

THE CHURCH BELL

JULY 2022

The First Congregational Church Newsletter

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ
At 26 Central Street in West Boylston
online at www.fccwb.com

*"The Lord has yet more light and truth to break
forth from his holy Word."*
- John Robinson, pastor to the Pilgrims



"Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord." ~ Psalm 33:12 NRSV

JULY WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Worship at 10:00 a.m.

Pentecost: On Fire with God's Love

July 3 ~ The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

The Sacrament of Holy Communion

"Dirty Feet and Dusty Faith"

Isaiah 66:10-14 and Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

The Reverend Julie L. Cedrone preaching

July 10 ~ The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

The Sacrament of Christian Baptism

"Lord, Have Mercy!"

Psalm 82 and Luke 10:25-37

The Reverend Julie L. Cedrone preaching

July 17 ~ The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

"Sister Act"

Amos 8:1-12 and Luke 10:38-42

The Reverend Julie L. Cedrone preaching

July 24 ~ The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

"Prayer's Power"

Hosea 1:2-10, Psalm 85 and Luke 11:1-13

The Reverend Julie L. Cedrone preaching

July 31 ~ The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Outdoor Mid-Summer Worship and Picnic

"No So Hidden Treasures"

Hosea 11:1-11, Psalm 107:1-9, 43 and Luke 12:13-21

The Reverend Julie L. Cedrone preaching

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Jewels from Jules

Our scripture from Luke's Gospel is a memorable one! It features a herd of pigs who become host to a pack of demons after Jesus exorcizes them from a tortured man. It's a bizarre and dramatic scene, this anguished man who approaches Jesus, in shackles and naked, driven by demons that "drive him into the wilds," and also make a request from Jesus to be sent into a herd of pigs. The demons are released, the man is healed and the pigs flee, not fly. Order is restored.

With God's help, all things are possible.

There are many ways to explore this scripture - a story about a man who begins naked and tortured and out-cast at the beginning of the story..... and ends up clothed, healed, and ready to spread the Christian message at the story's end. This is a story about what it means to wrestle with inner demons who imprison us - the writing of the tale can't be more heavy-handed, this man is chained and shackled, after all - but for this Sunday, we'll focus on what faith needs to thrive, seeing in our scripture that with faith, even pigs can fly, our demons can depart, and we can be liberated from our own jails.

For the demon-possessed man in the Gospel story, all he has to do from the depths of "the wilds" is reach out and ask for Jesus's help.

Our Old Testament scripture presents an equally colorful story with a similar theme. It features the prophet, Elijah, who has fled to "the wilds" after killing 850 men in battle and trying to escape a King who wants him dead. Elijah is exhausted, all alone and completely severed from society. He is living with the reality that he has killed by sword hundreds and hundreds of human beings, and is the target of grieving hatred. Elijah collapses underneath a lone tree in the wilderness and begs God to end his life.

Instead, God starts his life anew.

So, we have two very different men, one a mighty prophet on the verge of a meltdown (correction, actually having a meltdown!) and the other man a marginalized, tortured one on the fringe, both at the end of their ropes, trapped by their own demons and in a lonely spiritual wilderness.....and it is in that wild place, in misery, where the holy finds them.

In many Native American tribes throughout the United States, teenagers are required to complete a spiritual initiation in the wilderness.....five days and nights alone in the wilderness. A guide leads them to a secluded spot in unfamiliar wild territory, and deposits them there. For a surreal string of five days, that young person learns how to survive, not just the practical aspects of survival, like building a shelter and figuring out what to eat, but the spiritually strenuous art of being completely alone with God. Well, maybe not *completely* alone, there are plenty of curious coyotes, bears, fox, and mountain lions wandering around these rugged terrains. A friend of mine who completed this wilderness experience shared that his hardest moment was awakening to a large animal sniffing him in the night, pretending to stay asleep and be still until the animal fully examined him and lumbered off. This Wilderness Experience is called The Vision Quest, and after completing this ritual, the teenager is said to encounter the divine, trekking out of the wild with a clear purpose that is announced to the entire community.

