

WLCC, U.C.C. Weekly Notices

3.20.2020

Good morning

Dear friends,

We are at the end of the week and the Covid19 news does not sound good. We are ever hopeful that we will be meeting again soon, but until that time it has been decided that we will offer a weekly newsletter to let you know about life here at West Lebanon Congregational Church.

In this time of uncertainty, we have included messages of perspective and reassurance from Daniel Adam who would have been our guest minister on March 22, and Reverend Gordon Rankin, the minister of NH conference of the UCC. (See Attachments) These will also be on our website, westlebcc.org listed under Coming Events.

It has been decided that the WLCC will remain closed thru April 3 which means there will be no service on March 29. Norma will still be coming into the WLCC office Monday through Friday to answer the phone and emails from 10am-2pm. Please feel free to reach out to her if you have or know of a need.

The cook team of Sam Strong, Earle Woodward, Wil Smith, Tom Kahl, Peter Simpson, Linda Oidtmann, and Nancy Simpson served community dinner Thursday night at the White River location of LISTEN. The meal was served as a take-out meal. In talking to Ray Pecor, the LISTEN dinner on site coordinator, there is a need for donations to support the suppers as well as the food pantry which has seen and will continue to see increased use. This is a way to reach out to our community. Please remember to send your support to our church as well.

Please reach out to those members that might not receive this email. If you have news that you would like to share with others, please email Norma in the office so we may include this in a week's newsletter. This is the new announcement page of our bulletin which will be sent out on Fridays.

Faithfully and prayerfully,
Nancy Simpson – Deacon Chair

“Keep Awake”

By Daniel Adam

Reading: Mark 13:1-8, 24-37

2020 has been a rough year so far. Between the conflict with Iran, the Australian continent burning, the whittling down of political candidates and the suspension of campaigns that brought so many people the hope of real change only to be replaced with the status quo, the

recent development of the COVID-19 pandemic, and now Tom Brady is leaving the Patriots, we have been through a great deal in a relatively short period of time. It is okay to be emotionally exhausted and scared. And let's be honest, for many of us, this pandemic is scary. It not only affects the most vulnerable in our society, but also the largest demographic of not only our church but of the Universal Church, meaning that by the time it is all said and done, we will likely all be affected in some way or another. We are facing a threat unlike anything many of us have seen in our lifetime. Again, it is okay to be concerned.

One way this fear is manifesting itself is in the rise in discussions about Armageddon. Over the last several weeks, I have had numerous coworkers make arguments that this is the beginning of the end. Some argue that the Coronavirus is the first of the seven plagues foretold of in the Book of Revelation (chapters 15-16). Others saying that due to the panic and public unrest in our world today, the time of Christ's return must rapidly be approaching. Now, I don't know if they are right, for all I know they may be reading the signs correctly. But for the record, let me state that I believe that they are speaking out of their fear and their concern, rather than correctly prophesying the Second Coming of Christ. But in propagating these apocalyptic messages, they are only sowing greater fear into their communities because if this is the apocalypse, there is nothing we can do to stop it.

Luckily however, this is not the first crisis that humanity has faced in its history. We have faced plagues that reduced our numbers, and we have rationed supplies to insure the survival of the human race. In fact, we can find examples of these periods of uncertainty throughout all of human history, including in both testaments of our Holy Scriptures. Our Scripture reading is a good example of humanity preparing for crisis. Though the disciples did not know it, they were preparing to face a period of not only great trials but of a dramatic change in the world around them. And here we see Jesus warning them, in part, of what was to come. As the disciples are walking out of the Temple complex admiring the majesty of the Temple, the splendor of Jerusalem, and the great resources it took to build the city, Jesus foretells of not only the city's but of the temple's destruction. As you can imagine, this invoked fear and anxiety in the disciples and as they looked upon the temple from a far, they ask Jesus to clarify his prophecy. Jesus tells them that within a generation, not only will the temple be destroyed, but there will be false prophets who will try and lead them astray, there will be war, and there will be times of great need. There will also be periods of suffering and darkness to follow these periods of trial. The early Church believed that these events would trigger the end of the world when all was said and done. Today we know from both Christian and non-Christian historical sources that these events came true just as they were predicted.

Although this many seem to renew the darkness of our current situation, remember that not only did the Church and her Apostles survive the trials and darkness of this world, but she continues to survive today and continues to flourish in the adversity of this world. And just as the Early Church survived their trials, so will we. And just as the disciples did not face their difficulties alone, neither will we. In this Lenten season, we are preparing our hearts for the joys of Easter Morning and the promises of Resurrection, Salvation, and Christ's presence in our life. And though these promises are liturgically just out of reach, they are fully realized in our day to day lives. It is our choice to either focus on our current difficulties or to face them with the hope of new life that we know is coming and has already come.

I really appreciate the last two words of this passage in the NRV5, “Keep Awake.” What words could better summarize the Church’s responsibility in the face of this pandemic. As we close our church door to prevent the spread of this virus, it is not only unacceptable for the Church to fall asleep and forget that there are those in need in our community, but there are those facing new needs in the face of social distancing. Even though we should not be making personal visits, we can still check in on each other. A spontaneous phone call or video chat to just checking and provide support is just one way that we can continue to foster the beloved community God is calling us to be.

