

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 11, 2026

WHITE GIFT SUNDAY
BAPTISM OF CHRIST, 1ST SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING
AWARENESS SUNDAY

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

FOR YOUR CONTEMPLATION

“Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world.”

John Milton

PRELUDE *Athair ar Neamh (The Lord's Prayer)* Enya/arr. Pierce

RINGING OF THE BELL

WELCOME and ANNOUNCEMENTS

INTROIT *You'll Never Walk Alone* Richard Rodgers Ron Sanchez, soloist

* CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Come to the waters, beloved – where Spirit moved over at creation,

P: where Jesus was immersed in justice,

L: where God leaned close to us.

P: We splash in the river of God's joy.

L: Come to the waters, beloved – where God's voice thunders,

P: where God whispers kindness.

L: We watch as Jesus steps

P: into the muddy mess of our lives.

L: Come to the waters, beloved –

P: where the Spirit gifts us so

L: we can stand side by side

P: with the broken and forgotten.

L: We come because we are indeed God's beloved children.

* OPENING HYMN Fairest Lord Jesus No. 109

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: Hong Kong

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

‘Gentle Nature’

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 3:13-17

Liturgist: This is the Word of God.

People: Thanks be to God.

* HYMN

Spirit of the Living God

No. 281

SERMON

‘Beloved, Period.’

OFFERTORY PRAYER

OFFERTORY *Climb Ev'ry Mountain* Richard Rodgers Ron Sanchez, soloist

* 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

Arise, Your Light Is Come!'

No. 537

BENEDICTION

BENEDICTIONAL 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

Adiemus ("We Shall Hear")

Jenkins/arr. Pierce

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: Deb Myers and Martha Speed

Online Streaming: Raegan Eddy

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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 *

Isaiah 42:1-9

The Servant, a Light to the Nations

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;

I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry out or lift up his voice
or make it heard in the street;

a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth,
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Thus says God, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:

I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

I am the Lord; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.

See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

Matthew 3:13-17

The Baptism of Jesus

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw God’s Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from the heavens said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

This is the Word of God.

Thanks be to God.

New Revised Standard Version Updated Version

Fairest Lord Jesus,

1. Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature,
O Thou of God and man the Son,
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,
Thou, my soul's glory, joy and crown.
2. Fair are the meadows, fairer still the woodlands,
Robed in the blooming garb of spring;
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer,
Who makes the woeful heart to sing.
3. Fair is the sunshine, fairer still the moonlight,
And all the twinkling starry host;
Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer
Than all the angels heav'n can boast.

Spir - it of the liv - ing God, fall a-fresh on me; Spir - it of the

liv - ing God, fall a-fresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me,

use me. Spir - it of the liv - ing God, fall a-fresh on me.

WORDS and MUSIC: Daniel Iverson, 1926

IVERSON

537 God of the Ages, Whose Almighty Hand

Trumpets, before each stanza (optional)

1. God of the a - ges, whose al-might-y hand
 2. Thy love di-vine hath led us in the past;
 3. From war's a-larms, from dead-ly pes - ti-lence,
 4. Re - fresh thy peo - ple on life's toil-some way;

leads forth in beau - ty all the star - ry band
 in this free land with thee our lot is cast;
 be thy strong arm our ev - er sure de - fense;
 lead us from night to nev - er - end - ing day;

of shin - ing worlds in splen-dor through the skies,
 be thou our rul - er, guard-ian, guide, and stay,
 thy true re - li - gion in our hearts in - crease;
 fill all our lives with love and grace di - vine,

our grate - ful songs be - fore thy throne a - rise.
 thy word our law, thy paths our cho - sen way.
 thy boun - teous good - ness nour - ish us in peace.
 and glo - ry, laud, and praise be ev - er thine.

WORDS: Daniel C. Roberts, 1876, alt.
 MUSIC: George W. Warren, 1894

Episcopalian minister Roberts wrote this hymn for Brandon, Vermont's celebration of the Centennial of American Independence.

NATIONAL HYMN
 10 10.10 10

Sunday, January 11, 2025

‘Beloved, Period.’

Rev. John Hogue

Before celebrating a baptism, the Minister approached the young father and said solemnly, “Baptism is a serious step. Are you sure you’re prepared for it?”

“I think so,” the man replied. “My wife has made appetizers and we have a caterer coming to provide plenty of cookies and cakes for our guests.”

“I don’t mean that,” the Minister replied. “I mean, are you prepared spiritually?”

“Oh sure,” came the reply. “I’ve got a keg of beer and a case of whiskey.”

Seriously though, there are places in our world that are so dark that most of us really don’t want to look at them. Nations where law and order have so broken down that people’s lives are in danger just because they belong to the wrong faith or the wrong political party or the wrong tribe. Cities where the government is so corrupt that money that should provide basic services for those who need them instead line the pockets of the rich and powerful. Neighborhoods where crime is so rampant that even murder becomes just another part of life. We can see all these dark places in our world just by turning on our TVs and watching the evening news. Human Trafficking is a crime against humanity and ultimately a sin. Human trafficking denies the values of human life, exposes victims to serious health risks, endangers the mental well-being of victims and impedes the ability of victims to reach their full God-given potential.