God comes in the wilderness.

Where has God prepared a place for you to recover in the wilderness of your life?

The Wilderness Experience crosses faith traditions. Throughout the Bible, we learn of individuals who roam into the wilderness to encounter God, in times of confusion or exhaustion or survival. This seems counter-intuitive, doesn't it, to wander into rough terrain without anyone or anything when in most need of support? It happens over and over, this wilderness experience. Whether it's Jesus's escape into the wilderness for 40 days of prayer and renewal, a teenager on a Vision Quest, or the lengthy history of biblical figures including Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus, there is a spiritual habit of being inspired by God in the wilderness.

John the Baptist received the Word of God in the wilderness and Paul writes in his letter to Galatians that he received the Gospel from the wilderness, not the teaching and hands of other human beings. And, of course, in our scriptures, Elijah meets an angel who gives him cake and water, nourishment and a new perspective before he totally falls apart....and the demon-possessed man, aptly named Legion, is freed of those demons when he sees Jesus, and gifted a new life with clothing and purpose and community.

When I imagine wilderness, I think about something like the thick woods of a New England forest, little streams and chunky rocks and blueberry bushes. This biblical wilderness can be an arid desert, or simply an uninhabited place, dotted with caves for shelter. It takes serious skills to survive, and nothing less than an unbreakable, almost crazy faith to leap into the wilderness and expect to be taken care of without understanding who or what will do the caretaking. Spending time in the wilderness in solitude is hard! Being in harsh conditions in isolation can be brutal! These wilderness experiences seem to lead people on a spiritual roller-coaster before they are able to find God *somewhere* and emerge with an energized clarity. We all go through wilderness experiences, often without leaving our own houses - a death, a divorce, an addiction, a cancer, a confusion about life purpose, an unwanted baby... or a very much wanted baby that doesn't come. In our scriptures for the day, a battle-worn Elijah collapses, wishing for his own death and falling under a tree...and then it happens again, after the angel has fed him cake and water, he passes out and is woken up a second time. The demon-possessed man is also in a state of physical and spiritual torment, unclothed and in a prison of one, isolated from the town.

Honesty, I don't know how to define wilderness anymore, especially since the parameters are not limited to uninhabited areas - any place in our life that is chaotic and isolating, whether it be a the latest elementary school corridor anxiously anticipating a shooting or a West Boylston cul de sac or the Sahara Desert, can be the Wilderness....it can be a place and it certainly be the wilds of our own emotions.

The choice of a herd of pigs as a host for the ill man's demons has always been curious to me. When I read Bible commentary, it usually says that pigs are symbolic, because they are so unclean, just like demons. The truth is, pigs are very clean, they just don't sweat so they roll around in the mud to cool off.... and not because they love being filthy. Pigs are not what they seem, nor are our demons. And, that's the things about our demons - they're often not very real, but our perceptions and old thoughts, often someone else's that get planted in our heads. Yes, some demons are very real - alcohol, a pile of bills, mental illness. But it's how we choose to understand and confront them that determines their longevity and if we brave the wilderness or get lost in it. We all have times of our life in the Wilderness and we are also in this one changing, chaotic Wilderness together. Journey into the Wild and learn something new, be inspired in a place that doesn't feel safe. God is in those places, especially those that are dangerous and deserted.

Are you ready to enter the wilderness of your life? God often has a message for you there. Summer has begin and many of us are planning vacations to wilderness-like places. Although we tend to be more distracted by fried clams, amusements, beach romance novels, and souvenirs, may we take some time to enter the geography of the soul and truly find respite and newness in those wild places away from our usual routines. God will be there!

"You see, I want a lot.

Perhaps I want everything
the darkness that comes with every infinite fall
and the shivering blaze of every step up.

So many live on and want nothing
And are raised to the rank of prince
By the slippery ease of their light judgments
But what you love to see are faces
that do work and feel thirst.