My friends, if we Keep Awake, the dawn will come, and the sun will rise. We will curb the rates of this infection and we will be able to gather together once again. If we Keep Awake, even if the church’s doors are closed on Easter Morning, the Son will rise. If we Keep Awake, we will get through this!

Loving and Communal God give us the endurance to Keep Awake in this difficult time. In our lives of social distancing and social isolation, it is too easy to lose sight of the fact that we are a United and Uniting Church that encompasses your communal nature. Help us to reach out to others who may be in need of basic necessities or simply a kind word. And help us defeat our own pride and reach out if we find that we are in need of our community’s support. We ask this in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, holy in one. Amen

Message from The Reverend Gordon Rankin
New Hampshire Conference
United Church of Christ

March 16, 2020

Siblings in Christ,

During these past couple of weeks as my focus has been drawn more and more towards supporting our churches as each tries to embrace and innovate ministry for this season of the Covid-19 pandemic, I find myself reflecting upon the story of Jesus and the disciples in the boat on the Sea of Galilee during the storm. As you will recall, the disciples were terrified. Jesus says to the storm, “Peace. Be Still” and the winds and the waters calm. Then Jesus asks the disciples, “Why were you afraid? Was your faith not sufficient for the moment?” Certainly, we are in the midst of our own storm of sorts. Not only does the storm rage, but it seems apparent that so do our fears. I am struck that Jesus doesn’t admonish the disciples for not being afraid, but rather simply inquires why they are afraid. I suspect this was a rhetorical device to remind the disciples that if they rely upon it their faith is indeed strong enough to handle moments of fear and uncertainty. As is ours. Our faith is sufficient for this moment. And even though this storm may yet rage for a while long, perhaps it is to us now that Jesus says, “Peace. Be Still”. I am so very proud and encouraged by the ministries of our churches during this uncertain season. I have witnessed the ways in which you have innovated how to be community and to worship together even when it is safer not to have everyone together as gathered community.

And I have seen you multiply your efforts to make sure that social distancing doesn't turn into isolation for those who don't have all the tools for connection. There are most certainly new challenges in these days, but your faith is shining through.

One of the things I would encourage us to be sensitive to in this season are all the mounting griefs. I know for me that the cancelation of the NCAA Tournament was a bit of a blow. It has always been a part of my March self-care regiment. It is a small thing but real. For others it may be canceled or postponed vacations, birthday or anniversary celebrations, proms, concerts, spring athletic seasons and the like. And then there are the items of even greater consequence like lack of earnings for hourly workers in situations such as the hospitality industry, effects on small businesses that need the regular patronage, and the reality that there are many in long-term care facilities who won't be able to be visited by their loved ones. As church, we have many liturgical and pastoral tools to help individuals and communities address their grief. In these days, we ought to be drawing upon them all.

I want to call upon every member of all our New Hampshire Conference Churches to take every opportunity to express your support and care for your pastors, staff, and church leadership. They are working tirelessly on your behalf and for your welfare. They are facing challenges some of which have not been imagined before. Your affirmations and your prayers mean more in times like this than you could possibly know.

I also want to encourage you to continue your giving to your church as you are able. Mail in a check or contribute electronically. Our stewardship must expand to meet the increasing needs of the day. There are vital ministries to continue and new ministries to be developed and they will need your support. Please continue to give.

Finally, I want you to know that you are in my prayers, the prayers of our Conference staff and leaders, and in the prayers of those in the United Church of Christ National Setting. We welcome your prayers as well. Every Sunday when I visit one of our churches, I speak to how all of our stories are intertwined. That feels even more real to me right now than it ever has before. For it is in our prayers and support for one another that I see God's grace ever-present even in these stormy days.

Lenten blessings,
The Reverend Gordon Rankin
Conference Minister,
New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ

Dear friends,
Thank you to those that attended the service on March 15 and heard an uplifting message on hope. For those who were not able to be there we would encourage you to check out the church website, westlebcc.org, which has an audio link to our services.

After prayerful discussion, it has been decided to close our church for the next 2 weeks. What that means is that there will be no bell rehearsal, no Women's Fellowship or any other church meeting and no worship service on Sunday, March 22. As we have said in the past this a fluid situation, we will look at the situation and decide if we will have services on March 29.

While the church is closed, Norma Hazelton, our church secretary, will be in the office daily Monday through Friday from 10am-2pm. Please feel free to call (603-298-8096) or email (office@westlebcongo.comcastbiz.net) the office if you have a need or know of someone in need and we the church family can help in any way. Our operating expenses will decrease with reduced usage and this may last longer, but we will still have bills to pay so please consider mailing in your pledges.

Please reach out to one another in this difficult time and please let those without access know about our closing and future closings. Our church building may be closed but our church's hearts are open, and we want to show Christ's love and offer support to each other in this uncertain time. As we sang in our March 15th service's closing hymn, with Christ's help "we shall overcome".

Prayerfully yours
Nancy Simpson
for the Church Leaders of WLCC

Questions? Please email us or give the church office a call.
office@westlebcongo.comcastbiz.net 603-298-8096

REGULARLY SCHEDULED MONTHLY EVENTS

LISTEN Community Dinner - prep and serve; 3:30-5:30 pm, Third Thursdays
Italian Supper 5-6:30 pm, Saturday, May 20th. Take Outs Available.

Quail Hollow Get-Together 10-11 am, first Thursday of the month