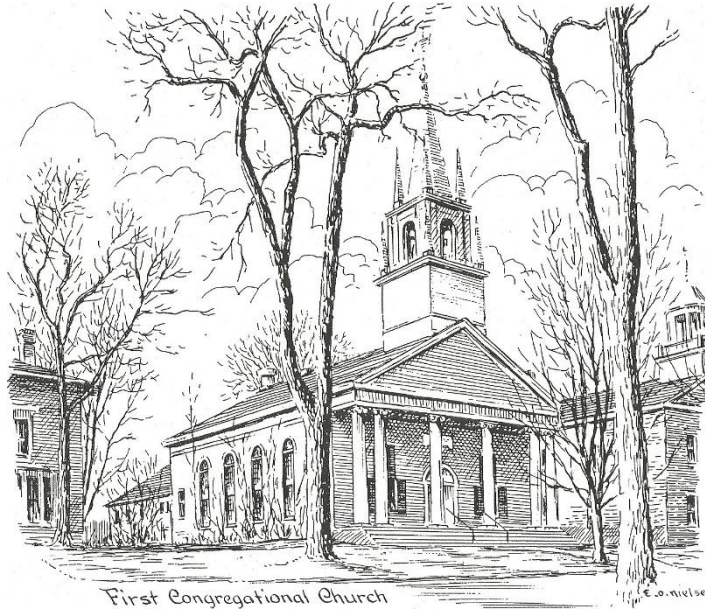


First Congregational Church
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
An Open and Affirming Church



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.

March 15, 2026

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

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: “The wound is the place where the Light enters you.” — **Rumi**

PRELUDE

Trio in B-flat Major

W.A. Mozart

RINGING OF THE BELL

WELCOME and ANNOUNCEMENTS

* CALL TO WORSHIP

L: In our journey we are “Shocked” when God’s servant is Marred. Disfigured. Hardly human, by the look of him. Yet chosen to do God’s will. Chosen to be exalted.

P: Jesus suffered. Despised. Rejected. Ugly. Misshapen. Devoid of anything that might remotely be considered attractive. Can you bear to look at him? Can you stomach what happened to him? Does it make any sense that God should be at work in him?

L: The ugliness and the pain, the bruises and the beatings, were your fault and mine? And were meant, most of all, to take the blame away. Blame? Yes, he took the blame.”

P: Can you bear the silence? The innocent lamb, the shears, and the abattoir. No bleating. No protest. Silence. Can you bear the silence?”

L: Do you feel the injustice? An innocent man condemned to death. A man of peace crushed by violence. An honest man entombed with liars. Let us continue to reflect , remember and continue our Lenten journey.

* OPENING HYMN

‘What Wondrous Love is This’

No.183

INVOCATION TO PRAYER

Jesus, you made the way for us to come and worship God. As we see your sacrifice lead us in the way of the wilderness, the way of the cross, the way that leads to eternal life. Amen.

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: Sierra Leone

MORNING PRAYER

SILENT MOMENTS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

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.

SCRIPTURE LESSON Isaiah 53:1-12; Hebrews 10:14 (NIV)

Liturgist: This is the Word of God. People: **Thanks be to God.**

* HYMN *'When I Survey The Wondrous Cross'* No.202

SERMON 'Struggles and Sorrows'

OFFERTORY PRAYER

OFFERTORY *Snow* Herman Beefink

* 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 *'In the Cross of Christ I Glory'* No. 185

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.**

Scripture: Isaiah 53:1-12

Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? **2** For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.**3** He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering[a] and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces[b]he was despised, and we held him of no account.**4** Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.**5** But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**7** He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouthlike a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth **8** By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.**9** They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb[c] with the rich,[d] although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.**10** Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain.[e] When you make his life an offering for sin,[f] he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the LORD shall prosper.**11** Out of his anguish he shall see light;[g]he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one,[h] my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.**12** Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Hebrews 10:14 (New International Version)

14 For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

This is the Word of God.

Thanks be to God.

New Revised Standard Version Updated Version

POSTLUDE

Postlude on an Irish Tune

C.V. Stanford

You are invited to sit for the postlude.