You love most of all those who need you
as they need a crowbar or a hoe.

You have not grown old, and it is not too late
To dive into your increasing depths
where life calmly gives out its own secret."

—Rainer Maria Rilke, Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God



WB FOOD PANTRY

First Congregational Church partners with Oakdale United Methodist and Our Lady of Good Council churches in West Boylston to host a Food Pantry. It is open from 1-3 p.m. on the 3rd Tuesday of every month. Donations of food and money are always welcome.

**Next distribution date is
Tuesday, July 19th 1-3pm**

Current Pantry Needs include:

Crackers, cookies, 4 packs of pudding, condiments, salad dressings, jars of pasta sauce, jelly, fruit bars, and Knorr Pasta Sides.

Please check all items for expiration dates as we have to discard any items that have expired.

Donations may be left in the blue bins in the ramp entrance. Thanks so much for your generosity

Community Nursery School

On June 17th our Pre-K Teachers Jordan and Lizz held a beautiful ceremony for our graduating Pre-K students and families at the Gazebo. There were many tears but also many laughs and some excellent dance moves from our graduating class. They were able to show some of the skills they have learned while here at CNS and impressed the crowd for sure. We said "see you soon" to most of these children as they will be here for our wonderful summer program and we wished the best of luck to the children who are headed off to camp and as they take their next step to Kindergarten.

Summer is here and we have been enjoying the last few weeks of being outdoors for water play, picnic lunches, circle time and nature exploration. Our classrooms have officially changed over for summer. We have additional classrooms available for children to explore outside their own room when the weather doesn't allow for us to get out. Children have moved to new classroom environments and are spending the first couple of weeks getting accumulated to new peers, teachers and classroom routines. Even though there are less children in the building this summer, it certainly doesn't feel like with all the excitement and fun the children have been engaging in. Our teachers have big plans for the summer with new adventures and themes to explore.

On the administrative side we were busy preparing for the start of our summer program as the registrations were coming in right up until the week before the program kicked off! This program has continued to flourish over the years with each year having more families stay on board for the summer. Marisa took a break at the end of the month to fulfill her other passion and role as the Director of GFWC Junior Women's Clubs of Massachusetts. Prior to becoming the Director she was the Assistant Director and represents the state of Massachusetts at the National level. Such a huge accomplishment and we could not be more excited for her to take the time off to celebrate this and continue the important work she does outside of working with the children, families and teachers here at CNS.

I have had the pleasure of overseeing the Community Nursery School for almost two full weeks and I could not say it enough, how well the school was setup for me to jump right in and have all the tools I needed to run the school successfully these last two weeks. Huge kudos to Marisa for going above and beyond in assuring the school would continue to run as smoothly as if she was here. This is not an easy task and the hard work has certainly not gone unnoticed. We sure are a unique and special community.

Kristen Sheldon



Summer update on refugees assistance:

On June 20th we welcomed Julia, or Jules, into our home for the summer. She is a very brave 15 yr old girl who flew to Boston by herself in May. She is one of the 7 Ukrainian students who accepted the offer from Woodstock Academy in Connecticut for free tuition and room/board to escape the daily bombing and killing in her own country. She will be staying with us for the summer and return to Woodstock in mid August. After much uncertainty, we were able to take her with us across the border to Canada for vacation we had already planned 2 months ago. So she will be able to visit 2 countries while here. If you would like to help with scholarships for them and 2 or 3 more Ukrainian students for this coming school year, please check out www.woodstockacademy.org

The attached photos are from Boston when we visited on June 23rd. Charles also joined us who came to the United States in November with his mother. They are from Sudan and were living as refugees in Egypt. We are having a diaper drive for his mother who is due to have a baby on July 12th. They have had a tumultuous start in our country, but are receiving more help now. Please bring any diaper donations to the bin in Fellowship Hall.