As Christians, we believe that "all human beings are made in the image of God, that every person is of intrinsic worth before God and that every individual has a right to the fullest possible opportunities for the development of life abundant and eternal" (NCC Human Rights Policy Statement, 1995). Human trafficking is forced and bonded child labor. It is a Debt bondage among migrant laborers. It is involuntary domestic servitude. It is a forced sex and sex trade. It is Child prostitution. They are child soldiers. It is Forced marriage. From the girl or boy forced into prostitution at a truck stop, to the man was discovered in a restaurant kitchen, stripped of his passport and held against his will. All trafficking victims share one essential experience: the loss of freedom.” – This is the statement from human trafficking website: Polaris

It is our responsibility to use the resources at our disposal to end human trafficking and to advocate for global policies and practices that would bring the activity we now know as human trafficking to a conclusive and absolute end. We are seeing the ramifications of Epstein files as the result of human sin and human trafficking. One of the most horrific days of human trafficking , I am almost shocked to tell you this is the day of the NFL Super Bowl.

This news is alarming. Many of us have stopped listening to the news because it's too disturbing, because the darkness in our world is too close. Darkness captivates, baffles, and appalls us. It's a shifty thing of many textures, many moods, a state of fascination and of horror, an absence and a presence, solace and threat, a beginning and an end.

If you have ever been down a mine and been told by a guide to switch off your lamp you may feel like you have experienced total darkness. . But quantum physics has found that you are in fact surrounded by light you cannot see, for true darkness “does not exist.” Light particles—photons—exist throughout the known universe and beyond it.

I want to pause and reflect on the quantum physics of light but from the standpoint of being Open and Affirming. We all know that people have opinions and viewpoints. Being Open and Affirming we acknowledge all viewpoints to the table. I recently came across a scientific observation that explains how people who believe they are right no matter what other people believe those who believe they are right expose with great confidence. Being a Minister for 30 plus years I have noticed that the loudness of an opinion often correlates to how wrong it is. I know of a gentleman who writes down five things he has a strong opinion about. Then instead of doing research to confirm his opinions, he does the opposite. He utilizes and searches for evidence that he is wrong. He says usually by the end of the year, he usually switches his position on at least one of the 5 issues. Why? What got him started on this was when he learned this strange fact about light. If you stretched the entire length of the electromagnetic spectrum in a mile, with gamma

rays on the one spectrum and radio rays on the other spectrum and visible light in between, guess how much of it human beings can see? .0035% If you put it into this perspective, if you stretch the electromagnetic spectrum for more than a mile, the amount human beings can see is the length of a pitachao.

So we all may still have opinions, but ever since I learned this, I am a lot more willing to concede that some of them are pretty stupid. Even Benjamin Franklin said, “The older I get, the less I know.”

Our lesson from Isaiah for today speaks to this. It addresses one whom God would appoint to bring light into the dark places of the world. It speaks of “the Servant of the Lord” who would come to right the wrongs in this world, who would bring God’s justice.[2] As I’ve said many times, I think our idea of justice is very different from the Bible. In our world, “justice” is something that happens in courtrooms. It is rather ironic that our next door neighbor is the Lincoln County Courthouse. Justice is about arbitrating disputes and determining guilt or innocence and handing down punishments for crimes. But in the Bible, God’s justice means that the hungry are fed, the prisoners are set free, the blind receive their sight, those who are bowed down are lifted up, and the immigrants and the widows and orphans have someone to watch over them. Simply put—God’s justice is the light that shines into all the dark places of the world and makes it possible for all people to thrive equally.

It’s important to notice the way in which the “Servant” in Isaiah establishes this kind of justice. Our lesson says it this way: “a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench” (Isa. 42:3). I like the way Eugene Peterson renders it in The Message translation: “He won’t brush aside the bruised and the hurt and he won’t disregard the small and insignificant.” In addition, the “Servant” is to be “a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (Isa. 42:6-7). If you’re thinking that sounds like a very strange kind of justice, I’m not surprised.

In fact, it would seem that this is the very opposite of the way we think authorities ought to “establish justice” in our world. They are to “crack down” on criminals, without lifting a finger to do anything about the social conditions that create criminals. We want them to carry out the “war on drugs,” but I’m not sure that includes coming up with ways to help those who use illegal drugs to find peace of mind. And when anyone anywhere does violence to us or to our people, we believe that we have a right and obligation to respond to that violence with violence-- whether that means waging war or executing violent offenders.