* * * * *

“Our worship ends, let our service begin”

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Minister and Teacher: Rev. John Hogue

Music Director: Joel Pierce

Today’s Guest Musicians- Beth Whitney (clarinet) Sarah Whitfield (flute)

Those serving you today:

Flowers: Jan Shaw

Online Streaming: Raegan Eddy

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 March Birthday to Tom Clement, Sullivan Joyce, Corinne Joyce, Marjorie Knight, Ann Light and Kent Wusterbarth

Help Yourself Shelf Wish List

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

Easter Flower Orders

It is once again time to order Easter Flowers to decorate our sanctuary for the celebration of Christ's Resurrection. Easter is April 5th, so orders for Lilies (\$12), Tulips (\$9) and Hyacinths (\$5) must be in to the church office by Wednesday March 25th. Rev. John is also putting together a live flower arrangement at the altar cross. If you wish to donate to this, specifically, the donation will be \$5. Order forms can be found in the back of the sanctuary.

Maundy Thursday April 2

Join us for a Passover Potluck. We will be sharing a potluck meal for the Sedar Meal. Please bring a potluck dish to share. We will eat at 5:30pm, and our Maundy Thursday Service will follow. St. Philip's will be joining us.

Good Friday Service April 3

Service will be noon at St. Philip's.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Reminder: Rev. John will be on a mission trip to North Carolina until Monday March 23rd. Veronica Hogue will be delivering Rev John's sermons.

Today's Offering-One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) - is a Special Mission Offering of the United Church of Christ that supports partners worldwide with ministries that fund health, education, and agricultural development, emergency relief, refugee ministries, and both international and domestic disaster response. Thank you for your support of this offering!

Today March 15: Special Congregational Meeting after Worship

Coming Up This Week

Monday, March 16

Rev. John North Carolina Mission Trip

Office Hours 9:30am – 1:30pm

Mah Jongg 3:00 – 5:30pm

Tuesday, March 17- St. Patrick's Day

Rev. John North Carolina Mission Trip

Office Hours 9:30am – 1:30pm

Sheepscot Valley Chorus 7:00 – 9:00pm

Wednesday, March 18

Rev. John North Carolina Mission Trip

Office Hours 10:00am – 2:00pm

Organ Society 9:30am

Feed Our Scholars packing 11:00am

Thursday March 19

Friday March 20

Drop off (at church) baked good donations for the youth group bake sale

Saturday March 21

Youth Group Bake Sale at Ames True Value Wiscasset 9:00am-Noon

Sheepscot Valley Chorus 9:00am-Noon

Sunday, March 22

Sunday Worship 10:00am

Coffee Hour in Fellowship Hall following Worship

First Congregational Church UCC
PO Box 350, 28 High Street, Wiscasset, ME 04578

Minister and Teacher: Rev. John Hogue
revjohnwiscassetucc@gmail.com
Pastoral Care – 207 955-0055

Music Director: Joel Pierce
Sexton: Mary McKinney
Office Administrator: Hilary Atwood

Church Office Email – fccw@myfairpoint.net
Church Office Phone – 207 882-7544
Church Website – www.uccwiscasset.org

March 15, 2026

“Struggles and Sorrows”

Text: Isaiah 53:1-12; Hebrews 10:14

Rev. John Hogue

What does the word sacrifice mean to you? It can mean various interpretations. In our context today we turn to chapter 53 of Isaiah, and then turn to Hebrews for the New Testament. Isaiah foretold, hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, a type of Messiah who was not the strong and powerful leader which Jesus' contemporaries were expecting. Sometimes the text was thought to represent the nation of Israel and its suffering, but later the New Testament writers understood it to be about Jesus.

Our God knows intimately the human experience of grief and pain. This is part of who Jesus is. Rather than spending the theological premise of atonement and suffering, I believe those of you in the pew would rather me be to the point about how I view suffering. I believe suffering is NOT, I repeat not as a punishment, but as an opportunity to connect with divine love and transform pain into spiritual growth. I believe in "suffering with" others (compassion) and believe that our wounds, when shared with God and community, become a source of healing for others, embracing the concept of ‘Wounded Healer’ like Henri Nouwen views. : Nouwen believed as I do, that, like Jesus, that our own vulnerabilities and wounds enable us to heal others. He emphasized that we are all wounded, and only by acknowledging our own pain can we truly minister to the suffering of others.

