discovered near Nof Ginnosaur on the lake's northwestern shore. Studies have determined the type of wood used was mainly cedar and oak. The style of construction was mortise and tenon joints. The size was 26 by 7 feet - big enough for 15 men.

Did you ever wonder what type of fish the disciples were fishing for? There were three types of fish that were primarily sought by fishermen in these waters. Sardines were the "two small fish" that the boy brought to the feeding of the 5000. Sardines and bread were the staple product of the locals. Barbels are so known because of the barbs at the corners of their mouths. The third

type of fish is called musht but is more popularly known today as "St. Peter's Fish." This fish has a long dorsal fin which looks like a comb and can be up to 1.5 feet long and 3.3 lbs. in weight."

Now we have some knowledge of the context of our scripture. Then Jesus says something strange. "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." He doesn't say, "Go to seminary." He doesn't say, "Clean yourselves up." He doesn't say, "When your life is less complicated, come find me." He says, "Now." Then the Bible says, "Immediately they left their nets and followed him." Imagine what that meant. Those nets were their retirement plan. Their family business. Their identity. Their security. Those nets put food on the table.

I want to give you a perspective of the social economic structure of the fisherman. While the fishermen have some economic resources, their social ranking is very low. In Cicero's ranking of occupations (De Off 1.150-51), owners of cultivated land appear first and fishermen last. Athenaeus indicates that fishermen and fishmongers are on a par with money lenders and are socially despised as greedy thieves (Deipnosophistai, 6.224b-28c). The two characters have a socially inferior and economically precarious existence under Roman control. It is among such vulnerable people that God's empire is first manifested. [p. 121] The kingdom begins among the oppressed. There is more; it begins among those who are enmeshed in the system. Even at this moment of 2026, we are being called out of the old way of being.

Fishing was controlled by the "powers that be" in two ways. (1) Commercial fishermen worked for the royal family or wealthy landlords who contracted with them to provide a specific amount of fish at a certain time. They were paid either with cash or with fish. (2) Fishermen leased their fishing rights from persons called "toll collectors" in the NT for a percentage of the catch. The "tax" could be as much as 40% (see Malina & Rohrbach, Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, p. 44).

Thus, Jesus calling fishermen is more than just calling them away from their families. It also involves a break from the "powers that be" -- the wealthy and or the government -- and into a new power: the reign of heaven.

Jesus' call occurred in the midst of the empire's close control of fishing whereby licensing, quotas, and taxation secured Rome's sovereignty over the water and its contents. Jesus' call contests this dominant reality by asserting God's sovereignty and offering an alternative way of life. [p. 120] Malina & Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*,).

We are all enmeshed in our cultural system. The fishermen were not as poor as some; with boats and nets they were relatively well off, and yet they were still part of the system, tied in as effectively as most Americans are by a mortgage and credit cards. Jesus called them out of it, and called you and I as well.

The disciples leaving everything behind wasn't poetic. It was terrifying. But here's the miracle: They trusted that the One who made the sea knew where real life was. We are no different here in our own congregation. We are looking at possible deficits in our budget. We do not know the outcome of the future. The point is we have to trust in God and have faith. My family and I will be moving into the area. We trust in God for providing into the future. I hope you will embark on the same trust in God.

Allow me to paint a Modern Picture for 2026. It's like Jesus walking down the dock in Wiscasset and saying: "Put down the lobster trap. Leave the bait barrel. Step off the boat. Come with me." Somehow... you do. The Invitation Still Sounds the Same. Jesus still calls ordinary people in ordinary places. Not from thrones — but from shorelines. Not from palaces — but from workplaces.

The question is still the same: What nets are we holding that keep us from following? Is the net fear? Is the net uncertainty? Is the net security? Is the net all of the above?

On top of everything, our text , particularly verse 15 lays the important groundwork that Jesus has come for all, Jew and Gentile. The details of where Jesus sets out on his own highlight both the heritage of the tribes of Israel in the North and the mixed ethnic community in which he is going to minister and spend time.

We are witnessing in our nation, seeing people as “other” based on their creed, color, gender, sexual orientation, income, age and health status. Then targeting them for deportation and various forms of discrimination. We need to step in to protect them from the looming darkness. As people of the United Church of Christ, as a congregation being Open and Affirming, we know no “other”; we are one, and when one of us suffers, we all suffer.

When people hear from the pulpit whom they are entitled to hate, it’s time to remember that God expects us to love all people—especially those that have been pushed to the margins. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Let us remind ourselves of the social teaching of Jesus Christ. We will be judged by whether we have responded to the call to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, welcome the stranger, serve those who are ill, and visit those who are in prison. Social concerns are an essential part of the Christian life. When we fall in love with Christ, we want to respond to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

As direct as we might find the story’s message, there is a danger in reading the story in too limited a way. We might be tempted to limit the story to direct service to those in need. We must not forget that we are called to work for social change in the structures of our world and for empowerment of those in need. We are called to ask why people are hungry, thirsty, homeless, refugees, without medical care or in prison. We are called to look at: the structures or systems that keep people from earning the food they need. We are called to look at the policies that keep people in the developing world from a healthy water supply and the economic forces that have some people living in substandard homes. The average American family finds it difficult to

afford a home. Honestly that is why our own family will be living together, to help each other out. Why is it in Maine and in America that our country hospitals are struggling and forced to change or close? Shouldn't we see basic medical care as a human right for all?