WARM estimates they still have another 15-20 apartment set ups for the Afghan refugees after 9 months of moving hundreds of refugees into new apartments. They must have climbed thousands of stairs at this point with all the 3 deckers. They are also trying to help with their language barrier by offering English classes every Friday morning at Journey Church in Worcester. Please check out their Facebook page or www.warmwelcoming.org if you can help out at all.

Many of these refugees really need our help with navigating some very broken systems. Sometimes it just takes a phone call, an email, or a trip to an office in person to make a dramatic difference in their life. We have been blessed with so much just by being born in the United States, why not share this gift with someone who didn't get that advantage?

Also still looking for help with the food pantry garden. Thank you Donna Raymond for volunteering :)

Blessings,
Carolyn Gagnon



JOIN US STARTING JULY 5TH



Outdoor Yoga

Relish an unrushed rush hour in the heart
of West Boylston

TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS
5:30PM

*First Congregational Church of West Boylston, intersection of
routes 12, 140 and Central Street. Classes will be on the side
lawn unless rainy weather moves classes indoors. \$12-\$15
donation to benefit our Food Pantry.*

Prayer and Praise**All those with health concerns:**

Sophia Landeo
 Lori Rotti-Carol Barnes' daughter-in-law
 Philip Helle
 Nancy-Peter Borge's sister
 Richard Whitney
 Nick Person
 Ursula Helle
 Margaret Borge
 Allison Person
 Rob Nierintz
 Sarah and Wally Trisdale
 Sue Coviello
 Ron Newman-Dan Newman's father
 Carol Ann Hamilton
 Nancy-Ben Bryant's friend's significant other
 CNS teacher-Chris and her husband Paul
 Scott Holt
 A child-Donna Raymond's friend
 CNS teacher -Kelly Lane
 Donna-Jenna Hoodlet's family
 Ron & Carol Barnes
 Donna-Karyl Leslie's friend
 Gail-friend of Diana Engelbart
 Virginia-Karyl Leslie's friend
 Chuck Crone
 Brent-Beverly Fisher's son
 Dawn-a former faithful thrift shop volunteer
 Karyl Leslie
 Obadidullah- a14 year old Afghan refugee seeking medical help in Worcester
 Oakdale United Methodist Church and Pastor Michelle Grube
 Connie Stewart
 Tommy Hayes and family
 Lee Bolivar
 June Crone
 Brian Dombrowski-Beth Tivnan's brother-in-law

**Wider concerns:**

Ukrainian refugees and those struggling to survive in Ukraine.
 Victims of violent crimes and their families.
 The refugees from Afghanistan.
 Those who are feeling especially lonely or bereft at this time.
 Our service men and women around the world and their families.
 Those who are unemployed among us and around the country.

If you would like to donate altar flowers
 please contact Lisa Fisher in the church office,
 508-835-4462.

The cost of the flowers is \$35.00.
 Available date: July 31



**Send address changes to
administrator@fccwb.com**

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

MONDAY THRU FRIDAY 9:00 A.M. - 2:00 P.M.

TELEPHONE: 508-835-4462 FAX: 508-835-4463

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WEBSITE: www.fccwb.com

Messages may be left on the church phone system for the staff at any time.

Pastor-**Julie Cedrone** (ext. 101)

Administrative Assistant-**Lisa Fisher** (ext. 100)

Financial office (ext. 103)

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03 Shirley Rotti	19 Cameron Villegas
03 Brenda Smith	20 Janet Gustafson
04 Jayson Pusateri	21 Francis Beaupre
04 Anne Webb	21 Andrea Borge
08 Nathan Holt	21 Christopher Shliapa
10 Jonathan Dehner	22 Albert Rotti
10 Bailey Doonan	23 Caroline Espe
13 The Rev. George Vogel	24 Winifred Hesemeyer
14 Alyssa Irula	26 Joyce Rowell
16 Benjamin Krugman	27 Ruth Bolivar
16 Joshua Krugman	29 Cara Bjorklund
16 Brittany Zendzian	31 Alex Bartholomew