- Shared Suffering (Compassion): I believe we need to advocate for entering into the pain of others rather than avoiding it. I believe the role of a Christian is to "suffer with" others.
- I believe suffering invites us to place our hurts into "larger hands"—God’s hands—and that our daily sorrows are anchored in a greater hope.
- I believe we are encouraged to embrace, rather than suppressing, emotions like mourning and grief, believing they are necessary for healing and finding true joy in the Spirit.
- To love is to risk suffering, as those we love can cause us immense pain or leave us, yet this risk is necessary to experience true life.

Whatever wilderness you struggle with, Jesus has borne the pain of that, on his shoulders on the cross. He has become your scapegoat, carrying your sin, your struggles, your sorrows. He went out into the wilderness of judgement all alone, so that ultimately we may all be healed, restored and made whole.

The book of Hebrews is a good place to go to in the New Testament to help us understand how Jesus continues and concludes the story of the Old Testament. In chapter 10, the writer describes how Jesus completely fulfils all that the Day of Atonement was pointing towards; that Jesus is the one, final sacrifice for all sin, and that: "... by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy." (Hebrews 10:14)

The sacrifice we bring is the sacrifice of response. Seeing how Jesus has dealt with our sorrow and shame, we are inspired and empowered to bring our praise and our service. We can worship God with our lips in songs and prayers, and we can worship God with generosity and compassion towards other people. If we are

looking to bring transformation to the world around us - to our churches, to our homes, to our workplaces, our pubs, our schools - we need to speak in the power of the Holy Spirit. It means speaking God's truth in love. It means praying with prophetic faith - speaking out God's word with the trust that it will be effective.

If you have seen the inside of my office, you will notice photographs of butterflies and paintings I have done in butterflies. The reason is of the following modern day parable:

A young boy came across a butterfly cocoon and brought it into his house. He watched, over the course of hours, as the butterfly struggled to break free from its confinement. It managed to create a small hole in the cocoon, but its body was too large to emerge. It was tiring and became still. Wanting to help the butterfly, the boy snipped a slit in the cocoon with a pair of scissors. But the butterfly was small, weak, and its wings crumpled. The boy expected the insect to take flight, but instead it could only drag its undeveloped body along the ground. It was incapable of flying. The boy, in his eagerness to help the butterfly, stunted its development. What he did not know was that the butterfly needed to go through the process of struggling against the cocoon to gain strength and fill its wings with blood. It was the struggle that made it stronger.

You may have heard a variation of this story before. I came across it in Frank Dupree's book Metamorphosis. It's a reminder of the fact that while it's hard to watch those who we are close to struggle, often the best help we can provide is to do nothing. By intervening, and shouldering the burden ourselves, we rob those we care about of the opportunity to grow and get stronger. As a parent, as a friend, or as a

spouse, the instinct to help is hard to resist. We see our kids struggling at school, interacting with other children, or falling behind on the playing field, and we want to step in and save them from hardship. We want to offload their pain onto ourselves. By doing so, however, we're eliminating the circumstances that the people we love need for their own personal development. It's instinctive, and understandable, to want to help. But often the best course of action is to wait and, like the butterfly, let the process unfold on its own terms and timeline.

As Robert Tew once wrote, "The struggle you're in today is developing the strength you need for tomorrow. Don't give up."

Sometimes the best gift we can give is to stand on the sideline, shouting encouragement, but allowing the process of growth to run its course. Perhaps turning this theme of suffering and sorrows more into Maine terms with this reflection:

A few winters ago along the Midcoast—not far from Wiscasset—there was an old lobsterman everyone simply called "Earl." He wasn't flashy. His boat wasn't the biggest in the harbor. Tourists never took pictures of him. In fact, if you were looking for someone impressive, you'd miss him entirely. One January, during one of those nor'easters that make the ocean look like it's chewing rocks for breakfast, a younger fisherman got into trouble. Gear iced up. Engine stalled. Radio cutting in and out.

Most folks had already tied up tight. Earl hadn't. When he heard the broken distress call, he went back out. It cost him. He damaged his own gear. Lost traps. Took on water. The Coast Guard later said it was risky—maybe too risky. But the younger

man made it home. Here's the part that struck me: Earl never talked about it. When someone tried to thank him at the dock, he shrugged and said, "That's what you do." Not glamorous. Not headline-worthy. Not a savior in shining armor. Just a quiet, costly act that bore someone else's danger.

Connecting to Isaiah 53 Isaiah says:

"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him... He was despised and rejected... Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering."