There is also a danger using this story in too simplistic. Most people will recognize themselves as being both sheep and goats. Most people have at some time answered the call to respond to those in need. Most people at some time have also failed to respond to the call to respond to those in need. All of us are called to be aware humbly of both realities in our personal life and in the life of culture and our nation.

Otherwise, we might fall into the trap of condemnation and ideology. We might then judge the world in unfair categories of us and them – good people and bad people. If we do this, we run the risk of simplifying the gospel message and preventing it from having its full power. We would also forget that judgment ultimately belongs to God. Our awareness of the injustices of our world will empower us to grow and change and be filled with life in solidarity with God and others, “so that God may be all in all.”

When Jesus began preaching: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” The mission is not recruitment. It is an invitation. Jesus announces good news before he gathers followers. The Truth? We do not bring the kingdom. We point to the kingdom already breaking in. Our church's mission is not survival, it is about witnessing. We don't protect a building — we proclaim a hope.

Perhaps this illustration I came up with will make sense. Most of you know I love coffee so here we go- Let's say we open up a ministry - a coffee shop: “The Coffee Shop on the Wharf.” Lobstermen came in before dawn. Tourists came in after sunrise. Locals stopped by just to see who else was around. We put a sign on the door that read: “You belong here.” But not everyone believed it. Some people came in only once. They worried they didn't look like regulars. Others rushed through, afraid they didn't have time to stay. Some stood outside, wondering if the place was only for insiders. One winter

morning, during the slow season, people took over. Instead of changing the menu, the people stood at the door and greeted every person by name if they knew it — and by kindness if they didn't.

When the lobstermen apologized for muddy boots, they said, "Boots mean you're working. That means you're welcome." When tourists worry about ordering wrong, we say, "Learning is part of belonging." When locals complained the town was shrinking, they said, "Then it's time to open wider, not smaller." Soon people started lingering. They helped one another carry trays. They shared tables. They learned each other's stories. Then one day someone noticed the old sign and said, "Funny thing — I used to think that sign 'You Belong Here' was just decoration. Now I realize it's the whole point of the place." The manager replied, "That sign tells you who you are. But the door tells you what to do."

Ordinary People doing Extraordinary Calling as Jesus calls fishermen — not scholars, not priests. "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." They don't have a five-year plan. They have a response. They leave their nets — the tools that defined them. Jesus does not call the equipped. He equips the called. What "nets" keep us from trusting Christ?

What would it look like for our church to follow Jesus beyond comfort? In the last verses (4:23–25) Jesus teaches, heals, and proclaims. The gospel is not just spoken. It is embodied. People follow because they see hope. Jesus walks the shoreline and still says: "Follow me." Not to the perfect. Not to the powerful. But to the willing. We are not defined by our past. We are shaped by God's promise. We are sent by God's love.

Let's imagine the bridge we cross on Highway 1 was originally a long wooden bridge that connected the harbor to the main road. It had stood for generations. Everyone knew it. Everyone trusted it. However, one year a new shortcut opened — a narrow road that cut straight through the harbor. It saved ten minutes. The town put up a sign: "Shortcut — Faster Route." At first, everyone tried it. But soon cars started getting stuck in the mud. Some cars



broke on hidden rocks. Others had to be pulled out by neighbors with trucks. Still, people kept taking the shortcut.

Then one winter a bridge inspector came to town. He walked the old bridge plank by plank. He checked every bolt. When he was done, he hung a sign: “This bridge is strong. You can trust it.” But many drivers ignored him. They said, “We don’t have time for the long way.” “We need results now.” “Everyone else is using the shortcut.”

Then one day a school bus full of children came to the fork in the road. The driver paused. She looked at the shortcut. She looked at the bridge. She chose the bridge. Someone behind her honked. Someone passed her in frustration. But she crossed safely — and every child arrived home. Later a reporter asked why she didn’t take the faster way. She said, “Because my job isn’t to be fast. My job is to be faithful.” Our job is to trust in God and be faithful.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Please note the change in regular Office Administrator hours beginning Monday, January 12.**

### **Saturday, February 7, 5:30pm**

Sweetheart Shrimp Scampi Dinner with Salads and Desserts. Free will donation towards local missions. **LIMITED SEATING!!!** Reserve your space by texting Rev. John at 207-955-0055. The meal will be cooked by Whitney Inn's Executive Chef Isaac Hogue.

### **Coming Up This Week**

Monday, January 26

Rev. John's Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm

Office Hours 9:30am – 1:30pm

Mah Jongg 3:00 – 5:30pm

Tuesday, January 27

Rev. John's Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm

Office Hours 9:30am – 1:30pm

Sheepscot Valley Chorus 7:00-9:00pm

Wednesday, January 28

Rev. John's Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm

Office Hours 10:00am – 2:00pm

Organ Society 9:30am

Feed Our Scholars packing 11:00am

Book Study 4:15pm in the Parlor

Sunday, February 1

Sunday Worship 10:00am

Coffee Hour in Fellowship Hall following Worship

First Congregational Church UCC  
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Sexton: Mary McKinney  
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*Shining the Light of Christ*  
FIRST  
CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH  
*in the Heart of Wiscasset*