I’m afraid, however, that our version of “justice” has only served to spread the darkness in our world. Our “justice” certainly looks very different from God’s justice. Our justice is a justice of vengeance and force and hostility. Rather than creating the conditions that make for life, it only leads to a “culture of death.” “But God’s justice takes place not through vengeance but forgiveness. God’s justice takes place not through violence but compassion. God’s justice takes place not through hostility but mercy. It is justice that leads to peace. In order to achieve God’s justice that rights the wrongs and creates the conditions in which all people can thrive, we have to employ God’s ways instead of ours.

I think that’s what the story of Jesus’ baptism in Matthew’s gospel is about. Jesus approaches John to be baptized, and John objects, “I need to be baptized by you” (Mt. 3:14)! Jesus’ response might seem strange at first glance: “it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt. 3:15). One would think that if anyone had “fulfilled all righteousness,” it was Jesus. Once again, I think The Message captures the meaning well: “God’s work, putting things right all these centuries, is coming together right now in this baptism.” I think, in a very real sense, in his baptism Jesus was making a public declaration that he was going to take the side of God’s justice. He was going to set about promoting God’s work of righting the wrongs and lifting the burdens from the oppressed. He was going to shine the light of God’s truth into all the dark places of the world.

That's what Jesus did. And the world responded in the way it always does--we don't much like having our ways criticized or our misdeeds exposed. And so they tried to stifle him by labeling him a criminal and executing him. But those of us who have shared in Jesus' baptism cannot give our approval to the ways of our world. By sharing his baptism we have taken on the same calling as his--to shine the light of God's truth and God's peace and God's compassion and God's mercy--in short, the light of God's justice--into all the dark places of our world.

I remember in seminary one of the professors I had , Dr. Ronald Stone teaches us about the importance of baptism. The Berlin Wall or Iron Curtain had fallen 3 years prior to the year I had this class. I remember the Dr. Stone staying that President Mikhail Gorbachev had been baptized and our faith tells us his baptism must make a difference. His grandmother had him secretly baptized by a Russian Orthodox priest. His grandmother/ mother put an icon of Jesus on the wall in every room in the house.(Example of an Icon) Gorbachev's father was a staunch Communist and put a picture of Stalin next to each picture of Jesus. On December 1, 1989, the news broadcasted President Gorbachev being driven into the Vatican to meet Pope John Paul II. The two met and spoke in the Pope's private library for seventy minutes. That is the power of the Holy Spirit received at baptism. Baptism counts. Baptism makes a difference.

The nature of epiphanies is communal, suggests Matthew. "This is my beloved son." Everybody got to hear that, not just Jesus, and so when he is led into the wilderness, he already knows this is not a private affair, a personal test, a lone examination. The wilderness is its own epiphany, but one for all to witness.

When you fall back on your baptism as a reminder of who you are, baptism is a reminder as the people of who God has claimed them to be, remember too that baptism is also about who the other needs you, and them, to be. To be present in the wilderness. To tell the other of God's words from heaven. To proclaim that baptism cannot just be about the self, but is about living life as being the light of the world for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven here and now. You, plural, are God's beloved children.

I wish to share with you the story of a church that was built in the highest mountains of Switzerland. It was a beautiful church that had been built with great care by the villagers who lived nearby. But there was one thing that the church didn't have. Can you think of what that might have been? It didn't have any lights. You couldn't just go into the church and switch on the lights like we do here. Yet every Sunday evening the people who lived on the mountain-side opposite the tiny church saw something magic happen. The church bell would ring and worshippers would wend their way up the mountainside towards the church. They would enter the church and then all of a sudden the church would light up brightly. What do you think happened? Yes - you see the people had to bring light with them - so they brought lanterns. When they arrived at church they would light their lanterns and hang them around the church on pegs set in the walls, so the light would spread all around. If only a few people came to church the light would be very dim because there would only be a few lanterns. But when lots of people came to church there would be plenty of light. After the service the villagers would take their lanterns home. At this time, to those who watched from a distance, it was as if a stream of light poured out of the church and over the mountainside. For many it was a sign that all was well. God's light was with them and in them. The only time the little church lit up was when people were there. That's when it truly became a church. That's when the light shone most brightly. (Take out your phones, turn your flashlight on and wave it)

Friends, carry your lantern to our community. Know this, You are Beloved, Period.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today, Wiscasset Flying Club meets in Fellowship Hall from 1:30 – 4:30pm.

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

Coming Up This Week

Sunday, January 11

Wiscasset Flying Club 1:30 – 4:30pm in Fellowship Hall

Monday, January 12

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

Office Hours 9:30am – 1:30pm

Mah Jongg 3:00 – 5:30pm

Tuesday, January 13

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

Office Hours 9:30am – 1:30pm

Wednesday, January 14

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

Resume Book Study on Psalm 23 at 4:15pm in the Parlor; we will be discussing chapters 9 and 10

Thursday, January 15

DAR Meeting in Fellowship Hall 4:00-6:00pm

Sunday, January 18

Sunday Worship 10:00am

Coffee Hour in Fellowship Hall following Worship

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