The Servant doesn't look powerful. He looks wounded. Overlooked. Ordinary. Like Earl, the suffering servant doesn't rescue with spectacle but with cost. He absorbs the storm so someone else survives it. But Isaiah pushes it deeper: this isn't just physical rescue.

"He was pierced for our transgressions... the punishment that brought us peace was on him." Earl risked his boat. Christ bore our sin.

Hebrews says: "For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." That's a strange sentence. Made perfect... yet still being made holy.

It's like the harbor in Boothbay or Camden after a storm. The storm may still be raging outside, but inside the harbor you are safe—even if your boat is still getting repaired.

Christ's suffering doesn't remove every storm immediately. But it secures the harbor forever. We are still "being made holy"—still sanding rough edges, still patching hulls, still untangling nets. But in Christ, the verdict is already spoken. Share with you the things I have learned about Maine in the Truth About Suffering.

In Maine, we don't romanticize suffering—but we respect endurance.

You don't see it in neon lights. You see it in hands cracked from cold water. In quiet meals delivered after a funeral. In neighbors who plow your driveway before you wake up.

Isaiah 53 tells us God's greatest work looked like weakness. Hebrews 10 tells us that weakness was enough. Not because suffering itself saves— but because love is willingly borne through suffering redeems. The world expects a conqueror. God sends a suffering servant. The dock might overlook him. The crowds might dismiss him. But heaven says: "By one sacrifice, it is finished. It is enough." And sometimes in Maine of all places, we understand that better than most. Because we've seen what quiet, costly love looks like in a storm.

1. What won-drous love is this, O my soul! O my soul! What
 2. To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing, to
 3. And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on, and

won-drous love is this, O my soul! What won-drous love is
 God and to the Lamb, I will sing; to God and to the
 when from death I'm free, I'll sing on! And when from death I'm

this! that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the heav-y cross for my
 Lamb who is the great I Am, while mil-lions join the theme, I will
 free, I'll sing and joy-ful be, and through e-ter-ni-ty I'll sing

soul, for my soul, to bear the heav-y cross for my soul!
 sing, I will sing; while mil-lions join the theme, I will sing.
 on, I'll sing on, and through e-ter-ni-ty I'll sing on!

WORDS: Appalachian folk hymn, Stith Mead's *A General Selection of the Newest and Most
 Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs Now in Use*, 1811, alt.
 MUSIC: Appalachian folk hymn, Walker's *Southern Harmony*, c. 1835; harm. FCC, 1997

WONDROUS LOVE
 12 9.12 12 9

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

1. When I sur - vey the won - drous cross on which the
 2. For - bid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the
 3. See, from his head, his hands, his feet, sor - row and
 4. Were the whole realm of na - ture mine, that were a

Prince of glo - ry died, my rich - est gain I
 death of Christ, my God; all the vain things that
 love flow min - gled down! Did e'er such love and
 pres - ent far too small; love so a - maz - ing,

count but loss, and pour con - tempt on all my pride.
 charm me most, I sac - ri - fice them to his blood.
 sor - row meet, or thorns com - pose so rich a crown?
 so di - vine, de - mands my soul, my life, my all.

WORDS: Isaac Watts, 1707
 MUSIC: Lowell Mason, 1825

HAMBURG
 LM

Lowell Mason, great American Congregational singing school master and tunebook editor, adapted this tune from a plainsong chant for use with the masterful words by the English Congregationalist Isaac Watts.

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?"

— Mark 8:34-36, NRSV

1. In the cross of Christ I glo-ry, tower-ing o'er the wrecks of time;
 2. When the woes of life o'er-take me, hopes de-ceive, and fears an- noy,
 3. When the sun of bliss is beam-ing light and love up- on my way,
 4. Bane and bless-ing, pain and pleas-ure, by the cross are sanc- ti- fied;
 5. In the cross of Christ I glo-ry, tower-ing o'er the wrecks of time;

all the light of sa - cred sto - ry gath - ers round its head sub-lime.
 nev - er shall the cross for - sake me: lo! it glows with peace and joy.
 from the cross the ra - diance stream-ing adds more lus - ter to the day.
 peace is there that knows no meas - ure, joys that through all time a - bide.
 all the light of sa - cred sto - ry gath - ers round its head sub-lime.

WORDS: John Bowring, 1825
 MUSIC: Ithamar Conkey, 1849

RATHBUN
 87.87